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Tuesday 1 March 2016

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Scottish Parliament

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our leader today is Dianna Wolfson, who is a participant in the Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, Faith in Older People and Interfaith Scotland.

Dianna Wolfson: Thank you for the opportunity to take part in time for reflection. The last time that I addressed the Parliament was in 2003, when I was an active retired woman in my mid-60s. Now I am an active older woman in my late 70s. When do I become elderly? Will I be invited back when I am 90?

As a trustee of Faith in Older People for the past few years, I have been able to reflect on the needs of older people beyond the physical dimension. The spiritual aspect of their lives becomes more compelling as they come face to face with their impending mortality.

In the Jewish scriptures there is a commandment to honour the elderly no matter what their contribution to society. High-profile elderly people command much respect. Her Majesty the Queen is approaching her 90th birthday, and we remember Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa and many others, but what about ordinary people whose achievements are unknown and unrecognised except by their families and their communities? They often become just a name above a hospital bed. My late mother embodied her own philosophy for life, which was that you have to be a good person. Few people in Scotland will know of her good deeds, nor those of many other remarkable older people throughout our country.

In 1998, a book of photographs taken in a Marie Curie hospice by Colin Dickson, called "Remaining Human", was published. In his preface he said that he had taken the photographs to show that faced with the prospect of death, most people remain completely human. He said:

"Until you are dead you are still alive ... their lives are still going on and they can laugh and be sad and be generous and be cruel, in other words be people just like other people."

Those observations could apply equally to the elderly.

Through my involvement with the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, I have had the privilege of interviewing older members of our community. I have learned of the challenges that they faced when they were growing up during the war, and of their service to our country both in wartime and in peace. It is so important to hear their voices and experiences, and their contribution to the Scottish story.

I will finish by quoting Rabbi Berel Wein, who said:

"May we all be blessed to come to the fullness of our lives with all our days attached to us in serenity and achievement."

Topical Question Time

Named Person Scheme

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Before I call Elaine Smith, I advise members that legal proceedings are on-going in relation to the legislative competence of the named person provisions. The matter is therefore sub judice for the purposes of standing orders, so members should not refer to the specifics of the case.

1. Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will review the named person scheme in light of recent reports that the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman has raised concerns. (S4T-01341)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): The SPSO has raised a technical concern about Parliament's general approach to complaints procedures and the process in particular that relates to the complaints process for parts 4 and 5 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. As Elaine Smith will recall, the measures were supported by all groups and passed unanimously at stage 3 of the bill. They included provision for using the affirmative procedure for the regulations that detail the content of the process, the draft order for which was considered by the Education and Culture Committee today.

I am not aware of any concerns that the ombudsman has in relation to the named person service or the approach taken to the complaints procedure. Indeed, the ombudsman was keen to emphasise his support in his recent letter, and today's news release makes it clear that the letter to the committee does not comment on the service itself and is

"about a minor technical point".

On the wider issue about statutory complaints procedures more generally, the member in her role as Deputy Presiding Officer might be well placed to progress the issue. I would be happy to discuss matters with her from the perspective of our recent experience.

Elaine Smith: I note that, although the ombudsman's concerns are specifically about process, there are wider concerns among the many constituents who have contacted me recently. For example, I understand that the Scottish Government has endorsed a toolkit for councils and teachers to use to structure questions to children. Will the minister confirm whether that is the case? If it is, what oversight and monitoring of how the toolkit is used does the

Scottish Government have in place to ensure that questions are appropriate and responses are treated with care and confidentiality?

Aileen Campbell: I am not aware that the Scottish Government is using any test around the named person. If the member has specific issues that she wants to raise with me, I will be happy to speak with her and discuss the matter in those terms.

Elaine Smith: I thank the minister for that offer, which I will certainly take up. If any professionals who are involved in the named person scheme have concerns about how information is being used and they want to report that, will they be protected by whistleblowing legislation?

Further, the Educational Institute of Scotland has expressed concerns over the potential for teachers to be left with increased workloads and to be required to work on the additional responsibilities over their holidays. Has the Government taken any steps to quantify the likely impact on teachers' workload?

Aileen Campbell: We have worked with the EIS and a number of different organisations and bodies about the legislation. We did that during the bill process, as well as through the consultation on the guidance. We will continue to work with anyone and, again, the offer is there to continue with that dialogue.

It remains the case that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 provides a robust framework to allow for appropriate, proportionate information sharing to happen in a way that was not there in the past. That will allow us to ensure that the relevant information about the child's needs and the family is shared with appropriate people in conjunction and collaboration with the parents on what they can say to that family member and whether they are content for that to happen. A robust framework is in place that has been enabled through the passage of the 2014 act.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the minister agree that the scheme could be helpful for a vulnerable family in my constituency who are not sure where to go to for help? The named person scheme will make it clearer and easier for them to get help.

Aileen Campbell: Absolutely. The whole thrust of the legislation is to stop what we have been told about in various consultations, the parenting strategy and the Highland pathfinder, which is that families are fed up being passed from pillar to post, going from service to service trying to explain their story time and again.

The named person is part of the getting it right for every child process. It allows for a co-ordinated

approach to provide families with the support that they need at an earlier point in order to avoid issues escalating into crises and costlier services having to be deployed and, far more important, to avoid the damaging impact that there is on the family if matters are left to grow and escalate. The named person is about early intervention and prevention and helping families when they need it most. The named person will deliver that. Again, I am happy to meet John Mason to discuss the issues that he may have.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the minister accept that parents' greatest concern about the named person policy is about data sharing and whether it is wholly transparent? Does she agree that the concern raised by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman about the overly regulatory nature of the complaints process could extend those concerns? The ombudsman is flagging up that the Scottish Government is proposing an unwieldy complaints system that is at odds with the systems in other public sector areas.

Aileen Campbell: As I said in response to Elaine Smith, the 2014 act provides a robust framework to allow for that information sharing to happen in a proportionate and appropriate way. It provides that reassurance that families deserve.

The order that was agreed to today at the Education and Culture Committee is aligned to other complaints procedures. I remind the member that the amendments that I lodged during the passage of stage 3 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill took cognisance of the very valid points that Liz Smith raised at stage 2, and placed a duty and a responsibility on Scottish ministers to develop and implement a complaints procedure for parts 4 and 5 of the bill, and set out the issues that we might want to progress in secondary legislation. That is exactly what I did earlier today at the committee. The approach was agreed to by all parties during stage 3.

I remind the member that, in his news release, the ombudsman reiterated that what he has raised is "a minor technical point". We have worked with the SPSO on a number of occasions during the development of the order, which I am glad received approval earlier today. If the member wants to raise a particular issue, she should do so but, given some of the comment on the matter, I have to say that the minor technical issue that the ombudsman raised has been used as a vehicle for more posturing and grandstanding on a policy that is designed to help families and protect children.

College Bursaries (Budgets)

2. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on reports that 67 per cent of colleges had

committed all of or more than their bursary budget by December 2015. (S4T-01334)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): We have invested a record level in further education student support this year—more than £105 million, which is an increase of 29 per cent in real terms since 2006-07. FE-level college students can now receive a non-repayable bursary of up to £94.52 per week, which is the best level anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Colleges have told the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council what they need to meet their student support commitments this year. We shall meet those commitments in full.

Liam McArthur: National Union of Students Scotland president, Vonnie Sandlan, said this week that college budgets are "overstretched and underfunded" and that students have no certainty about the funding that they might receive. She went on to claim that that is "a disaster" for college students, who are some of those most in need.

The principal of Edinburgh College told the Education and Culture Committee this morning that a lack of financial support for students is a major disincentive and is leading many students to drop out very early.

Does the cabinet secretary agree with Vonnie Sandlan and Annette Bruton? Can she tell the Parliament how many college students drop out each year, and how many have dropped out so far this year, because of a lack of financial support?

Angela Constance: It is unfortunate that Mr McArthur did not welcome this Government's commitment to meet in full the shortfall in student support this year—as we have done in every year.

There are broader issues in the context of future changes to student support, particularly in the FE sector. I am alive to the debate about an entitlement-based system, as we have in higher education—although of course in HE students repay the financial support that they receive for their studies—versus a discretionary system with non-repayable financial support.

Mr McArthur will remember from our discussion in the committee this morning that positive destination, completion and retention rates in the sector are improving under this Government.

Liam McArthur: The cabinet secretary complained about a lack of welcome for her action, but I was simply quoting Vonnie Sandlan, of NUS Scotland, on the welcome that she has given college budgets. The Scottish Government gave colleges only half the money that they said that they needed to meet the pressure for bursaries.

Ministers have a choice. Liberal Democrats have proposed a penny tax rise for education, which would raise £475 million to transform education, invest in our colleges and help people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Rather than cut 152,000 places and provide inadequate bursary support for students who need it, why will the minister not act to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to gain the skills that they need to get on in life?

Angela Constance: This Government is acting to provide FE students with the support that they need. The shortfall in student support this year is much smaller than it has been in previous years. We will meet our commitments in full, as we have done in previous years, to ensure that there is no shortfall.

It is surely to be welcomed that under this Government there has been a real-terms increase in student support. That does not mean that there cannot be improvements to the student support system. Indeed, the SFC has had a review of the system and we took early action, at the request of NUS Scotland, to deal with the variance rule, whereby some colleges were paying bursaries at 80 per cent of the bursary rate, as opposed to 100 per cent. I am pleased to say that from 2016-17 we will ensure that students receive 100 per cent of the award that is granted.

Good Food Nation

3. Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its plans are for Scotland to become a good food nation by 2025. (S4T-01339)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government's vision and priorities for Scotland to become a good food nation by 2025 were set out in the "Becoming a Good Food Nation" discussion document in June 2014. They included the establishment of the Scottish food commission, which published its first interim report last week. The report sets out a refreshed vision and five clear objectives, each with indicators, so that progress on the journey towards 2025 can be measured. The Government is working to achieve those objectives, in close partnership with stakeholders in the food sector and more widely.

Christian Allard: The cabinet secretary will know how much I have worked over the years to encourage the people of Scotland to buy and eat Scottish food, as it is the best choice for our environment, our food security, our health and the sustainability of our communities. What are the Scottish Government's plans to ensure that major retailers give Scottish consumers a real choice to buy Scottish produce?

Richard Lochhead: I should start off by saying that I well know how much effort Christian Allard has put in over recent years to promote Scottish produce, particularly Scottish seafood. In our work with the retailers, that is an objective that we have also been pursuing, with some degree of success, it has to be said, given that sourcing Scottish brands across these islands by United Kingdom retailers has increased by around a third since 2007. Over and above that, there have been many other initiatives. We have been working in a bespoke way with a number of retailers on supplier developer programmes, so that Scottish suppliers can get more shelf space, not just in Scottish stores but across the UK. We also have think local campaigns that have helped local sourcing across Scotland.

Christian Allard: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but I was looking for something more practical that we can do in the future to encourage many major retailers to sell Scottish dairy produce, seafood and meat, to ensure that they not only advertise Scottish produce but that they really put it on the shelves.

The Presiding Officer: Alex Fergusson.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I will answer if you like, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, would you like to have a wee shot at answering that question?

Richard Lochhead: I would be more intrigued to hear Alex Fergusson's response, but I will take the opportunity to give my own answer.

As I said to Christian Allard in my previous answer, a number of initiatives are taking place with the retailers, not least in the dairy sector, where I have been trying to persuade the UK Government to convene a summit of the heads of the UK retail and food service sectors, so that we can make specific efforts to get more dairy produce on to Scottish and UK shelves from Scottish producers, particularly as much of our butter and cheese is imported from other countries despite the fact that we produce a lot of good produce on our own doorstep. That is something practical that I am still working on, and I hope that the UK Government will give that sector more support in the future than it has had so far.

The Presiding Officer: I call Alex Fergusson.

Alex Fergusson: I am not sure whether to give a question or an answer, Presiding Officer, but I will go with the question.

Becoming a good food nation is all well and good and very laudable, as indeed is the success of Scotland's food and drink initiative, but what is the Government doing to ensure that the benefits

of those laudable policies actually reach the primary producer on which they depend, because primary producers across the board are struggling as never before?

The Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, have you got an answer this time?

Richard Lochhead: I wish that I had an answer to that question, because it is one of the biggest questions facing the future of Scottish producers. Although we have seen a phenomenal success taking place in Scotland's food and drink sector, where targets have been smashed six years early and exports are up by more than 50 per cent since 2007, it is the case—and I agree with Alex Fergusson's point—that the primary producer has not felt that benefit to the same degree as the rest of the supply chain. That highlights the fact that the supply chain is dysfunctional to a degree, and although no one national Government will be able to sort that out, it is certainly a big question that should face future policy makers not only in this country but across the whole of Europe. I would like to see a greater focus at European level on that question. Indeed, the European Commission will shortly publish a report on supply chain issues, and I hope that it flags up some issues that we can pursue here in Scotland and that will be pursued across Europe to ensure that the primary producer gets a fair share of every pound spent on food in this country.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary advise the chamber on how Food Standards Scotland fits into the vision of a good food nation?

Richard Lochhead: That is a fair question, given that the first anniversary of the creation of Food Standards Scotland is approaching.

The new body is already making a real contribution across a range of activities, particularly on nutrition, labelling and diet. In addition, a unit to deal with food crime has recently been set up. That is one advantage of the creation of the new body.

Food Standards Scotland also has observer status on the food commission that is up and running in Scotland, to ensure that its input is taken on board as we make the journey towards becoming a good food nation.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Could you confirm that questions by MSPs on the issue of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's comment on the named person scheme are a legitimate part of MSPs holding the Government to account? As far as the code of conduct is concerned, I trust that the minister meant no discourtesy to MSPs when she referred to political posturing on the issue.

The Presiding Officer: The member is very well aware that the responses that the minister gives have nothing to do with me as the Presiding Officer.

Work, Wages and Wellbeing

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-15760, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on work, wages and wellbeing in the Scottish labour market. I call Murdo Fraser to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee.

14:21

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On behalf of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, I express our gratitude for the opportunity to debate what for us has been an extensive, exciting and compelling inquiry into work, wages and wellbeing in the Scottish labour market.

At the outset, I thank all those who gave the committee evidence in writing or in person. I want to thank in particular the members of the public who contributed to our online survey, about which I will say a bit more, shortly. I also thank the members of the public and the employers who came to the Parliament day meeting that we held in Paisley. It was a useful means of reaching a range of opinions that might not otherwise have been available to the committee. I think that the opportunity to participate was appreciated and enjoyed by the people who attended.

I also record my thanks to our team of clerks for their assistance, our colleagues in the Scottish Parliament information centre, and my fellow committee members for their co-operative approach. As this is probably the final chance that I will have in this session to say it in the chamber as the committee's convener, I would like to thank my fellow committee members for all their support, enthusiasm and general good behaviour over the past five years.

In introducing the debate on behalf of the committee, I will begin by explaining what we knew at the start of our inquiry, before I share how we engaged with Scotland's workforce and some of the inquiry's findings. We knew that Scotland was emerging from the recession that began in 2008, we knew that employment in Scotland was at its highest since before the recession, and we knew that it had continued to increase steadily since 2010. However, we knew, too, that part-time working, the use of zero-hours contracts and temporary employment were also on the increase. The inquiry that the committee carried out into underemployment in 2013 highlighted those trends. In it, we concluded that underemployment should be considered alongside unemployment as being detrimental to a productive economy. We

wanted to explore what lay behind the recent promising employment figures.

In its health inequalities report, which was published just over a year ago, the Health and Sport Committee found that socioeconomic status and work quality are key contributors to health outcomes. It suggested that simply encouraging economic growth in itself might not reduce health inequalities. As a result, one of our key aims was to explore the effect of poor-quality work on health and wellbeing. First, we had to address this question: what is poor-quality work? Academics' and professionals' definitions varied, but members of the public, whom we invited to share their experiences using an online form, seemed to be clear that low pay, poor management and insecure hours make for poor-quality work.

Although most of the 600 people who responded described their job as good—thankfully—the majority also reported that their job had affected their health. Most people felt that their job had deteriorated in the past five years, and many people described poor progression opportunities and increased workloads.

I have already thanked all the witnesses and all the people who met us, wrote to us and contributed to the inquiry. The scale of the response illustrates how important fair work is to the people of Scotland. One person, sharing their experience of zero-hours contracts, put it quite simply:

"I can't live like this, not knowing how much money I'm earning to keep my family."

At the Parliament day in Paisley in September, we spoke to local workers, employers and support services and heard similar stories. However, we also heard that good management, secure employment and a say in how the workplace is run can make all the difference. It is clearly not all about pay.

In informal evidence, and more recently, in work that the committee carried out on social enterprises, employee-owned businesses and co-operatives, we heard that employee engagement can bolster a happy, healthy and more productive workforce. It became clear that fair working practices could be the answer to ensuring worker wellbeing and improving labour productivity.

Professor Chris Warhurst introduced us to the concept of high-road and low-road economies: an economy can lean towards high skills and high wages or towards low skills and low wages. Evidence suggests that Scotland has a recent history of favouring the low road. The committee was struck by the need, as described by Professor Warhurst, for "paving the high road" and "blocking ... the low road". "Taking the High Road—Work, Wages and Wellbeing in the Scottish Labour

Market”, is the title of our report and highlights the message that underpins all our recommendations. Members who have long memories will recall a Scottish soap opera of a similar name—although perhaps that is something for our creative industries inquiry, instead.

We are pleased to see that the Scottish Government is already lining up the cobblestones to pave the high road. We welcome the establishment of the fair work convention and I hope that the session 5 Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee—in whatever guise—will take a keen interest in both the outcomes of the convention and the future policy impacts of its work. As the cabinet secretary said in evidence to the committee, Scotland is already punching above its weight in encouraging businesses to sign up to the living wage. The public sector in particular has taken the message to heart. That is promising.

However, we heard concerns about whether private businesses that fulfil public sector contracts can meet the challenge. We heard powerful evidence from people who work in the care sector that they would like to pay more—the living wage—but cannot make the sums add up because of the amount of money that they are paid by public agencies and local authorities for care services. I know that in the recent budget the Scottish Government announced additional funding to help to promote the living wage in the care sector. I would be interested to hear more from the Scottish Government about how that agenda can be progressed and how we will square that circle for the businesses that have the ambition to pay more but currently feel that they are constrained by the amount of money that is coming from the public sector.

In general, we would like to hear more from the Scottish Government about how the living wage and other fair working practices can be passed down through the public-procurement chain. That would help to pave the high road.

The committee also welcomed the Scottish business pledge. However, we cannot ignore the fact that businesses have not been falling over themselves to sign up to it. We are concerned that the language that is used to describe the pledge is not clear. That brings us to the question of blocking the low road. We would like to see a definition of exploitative zero-hours contracts that makes it clear that such contracts are not welcome in a fair work Scotland, and that businesses that use such contracts will not gain business-pledge accreditation.

In evidence, it was obvious that the definition of an exploitative zero-hours contract is not clear. I raised the issue with the First Minister when she came to the Conveners Group meeting. She could

not give me a definitive answer at that point, but subsequently wrote to me in my capacity as convener of the committee. We welcome that clarity, but there was a period before that when we were asking businesses to sign up to the business pledge when we were not clear and they could not have been clear what the definition was. It is important that such clarity is obtained and that such confusion does not arise again in any similar or related matter.

We know that the business pledge is being actively promoted by the enterprise agencies, but we have further concerns that the low road is far from being blocked there. We have all heard in recent years the negative press about alleged poor working conditions at Amazon’s Scottish sites. That firm received significant regional selective assistance grant funding through Scottish Enterprise when it was establishing itself in Scotland. The question that we must therefore ask is this: what expectation now lies on Amazon to use fair work practices? For example, do we expect it to reject the use of zero-hours contracts, with which it has become so notoriously associated?

The committee would like the Scottish Government to review the process for awarding those big-ticket grants. We want funding to go to employers that will not only create jobs, but that will create fair, appropriately paid and secure jobs.

In conclusion, the committee would like fair work principles to be embedded across policies that cover employment practices, procurement and business support. We firmly believe that, in doing that, we can encourage a more productive and resilient economy for Scotland. We hope to see a commitment to those aims being reflected in the Scotland performs national performance framework.

I look forward to hearing the cabinet secretary’s response to what I hope will be a lively debate that holds the wellbeing of the Scottish workforce at its heart.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee’s 1st Report 2016 (Session 4), *Taking the High Road—Work, Wages and Wellbeing in the Scottish Labour Market* (SP Paper 874).

14:31

The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training (Roseanna Cunningham): I, too, thank the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee for the report and for inviting me to give evidence for the inquiry. I listened with interest to Murdo Fraser and noted a number of specific points, one of which sounded almost like a

Conservative call for increased public expenditure. That may go down in history as the first time that I have heard that, although Murdo Fraser will no doubt say that he was speaking only in his role as committee convener.

Since my appointment as Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training, promoting fair work has been a key focus of the Scottish Government, and it is helpful that the committee has taken that up through the inquiry. Our programme for government sets out our vision for creating a fairer Scotland. We are committed to promoting a culture of fair work, and the committee's report highlights key areas in which the Government has taken action.

One of those areas involves the living wage, which is one of the issues that Murdo Fraser raised. I am sure that many members have heard at first hand, as I have, what the living wage can offer people who work in Scotland. When I talk about the living wage, I am talking about the true living wage and not the enhanced minimum wage that the United Kingdom Government is introducing for over-25s. The living wage has made a difference to individuals, which ranges from their being able to afford to decorate a nursery, for example, to their having savings in the bank and perhaps being able to go on holiday. Those simple things would not be attainable for some people without the living wage.

It is not just employees who can benefit from the living wage. I have often spoken of the benefits that it can bring to employers and the wider economy. It is not unusual for employers to tell us that moving to the living wage has made a difference to their productivity, reduced their staff turnover and reduced absenteeism. That is part and parcel of the package of work.

As of yesterday, the Scottish living wage initiative has accredited more than 477 organisations, which means that we are on course to reach our target of 500 by the end of March. The wider picture on wages is positive, too. According to Resolution Foundation analysis that was published in January, pay in Scotland has grown faster than that in any other nation or region in the UK over the past two decades. We know that Scotland has the second highest proportion of employees who are paid the living wage or more across the countries and regions of the UK.

Last month, we made a decisive commitment to enable payment of the living wage in the social care sector. That is an important action that we believe will help to deliver fairer workplaces and better-quality care in a sector that is sometimes characterised by low pay. Some companies that operate in the care sector are signed up as accredited living wage employers, and I encourage other employers to follow that lead.

This is not just about wages; fair work is about much more than that, and the results in the workplace can often be tangible.

The committee welcomed the Scottish Government's work on procurement, which the committee convener discussed in his opening remarks. We are addressing a number of fair work issues through public contracts. Since 1 November last year, all public bodies have been required to consider how they can address fair work practices when they prepare tenders to go out to competition, and the new statutory guidance makes it clear that the Scottish Government sees payment of the living wage as a significant indicator of an employer's commitment to fair work practices. That is one of the clearest ways in which an employer can demonstrate that it takes a positive approach to its workforce.

However, the convener was right to point out that the living wage is not the only measure. We are sending a clear message that exploitative practices such as the inappropriate use of zero-hours contracts and umbrella companies are not acceptable.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (Ind): The minister mentioned inappropriate use of zero-hours contracts. Will she define the fair use of zero-hours contracts?

Roseanna Cunningham: There has been quite a discussion about that. I am not quite sure, because I am not up on my football, but I think that I have seen Ann Budge from Hearts making the point that she uses zero-hours contracts about half a dozen times a year to get staff in for specific events and that she would not be able to put those staff on broader contracts. We have to be a bit careful that we do not expand the definition so far as to include things that people consider to be perfectly okay. I appreciate that there is a difficulty of definition.

The committee raised the issue of zero-hours contracts in connection with the Scottish business pledge, which we had an interesting discussion on. The programme for government makes it clear that, in 2016, we will continue to raise awareness of the Scottish business pledge. More than 200 businesses have signed up to it since May last year, but I want many more to do so. I welcome the committee's broad endorsement of the pledge, but I also acknowledge its further advice. For example, text on zero-hours contracts has been taken from the committee's report to be added to the pledge website.

Zero-hours contracts can in some cases—I gave an example—offer people the flexibility that they want, but too often they become exploitative, such as when employers deny staff regular or sufficient working hours or unfairly penalise them

for being unavailable or not accepting offers of work. The Government is taking steps to ensure that we lead by example. We do not directly employ people on zero-hours contracts.

Presiding Officer, I am going to run out of time. I wanted to say something about pregnancy and maternity discrimination issues, which—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): I can give you an extra minute.

Roseanna Cunningham: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We do not yet have Scotland-specific figures, but the Equality and Human Rights Commission has reported that, across Britain, more than one in 10 new and expectant mothers reported that they had been dismissed or made compulsorily redundant while others in their workplace were not, or treated so poorly that they felt that they had to leave their jobs. Many of us assumed that that issue disappeared decades ago, but it seems that it did not. The Scottish figures are unlikely to be much at variance with that, so we have moved to take action, which I announced a few days ago. I hope that members will look at that, because it is important that we take the matter seriously as part and parcel of the fair work portfolio.

I will not say anything now about the Trade Union Bill because I want to say something—very quickly—about the fair work convention, which will report in a few short weeks. The committee's report has been useful for the convention, as it contains a lot of material that is relevant to the work that the convention is doing. The convention's report to us will provide a practical framework for employers, employees and others. We will go into the new session of Parliament with those recommendations in place and they will be fully considered. In the meantime, I look forward to continuing to work with all interested parties to promote fair work in Scotland.

In my dying seconds, I note that Murdo Fraser discussed Amazon. I hope that he is happy to hear that I will be visiting Amazon staff tomorrow to discuss with them directly some of the issues that have been raised about practices.

14:39

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I thank the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee for an important and timely report that builds on the work that the committee did previously on underemployment. Just how necessary the report is was brought home by the rather alarming extract from the cabinet secretary's evidence. The report states:

"The Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training said that she did 'not like' any of the definitions she had

seen of fair work, and felt it was a highly subjective area. She suggested that it is 'much easier to see a bad job than provide a hard and fast definition of a good job or fair work'".

The cabinet secretary for fair work admits that she is unsure what fair work is. There is a temptation to go down the rhetorical route and ask whether the cabinet secretary for education knows what education is or the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has any idea about justice. However, that would be a bit unfair, because the cabinet secretary for fair work was showing some welcome honesty about the complexities of fair work.

It would be good if the Government demonstrated the same honesty when it comes to the monthly reporting of labour market statistics. When those statistics come out, we often see hyperbolic claims about a return to pre-recession employment levels or record employment rates in particular areas, but the committee's report makes it clear that there is rather less to that than meets the eye. It says:

"The majority of evidence suggested a deterioration in job quality. In particular, we heard of an increase in poor-quality, low-paid and insecure work, and a worrying prevalence of the use of exploitative zero-hours contracts."

In other words, there might be more jobs, but the quality of those jobs leaves a great deal to be desired.

For a long time, we in the Labour Party have been saying that, when it comes to labour market statistics, we have to look behind the headlines. That is not just because the numbers tell us something different but because behind those headlines are the real-life lived experiences of many people who are struggling to get by in low-quality, poorly paid jobs.

I was struck by one example in the report that comes from my constituency of East Lothian. A legal secretary explained:

"I was taken on in 2008 with the promise of being trained as a paralegal, then the recession hit and 7 years later I'm still an unqualified secretary, can't get a job elsewhere but haven't progressed in this one. I am given too much responsibility but no reward, paid just enough to not be entitled to ANY tax credits but not enough to actually live off, or work towards a mortgage, or pay off any debt. The Company I work for takes full advantage of the fact the people are terrified to leave but there is no future in the role."

That is the reality behind the statistics. We should not lose sight of the report's recommendations about improving the quality of the labour market statistics. The cabinet secretary is quoted in the report as accepting that the data is broad brush and that

"it could be hard to break data down to a useful level, noting for instance that even working one or two hours a

week would see someone classed as being in employment.”

Roseanna Cunningham: I hope that Iain Gray will acknowledge that the data that comes out is UK-wide data that is broken down for Scotland. The statistics are official statistics on which all employment information is based across the UK.

Iain Gray: I accept that, but I will make two points. First, the report makes it clear that the Scottish Government pays the Office for National Statistics to do additional work to provide more detail at the Scottish level, so the capacity is there to improve the statistics that we have. Secondly, caution needs to be applied when political points are made on the basis of the statistics because, as the report says, they do not always bear examination.

It is fair to acknowledge the work that the cabinet secretary and her colleagues have done to increase fair work, particularly through the fair work convention. I will also say what the cabinet secretary ran out of time to say: there is no doubt that the chances of work being fair and of high quality are increased in the sectors that have good trade union organisation and recognition from employers. It is therefore extremely welcome that one of the final recommendations in the committee’s report—although this is not quite how it is put—is that the Scottish Parliament should continue its opposition to the new trade union legislation. Whether we do that by changing Scottish Parliament standing orders or by addressing the human rights issues with the implementation of the legislation in Scotland and by the Scottish Government, what is done will be central to the degree to which we can promote fair work in Scotland.

14:45

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee has produced a pretty comprehensive and effective report. The committee took a huge amount of evidence, with 11 panels of witnesses, by my count, a full day away in Paisley, and more than 600 responses.

The committee engaged with academic experts but, importantly, it also engaged with those who would not be considered experts and a number of people who were probably speaking to the Parliament for the first time. All that engagement should be welcomed, and it is reflected in the overall quality and substance of the report that was ultimately produced.

Some of the report’s conclusions were predictable—some of them disappointingly so. I suspect that all members across the chamber will recognise the overall deterioration in job quality since 2008; they will have seen it in their own

constituencies. We should all be doing what we can to try to reverse the statistics.

However, there is some light at the end of the tunnel. About a month or so after the report was published on 14 January, the most recent statistics—the February 2016 labour market statistics from the Scottish Government—had at least some elements that made us think that we might be on the right track at last.

Up until the 2008 recession, underemployment hovered at around the 10 per cent mark. Then it shot up to 13 per cent, where it broadly stayed for a five-year period. However, the most recent statistics that we have show that, last year, it appears to have dropped from 13 per cent down to 12 per cent. That does not sound a huge amount but we are talking about tens of thousands of people. From the shape of the graph, it appears that if the statistics follow in the same vein over the next year or two, we could have at least a fighting chance of getting back to the underemployment levels that we had prior to the recession. Therefore, although the statistics that the committee had were correct when the report was published, on the face of it—at least according to the most recent set of statistics—it looks as though we may be moving in the right direction.

I particularly liked Murdo Fraser’s earlier comment about “paving the high road” and “blocking ... the low road”. When he used the phrase, he did not—today, at least—try to claim credit for it himself; he quite rightly attributed it to Professor Warhurst, unlike in previous private conversations, when he gave the impression that it was his own idea. I just wanted to put that on the record.

The committee as a whole quite rightly wanted to see fair pay, security, safe conditions, respect, training and engagement.

I would be genuinely interested to hear in the closing speech from the Government just a bit of the detail on the Government response to some of the report’s specific recommendations. I am aware that there is no formal written response yet—I understand that the deadline is some two weeks hence—but given that we are debating the subject today, it would be useful for the Parliament to get a flavour of the likely Government response to some of the specific issues in the report and to other issues on which we can make progress now instead of waiting until the next parliamentary session.

Clearly, some of the issues will take until the next session to address, and some of that may well rely on the report that we get in a couple of weeks from the fair work convention. However, perhaps there are items in the committee report

that the Government can respond to positively today and say quite clearly that it backs them; indeed, perhaps it can say quite specifically that there are items that it will not back.

For example, the committee report asked about how we can genuinely extend and improve the labour force data that we get. The exchange between the cabinet secretary and Mr Gray highlighted some of the difficulties. However, if we put our heads together, can we find a way of getting a more Scotland-specific workforce and job quality survey? I think that all parties would welcome that, because if we want to propose the right cures to the ills that we face, we need to ensure the accuracy of the data so that we get an accurate diagnosis. If we are getting the wrong data, or if we are not getting the right level of data that we require, it is more difficult for political parties and the Government to get the right results. I am interested in hearing the Government's response to that point.

What is the Government's response to the recommendation that there should be a national indicator in the national performance framework? On the face of it, the conclusion that we ought to have some form of fair work index as one of the national indicators seems pretty sensible and fair. We have 50 national indicators, so can we have 51, if the Government sees fit, or do we have to remove one of the current indicators because the number is capped at 50? I am not sure what the answer is to that, but what is the Government's response to that recommendation in principle?

My time is running out, so I will close by saying simply that the report is excellent, and the more details we get from the Government today, the better informed the debate will be.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to the open debate. I am afraid that there is not much time in hand, and speeches should be of four minutes.

14:50

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): The overall employment situation in Scotland continues to improve. The latest figures highlight that we have record levels of employment and that those levels are higher than those in the UK; that average weekly wages are higher than those in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, with more than 80 per cent of employees paid at least the living wage; and that we have more graduates per head of population than any other nation in the UK.

The committee heard in evidence that

"governments opt to either support a high-skill, high-wage economy, or propagate a low-skill, low-pay economy."

I believe that the Scottish Government is opting for the high road, but it appears that the UK Government is aiming for the low road. The difficulty for Scottish workers who are in poor-quality low-paid work or who are employed using exploitative zero-hours contracts is that employment law, health and safety and industrial relations are all reserved to Westminster. Legislation in the area is in the hands of a UK Government that focuses on restricting trade unions rather than tackling bad employers.

As a witness from the University of Warwick stated in evidence,

"poor quality cleaning jobs in hotels can get worse when workers are shifted into temporary work agency employment or retail workers put onto zero hours contracts."

The Poverty Alliance highlighted the impact that that has on employees, stating:

"Those on zero hours contracts can also face confusion about their rights to holiday, sickness and maternity pay, and fluctuating hours can make it difficult to access benefits."

Gavin Brown: Will the member give way?

Gordon MacDonald: No—I have only four minutes.

The Poverty Alliance continued:

"It is also difficult to imagine how anyone is meant to manage their finances week to week with no idea of what their earnings will actually be."

Despite the fact that employment law is reserved to Westminster, the Scottish Government is promoting fair work practices. Last autumn, it issued statutory guidance that requires public authorities to consider how they can address fair work practices and discourage the use of inappropriate zero-hours contracts. The business pledge encourages employers to pay the living wage, and Scotland now has the lowest proportion of employees who are paid below the current level of £7.85 per hour of any of the UK nations. It was announced in the Scottish budget that £250 million is to be invested in social care, to allow councils to commission adult social care from the independent and voluntary sectors on the basis that care workers are paid the new living wage of £8.25 an hour.

We have to focus not just on pay and insecure work. Devolution of the work programme will provide an opportunity to improve the existing scheme, creating a simpler and more efficient service for those who are out of work. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation states:

"half of men and a third of women who claim Job Seekers Allowance do so within six months of a previous claim ending. A significant section of these individuals will have moved into and then out of work during this time".

The committee was concerned about the lack of clarity in Department for Work and Pensions policy in relation to offering jobseekers zero-hours contract posts and the sanctions regime. We are concerned that some people may be forced into accepting unsuitable work with exploitative employers. Any new programme must take into consideration individuals and their circumstances because, otherwise, some of the poorest paid in the country will continue to face the revolving door of short-term employment. As Professor Chris Warhurst said in evidence,

“We should laud the good employers and set them up as exemplars of what can be done; we should provide support for the willing employers; we should educate the indifferent employers; and we should regulate for the bad employers.”—[*Official Report, Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee*, 30 September 2015; c 14.]

14:54

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate on an important report. Regardless of the previous speaker’s characterisation of it, the report was marked by the way in which committee members came together, listened to the testimony of people’s experience and tried to respond to that. It covers important issues and makes important recommendations. I urge those who will be in the Scottish Parliament after the next election to revisit this important report because we were all united in wanting not only to describe the scale of the problem but to influence the finding of solutions to the problems.

At the heart of the report there is a central truth: low pay, job insecurity, zero-hours contracts and lack of involvement in decision making in the workplace matter not just because they are bad for the health of individuals and their ability to plan for and support their families but because poor working practices are bad for the economy and its capacity to be strengthened and to create opportunity and a better life for all. Nothing in the report causes more despair than its recognition that there are people who work unbelievably hard every day doing their very best in very important jobs without significant reward or even a guarantee that they will be able to meet their families’ needs. That must surely be a spur to us all.

I will highlight a number of issues. The first is flexible working. That sounds like a nice term, but the report includes a description of one woman’s experience that is worth reflecting on. She has worked in the supermarket all her life and now has responsibility for the care of her mother. She needs to be available at around 8 o’clock or 9 o’clock at night to ensure that her mother is put to bed and is comfortable. However, her employer advised her that she had to be available from 6

o’clock in the morning until midnight even though she might be working only 15 or 16 hours in the week. The irony is that, unable to respond to that lack of flexibility, she could end up having to give up her work, which would mean that she would not only be less productive and unable to support her family but face the risk of sanction. That surely cannot be just. As Karen Whitefield from the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers said, it seems that flexibility is now too often all on the side of the workforce and not on the side of the employer. We need to reflect on that.

The lack of involvement of employees in the workplace has a direct consequence for health and safety, for employees’ protection in the workplace and for the work that they do. That is most obvious in the oil and gas industry. We heard evidence that people in that industry were reluctant to complain in case that put their job on the line at a time when jobs are at risk anyway. We must recognise the importance of participation and the critical role of trade unions in relation to wages and conditions and, as importantly, in giving a voice to the people in the workforce who can improve the quality of the work that is done if attention is paid to them.

It is not an accident that we linked pay and conditions in the report and acknowledged the issue of low pay. We recognise the potential of the use of the living wage, but we must also acknowledge that it is not sufficient to pay the living wage if the people who are on it become more and more overstretched, doing more and more work filling in for people who have lost their jobs. That is happening in the care sector more generally but, with cuts to local government, the living wage badge will not be sufficient to give people security and good-quality work if they have to do more in the time that they have been given.

It is important that the DWP does not direct people to employers with bad working practices and then sanction them for not taking those jobs.

I say to the Scottish Government that I understand the need for the business pledge to be voluntary at this stage but, if the pledge is to matter, it must ensure that businesses that want to be good employers and take the high road are not undercut by the ones that cynically choose the low road. The business pledge and Government and local government decisions on contracts are significant in rewarding people who aspire to provide the good-quality jobs that the report identifies. That is where Scottish Government action in particular is critical. The Government must recognise its power to reward employers who want to do the right thing.

14:59

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I wanted to congratulate the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and its convener on their choice of title for their report, but Gavin Brown has prevented me from doing that, because it seems that the title did not come from them. "Taking the High Road" is a fantastic title. It is very much a Scottish title and it tells us about the kind of society that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government want.

Professor Chris Warhurst, the director of the Warwick institute for employment research, talked to the committee about the choices that Governments make—because this choice is one for Government much more than it is for employers. He said that there is a clear choice before us: taking the option of high road economies, which focus on high skills; or taking option of low road economies, which focus on low skills and low wages. We know that the SNP Government wants us to be on the high road with many of our European neighbours.

I listened to what Gordon MacDonald said and I will say something along the same lines. I have lived in Scotland for 30 years, and it is clear to me that successive Westminster Governments have taken us down the low road of low wages and low skills. The debates that we had in 2014 and the debates that we will have this year in the Scottish election campaign and thereafter in the European Union referendum campaign concern the road that we want to take for our economy and our wellbeing: is it the high road or the low road?

Something that we worked a lot on when I was a member of the committee was the idea that productivity is key to promoting the benefits of a higher wage society, for workers as much as for employers. Patricia Findlay, professor of work and employment relations at the University of Strathclyde, said to the committee that there is indeed an increased interest among policy makers and academics in linking job quality and productivity. I agree that the discussion around job quality and wellbeing at work must focus on job quality, productivity, innovation and competitiveness.

The committee report talks about EU data identifying that there are relatively low numbers of workplaces in the UK where staff engage in problem solving activities. That is true, and our continental neighbours are a lot better at giving employees and employers the space to engage and work collaboratively.

In the north-east, many international energy and subsea firms are engaging with their employees like never before. At a recent meeting of the cross-party group on oil and gas, we heard about the

approach of Nexen, which gives us a great example of how to achieve better productivity by engaging employees. Nexen had a 30 per cent improvement in productivity in just six months. Engagement was the key, and the offshore workforce found the solutions to better productivity.

We were told that Nexen adapted the marginal gains theory, a system that was created by the British Olympic cycling team—one that the French Olympic cycling team must have missed, somehow. Nexen encouraged staff to break down routine work activities in a bid to identify small gains. The move will see an additional 140 million barrels of oil for Nexen—I am delighted that Patrick Harvie is not here to hear that.

It seems that everyone agreed on certain points when giving evidence for this report. Stephen Boyd from the Scottish Trades Union Congress said that industrial democracy is weaker in the UK than across the EU. I agree with the trade union movement about the importance of effective partnership between trade unions, businesses and Government. It is key to the future of our economy as much as it is to our wellbeing.

I will conclude with a quote from the departing chair of the Scottish Human Rights Commission, Professor Alan Miller, that I read in *Holyrood* magazine. He said:

"Scotland has withstood extremely well the toxicity of the Westminster debate".

Reading the committee report, it is clear that Scotland has what it takes. We must keep a positive debate that focuses on taking the high road.

15:04

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw)

(Lab): In general, I welcome the recommendations of this report, which back up many of the things that Scottish Labour has been saying for some time. The Scottish Government has also made supportive noises but has not always taken opportunities when they are presented. I hope that this report will be a spur to move beyond lip service in such areas.

Having said that, I acknowledge that the big obstacle to the report's first recommendation—which is for better research and improved data that can be used to establish a fair work index—is not the Scottish Government but the UK-wide Office for National Statistics. As the Scottish Trades Union Congress noted,

"the Scottish Government plays the weak hand dealt by ONS very well; it presents ONS data in an accessible and up to date fashion".

Serious pressure needs to be applied at UK level to improve the quality of labour force statistics and enable the Scottish dimension to be properly explored.

The Scottish Government needs to have a clear idea about how research and analysis should be extended. Perhaps, then, it is just as well that the next recommendation—to ask the chief economic adviser for advice on what research would be useful, and to ask the Scottish Government what it would do with such research—gives the Scottish Government a steer on that.

I am glad that the committee

“believes that scope exists to place stronger emphasis on the Living Wage and fair work practices through the public procurement process”.

It is just a pity that the opportunity was missed in the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill. If that opportunity had been taken, we might now be in a stronger position and not merely encouraging public bodies to explore options.

Mental health needs much greater support. Unfortunately, that is an area where the Scottish Government’s progress is disappointing in several respects, including funding, waiting times, young people, and workers in high-stress employment such as in the national health service. Better support for mental health services is not just the right thing to do; it is an important factor in other respects. We need monitoring of mental health in the workplace to become more effective. Otherwise, we are more likely to suffer economic and organisational failures as a consequence of not addressing the problems of mental health in the workplace. Temporary contracts, zero-hours contracts and lack of job security contribute to the stress of employment. Secure and stable working arrangements should be the default, not the exception.

I welcome the approach to the Department for Work and Pensions but, again, it is a pity that the opportunity of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill was allowed to pass by.

The action against and clarification of “exploitative” zero-hours or short-hours contracts is both welcome and overdue. As a trade unionist, I oppose the Tory attack on workers’ rights in the Trade Union Bill and I regret that the Scottish Parliament was not allowed to take a stronger stand against it.

I believe that good industrial relations are in the best interests of workers and employers, so any help that can be given to get employers to see the light is very welcome. Like others, I look forward to the minister’s response to the recommendations in the report.

15:07

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): As a member of the Parliament’s Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, I am delighted to speak in this debate on work, wages and wellbeing in the Scottish labour market, and I compliment the convener on his balanced speech.

It is important that all workers are entitled to a living wage—in fact, I would suggest a living weekly wage—safe working conditions and secure employment. I support the Scottish Government’s actions to improve employment standards in Scotland, including the promotion of the living wage, which is currently £8.25 an hour. Since this Government introduced the requirement to pay the living wage as part of its public sector pay policy, it has invested more than £1.5 million a year in the living wage rate throughout the relevant parts of the public sector, which has directly benefited around 3,000 workers.

Through the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014, the Government has promoted fair working practices. Its statutory guidance on fair work practices goes further than any other Administration. It makes it clear that paying the living wage is an indicator of an employer’s commitment to fair work practices and that doing so can have a positive impact on the quality of work. The act also requires public bodies to consider whether any procurement exercise can include a question on fair work practices.

I note that the Government has taken action to eradicate unfair working practices. Since the introduction of the Scottish business pledge, numerous companies have signed up. Those companies have pledged to pay the living wage, abstain from using exploitative zero-hours contracts, encourage diversity in the workforce and adopt progressive workplace policies. Additionally, the Government does not make use of zero-hours contracts and seeks to eradicate exploitative ones.

In order to create access to justice for all workers, the Government has committed to abolishing fees for employment tribunals. Under the Smith commission proposals, the UK Government is set to devolve employment tribunals to Scotland. However, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee believed the UK Government’s draft legislative clauses fell short of fully implementing the recommendations of the Smith commission.

As a member of the Health and Sport Committee, I commend the Scottish Government’s efforts to improve health and wellbeing by improving the quality of work and employment. Research shows that there is a socioeconomic gradient of health in employment, with many of

those in low-skilled jobs suffering from poor health. Employers can take steps to improve workplace health by paying a living wage, involving workers in management, offering flexible working opportunities and providing opportunities for advancement.

Furthermore, I note that the Government is taking action to improve working conditions for those in the health and social care sector by promoting the living wage and fair work practices. During the past year, the SNP Government has provided £12.5 million towards those ends. This year's draft budget sets out plans to invest a further £250 million per year through health and social care partnerships to protect and grow social care services. The SNP Government has also provided resources to local authorities to ensure that they have been able to commission care services that pay workers the full living wage.

The fact that employment legislation remains reserved to the UK Government provides a challenge for this Government and the EET Committee. The UK Government's national living wage is well below the real living wage that was calculated by the Scottish Government to address the basic cost of living. In addition, the UK Government's Trade Union Bill threatens Scotland's positive relationship with trade unions. The number of working days that are lost per 1,000 employees to industrial disputes is lower in Scotland than in all the other regions in the UK. Therefore, if Westminster does not withdraw the bill, Scotland should be exempt.

The SNP Government has established a fair work convention that will produce a framework for implementing fair work. The framework will support the Government's objectives of economic growth and inequality reduction. I welcome the publication of the fair work convention's framework so that the SNP Scottish Government can continue to work to improve the standard of living for workers throughout Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Wilson. I ask you to keep to your four minutes please, Mr Wilson.

15:12

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (Ind): First, I declare an interest as a member of Unite the union and as a former director of the Scottish Low Pay Unit. I commend the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and its members for bringing the debate to the chamber. It is important that we continue to keep this issue at the forefront of everything that we do.

As has been mentioned today and as is covered in the report, the committee's findings show that it is important that we continue to ensure that people

across Scotland are in high-quality work that pays well; that is rewarding and has good working conditions; and in which individuals feel respected and well treated.

Employment numbers alone are not enough to measure the success of the jobs market in Scotland. There is no point in having high numbers of people registered as employed if their work does not provide them with adequate pay, gives them too few or too many hours or does not provide them with secure and dignified work.

The work, wages and wellbeing online questionnaire found that 68 per cent of respondents stated that the quality of their work had deteriorated over the past five years, while 14 per cent felt that it had stayed the same and only 18 per cent said that the quality of their work had improved. The results are clear: even if the employment rate is up, the quality and standards of work are not. What good is it to provide jobs if those jobs do not offer the dignity, security and finances that employment should guarantee?

No one who works full time should find themselves in in-work poverty. The current national minimum wage is simply not enough. The UK Government's so-called living wage is not adequate, and I make a distinction between the UK's living wage and Scotland's living wage in that context. Although the pay boost is welcome, the UK living wage still falls short of the minimum amount that is required to pay an appropriate living wage. Coupled with the Westminster Government's attack on the welfare state, the so-called living wage fails to provide a decent rate of pay for the average worker. That is why the campaign for a £10 minimum wage by 2020 should be supported.

The UK Government has further attacked the rights of workers through the introduction of the Trade Union Bill. Workers' rights are being attacked at every opportunity, and that is still the case. The right to collective action and bargaining is crucial for continued employment rights and welfare. Individuals have a right to be secure and confident in their employment, and employers should have to work with trade unions to secure good working conditions. The use of casual and agency staff and short-term contracts is no excuse to ignore employment rights. Employers should be challenged to show that contracts are justified and that working conditions are fair.

Employment has the ability to offer people both financial and personal rewards, but unfortunately it does not always do that, as we see from the report and every day in the press. In modern-day Scotland, no one should be a wage slave or a serf. We must ensure that work is decent, honest and fair, and that it provides a good wage and good

working conditions. In a country such as ours, that is not too much to ask.

I look forward to seeing the report's impact in future parliamentary sessions. I hope that the Parliament will ask employers to consider seriously the issues that have been raised and the recommendations that have been made. I look forward to the Scottish Government responding positively to the report, to ensure that we root out all the bad employment practices that unfortunately continue to exist in Scotland today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to closing speeches. I remind members who participated in the debate that they should be here for closing speeches.

15:16

Gavin Brown: This has been an interesting debate. I will return to some of the excellent contributions that were made, but before I do that I will pick up on two points. The first is the Scottish Government's criticism that the UK Government's national living wage is not the same as the living wage. Of course, today that is correct, but by the end of the Westminster parliamentary term I suspect that it will not be. I also point out that the UK Government's national minimum wage is higher than what the SNP proposed at the general election and is higher, too, than what was in the white paper, which detailed what it would have been if we had become independent. The Scottish Government is correct to point out the facts, but a little bit of context is necessary.

Gordon MacDonald and Christian Allard raised the second point, which was absurd and, in some ways, lessened the quality of the debate. They said that, over a 30-year period, the UK Government has intentionally taken the low road while the Scottish Government has taken the high road. No Government wants to take the low road—there is not a political party in this place that wants to go down that track. Of course, Governments have got things wrong over the years, but if what those members said was true, the Scottish share of income tax receipts would be far higher, in percentage terms, than the UK share. We all know that that simply is not true.

Christian Allard: I was talking about taxation and the high road and the low road, and I gave some European Union examples. Does Gavin Brown not agree that whereas France has given Google a bill for £1.3 billion for unpaid taxes, the UK Government has settled for a fraction of that: £130 million for the same period? That is exactly why we are talking about a low road and a high road.

Gavin Brown: In all honesty, I genuinely do not understand the point that Christian Allard is

making. I point out a host of areas in which successive UK Governments of different political stripes have pushed hard to bring in high-quality jobs, whether through inward investment or through what they have done for science, engineering or medicine. Governments of all shapes and sizes want to bring in the best high-quality jobs that they can. They do not always succeed, but to suggest that they do not want those jobs and that they do not succeed intentionally is an absurd proposition.

There were a number of highlights in the debate, one of which was Johann Lamont's thoughtful contribution. She very eloquently made the point that poor working practices are not just bad for the individuals concerned but, ultimately, bad for the economy as a whole. I would go a step further and say that in the medium to longer term, they are bad for employers as well. There might be a short-term boost to the bottom line as a result of paying workers less and not treating them well, but that sets a terrible precedent, and doing that does not do a business any good in the medium term, in terms of its potential and its sustainability. Johann Lamont made that point well.

In my final minute, I will return to the point that I made earlier. I hope that the minister, in her summation, will respond specifically to a number of the issues that were raised in the report. I talked about the new national indicator and improving labour force data. There were other excellent suggestions—the commissioning of specific research from the office of the chief economic adviser was a good idea. Can things be done in the public procurement processes? Although there are challenges, there are further angles that we can consider, particularly those looking at the supply chain and not just the individual main contractor. A specific conclusion was on mental wellbeing monitoring and performance indicators across the workplace. There was a whole host of good ideas. Obviously, we will get a full written response, but anything that we can get from the Government today would be welcome.

15:20

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): As members have said, work, wages and wellbeing matter to us all. What people do when they get to work, how much and how they are paid, how they are treated and what work does to their lives are all pretty fundamental questions. They are of fundamental importance most of all to working people and their trade unions but, as we have heard from all sides of the chamber, they have a wider significance beyond the workplace, too.

Poverty wages, exploitation, insecurity, a reckless disregard for workplace safety and the

victimisation of workers who demand rights tell us about a bit more than just the bad practice of a few rogue employers. All those things happen in Scotland today, so while a consensus on most of the report's recommendations is to be welcomed, there are no grounds for complacency.

The Scottish Government says that it places a high value on good employment practice, and saying so is a step in the right direction, just as it is for companies that sign the Scottish business pledge. However, saying so is not enough in itself.

It is not enough for the First Minister to appoint a cabinet secretary with "fair work" in her job title unless the Government can reach a shared view on what is acceptable employment practice by companies that seek Scottish Government endorsement. That shared view came in the end, but only after considerable confusion. As the committee report says there was an

"initial failure to make explicit"

that companies using exploitative zero-hours contracts could not sign up to the Scottish business pledge, and the committee rightly calls for the Government to adopt much clearer definitions in that area.

Furthermore, it is not enough to have a cabinet secretary for fair work if she is not in the loop when it comes to decisions—or even discussions—about the award of Government funding to inward investors when some of those companies, as we have heard, flout the most basic expectations about fair treatment of employees. Ministers telling us that those are decisions for public servants and not for them is also not good enough. Stewardship of public money is the job of ministers who are directly accountable to Parliament, and the larger the sum the more important the accountability.

In pursuit of consensus, the committee asks very politely that ministers should look again at the process of making high-value awards of regional selective assistance to consider whether changes may be required. That review should not take long, given what we know already. If companies take Government money without respecting even the spirit of Government policy, there can surely be no doubt that changes are required—and the sooner the better.

On the question of the living wage, the committee has also chosen its words with care; nonetheless, it reaches a strong conclusion:

"scope exists to place stronger emphasis on the Living Wage and fair work practices through the public procurement process".

We have heard a number of speakers echo that view in the debate.

It is perhaps a pity that the Scottish Government has not been more ambitious before now in exploring what further scope might be available. If the next Government follows the committee's advice to explore the "options to the full", it could make a real difference to many low-paid workers in contracting companies.

Last but not least, the report lays out the case against the Tories' Trade Union Bill. The evidence reflected in the report clearly points to the conclusion that workers who are organised in trade unions are much less vulnerable to exploitation than those who are not. Fair work conventions, business pledges and living wage policies are all to be welcomed, but the biggest defence of all for decent work, wages and wellbeing is the ability of working people to organise in support of their rights at work. That is why stopping the Trade Union Bill is so important, why this side of the chamber welcomes the report and why we look forward to the Government's responses to the whole range of recommendations in it in the near future.

15:24

Roseanna Cunningham: I thank the committee again for its valuable piece of work, and I thank all the people who took the time to give evidence. I will send the committee my response to the report's main recommendations later this week.

The report and today's debate reinforce my belief in the importance of looking at fair work. The increasing recognition that how people are treated in the workplace has an impact on their health, their wellbeing and their productivity is welcome and is something on which we need to build.

As I said in my opening speech, I am pleased that the Scottish Government has been able to take action to promote fair work in a number of areas. I gently say to Lewis Macdonald that there has been a lot more than just talk over the past year and a half; a great deal has been done. I am happy that the committee acknowledged the importance of the work that the Government has undertaken, and I appreciate the support for improving working practice that has been in evidence during the debate.

I think that we all agree that more needs to be done to spread the message and to support employers, employees and their representatives to improve conditions in workplaces. In the coming weeks, the fair work convention will publish its framework, which will set out the views of employers and trade unions, working together in partnership, on what "fair work" means. I expect the framework to demonstrate the flexibility and aspiration that the committee requested.

It is important that the committee's report and recent studies from the Resolution Foundation and others give us a strong evidence base, which we will be able to take to employers throughout the country, to promote the benefits of a fair approach. Many of the benefits have been clearly articulated today.

I want to respond to some of the points that have been made in the debate, although I do not have enough time to go through every speech. I concur with Iain Gray's comments on trade unions and the Trade Union Bill, which were echoed by a number of members from more than one party.

Iain Gray also talked about the labour market stats. There are indeed issues with the stats. One such issue is a pretty fundamental misunderstanding of how the statistical analysis is derived from the raw numbers. It was of some interest to me to discover that there are people who think that the labour market stats are a total headcount, as opposed to a sample survey. I do not want to get too bogged down in the detail of how the stats are compiled, but I gently suggest that Iain Gray's remarks about hyperbole might also be directed to his colleagues in his own party, because negative comment can be equally misleading.

Murdo Fraser mentioned Amazon, which I was able to mention only briefly in my opening speech, when I indicated that I will meet Amazon tomorrow. I have to point out that the organisation that Willie Rennie described in the Parliament as "terrible", and which he said that Fife would be far better off without, was in fact welcomed by Mr Rennie's party in 2004, when Jim Wallace, who was enterprise minister at the time, described Amazon's arrival as excellent news for Scotland. I also have copies of press comments from Duncan McNeil, welcoming Amazon investment in Gourrock. The point of repeating that is to remind members that when jobs are the issue, there is more than one driver behind comments that are made.

Gavin Brown wanted more detailed responses from Government. In a five-minute speech, that is impossible. At the outset I gave him a detailed response on the business pledge; we have already taken action on the matter. I hope that he will manage to hold on for a couple more days until he gets the considered and full response.

Gavin Brown also asked about a Scotland-specific job quality survey and fair work index. A review of the national performance framework is reaching its conclusion, and I understand that we can expect new indicators that relate directly to fair work. No doubt Gavin Brown will want to have a look at those, if that is the case.

On the broader research question, which I think that John Pentland raised, I reassure members that a lot of specific research is under way and will be published when the pieces of work are complete. We contribute funding to help to build capacity for research among academic and other stakeholders. For example, we contribute to the University of Strathclyde's innovating works project and research by Oxfam and the Poverty Alliance. There is an on-going programme of research.

Johann Lamont correctly reminded us that the living wage, as important as it is, is not the sole indicator of fair work, as I said in my opening speech. The living wage can become an iconic factor in the fair work debate, but it is not the only one.

On the matter of definitions, which was raised by Iain Gray and by Lewis Macdonald, I agree that it can be difficult to specifically define concepts. Lawyers sometimes make an entire living out of such definitions, but one of the reasons that we set up the fair work convention was to help that process. Definitions, by definition, leave out or include things about which there will be endless debate.

I welcome the committee's helpful report, its recognition that much work has happened and its call to do more to promote fair work. I believe that this Government has led the way, and I am personally committed to further action with the powers that we have at our disposal, but we really cannot get away from the fundamental fact that we could do far more in this area if we had the full set of powers around employment law devolved to Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Joan McAlpine to wind up the debate on behalf of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee.

15:30

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): This has been a worthwhile debate on a worthwhile committee report, and that is important given the issues at stake and the level of engagement that the committee had. We need to do right by the 600 people who responded to our questionnaire and engaged with the committee. The convener mentioned some of the difficulties that we had in defining what was good or bad work, given that most people whom we spoke to felt that they had a good job.

In the conclusions to the report, the committee came up with a number of aspects that we believe workers should be offered as standard in any good-quality employment. They were:

"regular and sufficient pay which allows for a decent standard of living ... secure employment ... safe working

conditions ... working hours known and mutually agreed in advance of shifts ... a culture of mutual respect ... training opportunities and routes for advancement; and ... employee engagement in company/organisational decisions.”

I think that that is a good framework to be moving forward with. We agreed that list in the executive summary, and I welcome the cabinet secretary's comment that she will send out a clear message on good employment practices saying that exploitative contracts and working practices are unacceptable.

Iain Gray highlighted examples of the human cost and the need for better data on the subject. As the cabinet secretary and others have pointed out, the data that we use comes from the ONS. As I recall, the same point was made in oral evidence to the committee by the STUC, which was very disparaging of the ONS data and its ability to adequately break down Scottish labour markets, notwithstanding the additional funds that Scotland pays for that breakdown. On data, Gavin Brown mentioned something that may be a little more encouraging, in that there was light at the end of the tunnel with the Scottish labour market statistics showing a slight drop in underemployment, albeit a small one, that may indicate an encouraging trend over the past year. That was an important point to make.

Paragraph 203 of the committee report states:

“We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to the Living Wage”,

while in paragraph 204 the committee welcomes

“the new procurement guidance on the Living Wage and fair work”.

That guidance was highlighted by Richard Lyle during the debate. Gordon MacDonald spoke of it being an indication that the Scottish Government was following the high road in that regard—that came up repeatedly in the debate—but that it was hindered by the UK Government's control of employment legislation. That differentiation was made in the report and it is important to state that, even though we are not going down party-political lines.

Mr MacDonald and others also highlighted the measures in the Scottish budget to pay home care workers the living wage. Home care workers were a subject of great interest to the inquiry, with several organisations representing the sector and its workers highlighting the rapid staff turnover in the sector, which must have an effect on patient care and which I hope the introduction of a living wage will address.

Johann Lamont highlighted a difficulty that carers experience. One witness gave very powerful written evidence on her inability to plan the care of her elderly mother, because the supermarket that she worked for was not flexible—

the flexibility was all on the side of the employer. That situation, which faces far too many workers, is obviously unacceptable, and the committee hopes that the fair work convention will pay attention to it. In its conclusions, the committee said that it appreciated the joint chairs' comment

“that the current Committee inquiry will feed into the Convention's deliberations and outputs.”

That was very welcome.

I note that the cabinet secretary told the committee that the fair work convention is independent of Government, but that it will work with Government in a constructive manner. I am sure that the convention's independence from Government is also an opportunity for it.

John Pentland talked about the need for better research, which the committee also called for. As regards purely practical recommendations, the committee praised the work of Oxfam Scotland as it builds its humankind index and recommended that the fair work convention should consider carefully Oxfam's conclusions.

There has been a lot of discussion of the business pledge and of whether help should be given to companies in certain circumstances. I agree with the committee's call for a target to be set for the number of companies that sign up to the business pledge, and I welcome the news that 200 have already done so. The committee recommends that all account managed companies be encouraged to sign up to the pledge, and I think that we could probably do more to publicise it.

I recently visited the company of DS Smith in Lockerbie in my area, which has taken on four apprentices this year and has a great apprenticeship programme planned. It pays its apprentices double the normal apprentice wage and has increased training remarkably from 100 hours to more than 1,000 hours. It is obviously paying the living wage, has no zero-hours contracts and has a great gender balance in its operation. However, when I asked whether it knew about the business pledge, it was not aware of it, even though it ticked all the boxes for it. I am now encouraging the company to sign up to the pledge. It is important that we all encourage companies that are doing a great job in promoting fair work in their communities to sign up to the pledge so that they can be held up as examples. There are many good examples out there. One way to move forward is to praise the good examples as well as to attack the bad practice, of which there are too many examples.

The cabinet secretary acknowledged the consensual aspects of the debate and said that she looks forward to the work of the fair work convention, whose framework will respond to the

committee and to what has been said in today's debate. I am sure that we all welcome that. I for one am looking forward to the publication of the convention's framework, which will take place in the next few weeks, and I believe that we can all look forward to it with great anticipation.

Social Security

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-15758, in the name of Alex Neil, on social security. We do not have a lot of time in hand.

15:39

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights (Alex Neil): I am delighted to open today's debate and to set out progress and plans on social security—especially because this is the first genuinely important social security debate that we have had since learning that we will take over the powers for 11 benefits at some time in the near future. We will, for the first time, have the power to act on those social security measures, so this is an historic day for the Parliament and Scotland. I look forward to the whole Parliament working together—I hope—to ensure a smooth and safe transition to delivery of social security in Scotland.

Recent debates in Parliament show the interest that members have in the subject. I pay tribute to the work of the Welfare Reform Committee in particular, in its consultation in support of the work that it did on new powers and the excellent work that it has carried out over several years on welfare benefits. I am pleased to see that the committee's conclusions closely match my priorities in terms of what we need to do to take forward the social security agenda.

Our first priority is to ensure a smooth and safe transfer of powers from London to Edinburgh. In all the consultations that we carried out last summer on social security, everyone's number 1 concern was to ensure that people continue right through the transfer period to receive their benefits on time and in the right amount. I pledge today that our number 1 priority will be to ensure that that happens.

Our vision and principles are designed to ensure that people are treated with dignity, fairness and respect—fundamental principles on which we can all agree. Like every other MP and MSP, members will at their constituency offices and surgeries have spoken to members of the public who have expressed frustration about aspects of the social security system—in particular, the medical assessments that are associated with disability living allowance and personal independence payments. Members will have heard everything: from people feeling as though their medical situation was being treated cursorily, to someone winning an appeal and then being immediately called again for another medical assessment, right through to people with lifetime conditions being called in for assessment to see whether they are

fit for work when it is very clear that they will never work again. All those things are important to people, as is the money itself. When we treat people with dignity and respect, we can both streamline and make more humane the assessment process. That will be one of our top priorities.

I am also pleased to announce to Parliament the outcome of the first stage of our planning for a delivery vehicle for the new powers. Over the past 18 months we have been engaging with people and organisations across the country in order to understand how best to deliver the new social security powers. The outcomes of that engagement have allowed us to form a consensus that dignity and respect are to be at the heart of all that we do in policy and delivery. We need to do things differently and to take a fairer approach, although there is still a lot of work to do to achieve that. We have already committed to introducing Scotland's first social security bill before the end of the first year of the next session—assuming that we are re-elected to Government. Our ambitions are that the legislation will reflect a distinctively different and fairer Scottish approach to social security.

Until now, the role of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament on welfare has been primarily in relation to mitigation. In the context of falling budgets from the United Kingdom Government, we have been left to pick up the pieces and to do our best to mitigate the worst impacts of the very big cuts to certain benefits over the past six years. The scale of the cuts could result in costs to Scotland of £6 billion between 2010 and 2016. We are doing everything that we can to help; in the three years to 2016 we have invested just under £300 million to mitigate the worst impacts of the cuts.

The independent poverty adviser reported just a few weeks ago that we have to do everything in our power to try to improve outcomes when we get the new powers. She pointed out that we must proceed with caution in order to ensure safe delivery—to which I have already referred twice—and we fully agree with that. She also set out the fundamental principle that public service delivery of social security policy has to be respectful and person-centred and must preserve the dignity of people who are in poverty. Fundamentally, that is what we intend to do.

Our vision is that social security is important to all of us. None of us knows when we might have to rely on the social security system because we hit a bad patch or become very ill or disabled. Therefore, we must be able to support each other when that kind of support is needed.

Our powers will impact on some of the most vulnerable people in society. Everyone in Scotland

has an interest in ensuring that people have a decent standard of life when they hit difficult times. We aim to use the powers in a way that better meets the needs of the people of Scotland, to engage with our stakeholders at every stage, and to ensure that we serve their needs and aspirations as well as live up to their hopes about a more humane social security system.

We believe that five basic principles should underlie a Scottish social security system. The first principle is that social security is an investment in the people of Scotland. At the heart of our approach is an understanding that social security plays an important part in tackling poverty and inequality. Where people face additional challenges and costs in their daily lives—very often because of ill health or disability—it is right that all of us help to meet those costs. It is important in supporting people to participate fully in our society.

The second principle is that respect for the dignity of individuals is at the heart of everything that we do. At every step of our engagement with individuals, we will treat them with dignity and respect.

The third principle is that our processes and services will be evidence based and designed with the people of Scotland. The starting point for the design of our policies and processes is that they are based on the best evidence, so the individuals who are affected by them should have their say and be listened to.

The fourth principle is that we will strive for continuous improvement in all our policies, processes and systems, and put the user experience first. In the first instance, our priority will be to ensure a smooth transition, as I have already said, so that people have confidence that they will continue to receive the support to which they are entitled.

The final principle is the need to demonstrate that our services are efficient and that they give value for money. We know from our consultation that the system can be complex for people. We will seek to reduce the bureaucracy in claiming benefits and to ensure that, at all stages, people are provided with the relevant information on how the system will work for them.

On delivery, we intend, after having examined all the available options, to set up a new social security agency for Scotland. We already have a distinct and separate policy agenda, which will be reflected at every stage, from policy making to implementation and delivery. The social security agency will work with stakeholders, practitioners and experts from local government, the third sector and representative organisations across Scotland and will build on the excellent

relationships and innovative approaches that are already in place.

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): When the minister was analysing all his proposals, did he ever foresee a “benefits stampede” to Scotland, as the Conservatives have described it?

Alex Neil: No—not at all. That would be inconceivable, particularly with the benefits in question because they relate to severe illness and disability. I do not envisage people deliberately trying to make themselves disabled or ill in order to come to Scotland to claim a benefit. We already have a number of free benefits in Scotland—for example, we have free prescriptions, which has not ended in a stampede from elsewhere in the UK. I do not believe that the powers that we are discussing will end up in a stampede from other parts of the UK, either. Apart from anything else, there is a requirement for residency in Scotland to qualify for certain types of assistance in many schemes that already exist, although they are not part of social security administration. It is clear that that will also be the case with the social security schemes that the Scottish Government will administer.

Our new agency will be directly accountable to the Scottish ministers, who are, in turn, accountable to Parliament, and it will be answerable to the people of Scotland on social security in a way that has not been possible before. By working with local government and all our other partners, and with each performing a meaningful role in the process by which we will take the work forward, we will together help to ensure that the dignity of users is held in its proper regard and reflects our wider commitment to participation in the debates and decisions that matter most to people.

Today is an important step in the journey to the day when the first devolved social security benefit payment is made in Scotland, but much work still needs to be done. Following our initial appraisal of all the available options for delivery, more detailed work will be required to develop configurations for the overall social security system. Our proposals will be fully costed and appraised as a fuller business case, which will be published later this year.

Unfortunately, I have run out of time. Members will already be aware of the commitments that we have made in terms of our early priorities, some of which are, I know, shared by Labour members. I look forward to the rest of the debate, during which I hope we can get on to the prospects of delivering an enhanced system for our people.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the devolution of new social security powers; welcomes the extensive consultation

process that the Scottish Government has carried out with stakeholders and benefit users into the future delivery and approach of social security policy in Scotland to ensure that it has services that will be accessible, fair and command the confidence of users; agrees the vision and principles that will be at the heart of the Scottish Government's position, which are underpinned by an emphasis on treating people with dignity and respect; welcomes the policy choices that the Scottish Government has outlined to ensure that there will be a fair approach to new social security powers, and agrees that the smooth transition of these powers will be a priority for the Scottish Government and be to the benefit of all of Scotland.

15:50

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): One of the most depressing features of our politics over the past few decades has been the tone of the debate about social security—or welfare, as it has, sadly, come to be labelled. Over 100 years ago, socialists, liberals, social reformers, progressives in the churches and the trade unions argued for a system of social protection that would end destitution. They argued for sick pay, unemployment benefits, pensions, holidays, a reduction in the working week and the like. Over time, through campaigning, the welfare state as we know it emerged, with the social security system as a key element.

It was the creation of that welfare state, often in the teeth of opposition from the forces of conservatism—some things have never changed—that ended reliance on the poorhouse, ended destitution and provided universal healthcare, housing and protection for all. In short, we moved from being a society in which we abandoned the poor and the needy to being one in which collectively, through our taxes, we took responsibility for our friends and neighbours who were in need of our help. The welfare state civilised our society by allowing everyone, irrespective of their power and wealth, to access education, healthcare and a basic income.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Does Neil Findlay agree that the Conservatives should note the work of George Barnes of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, who was the champion of the pension? He was so successful that he managed to defeat the Conservative cabinet minister Bonar Law. The Conservatives should perhaps note that, when people act on such matters, they suffer.

Neil Findlay: I am sure that that was the case. He was probably in Mr Stevenson's class at school. However, Mr Stevenson makes a valid point.

From all that emerged the post-war consensus, in which Governments of whichever persuasion accepted the need for a decent social security system—until the dark cloud of Thatcherism cast

its ugly shadow over our society. From then until now, the debate, and the tone of the debate, around social security has become steeped in a negative culture of blame and division, setting worker against worker, the able-bodied against the disabled, the young against the old and the host community against immigrants. It has created a system that treats people with suspicion instead of compassion and which increasingly stigmatises people using language such as “scroungers”, “shirkers” and the “feckless”.

I agree absolutely with the cabinet secretary: any of us at any point in our lives could find our world turned upside down by a debilitating illness or physical disability, by the arrival of a child or a parent who is in need of round-the-clock care or by an extended period of unemployment. We should all say, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

With devolution of social security, we have a real opportunity to do things differently. On the Welfare Reform Committee, there has been a great deal of consensus among Labour and SNP members—we will, as always, leave the Tories out of this, although I note that Mr Lamont did, at least, remain silent most of the time.

We agree with the Government that

“social security is an investment in the people of Scotland ... that respect for the dignity of individuals”

should be

“at the heart of everything that we do ... that our processes and services”

should be

“evidence based and designed with the people ... that Governments of whichever persuasion should strive for continuous improvement in policy, processes and systems, and put the user experience first”

and that services should be

“efficient and ... give value for money.”

I hope that there is nothing controversial there.

In creating strong foundations for a new welfare system, we all want them to be robust. However, what we build on top of those foundations and how any new system is funded are more important. We want a system that is publicly run and accountable to Parliament, not one that is hived off to the private sector or an agency elsewhere that can be blamed if things go wrong. We want a system that helps people to participate in our society and to get back into work when and if they are able to do so.

We want child poverty to be at the centre of our system. Tragically, one in four children is affected by poverty—220,000 of our fellow citizens. None of us can wash our hands of that collective shame.

On Monday, the Labour leader Kezia Dugdale set out how our proposals will offer children who are leaving care and going into higher education a full grant, which will give them the best opportunity to complete their studies and move on in life. After months of campaigning, we have won the argument for paying care workers the living wage. Scottish National Party members voted against that half a dozen times, but let us put that in the past and celebrate the fact that, like our bedroom tax member’s bill, our campaigning has again paid dividends.

The next stage is to secure a better deal for carers by raising the level of carers allowance to match the level of jobseekers allowance, which would be worth about an extra £600 a year to carers. Labour has made that a firm commitment. We will also more than double the level of maternity grant that is made available to new mums, and would provide £1,030 to help mums with the cost of a new baby.

We cannot do any of that if we do not have a plan to address austerity, and I still have to find the Government’s plan for addressing austerity. We can do it because we have come up with a range of funded options incorporating income tax changes, initially to the basic rate then to the higher rate, a refusal to implement Osborne’s tax cuts for the top 15 per cent of earners by maintaining the threshold, and rejecting the SNP’s tax giveaway to the wealthiest through abolition of air passenger duty.

Our tax plans, combined with the commitment to tackle child poverty and the gross inequality in our society, are at the heart of our plans for a Scotland in which everyone has opportunity, in which everyone is valued and in which everyone is looked after. I look forward to continuing the debate on the future of our social security system and am sure that we will hear more on that from members during the debate.

I move amendment S4M-15758.2, to insert at end:

“; believes that, given that 220,000 children in Scotland are affected by child poverty, the devolution of social security should see addressing child poverty become the Scottish Government’s number one priority, developing a range of policies across government to address such glaring inequality in society, and further believes that such a strategy can only be delivered by using the new financial powers of the Parliament to increase the revenues available to the Scottish Government”.

15:57

John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak in today’s important debate, and I am pleased that the Scottish Government is working with the UK Government on a smooth transition of

the new powers to ensure that individuals who are currently in receipt of benefits continue to receive them on time.

Although the work of the Welfare Reform Committee, of which I am a member, has gone some way towards raising key issues around the delivery of social security, I am aware of some concern about the level of concrete preparation for the transition. I therefore urge the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights to do all that he can to ensure that the process is as smooth as possible. It is vital that existing claimants do not experience any delays in payments, but the Government's recent information technology record does not fill the public with much confidence.

It is important to recognise that, thanks to the Scotland Bill and the work of the Treasury and the Deputy First Minister in reaching agreement on the fiscal framework, the Scottish Government will soon have more control over welfare than it has ever had before. We welcome the wide-ranging powers; they give us the opportunity to discuss important issues in depth.

For too long, debates about social security and welfare have simply been an exercise in criticising the policies of the UK Government; it has become something of a pastime for ministers and cabinet secretaries. The Scottish Government now has an opportunity to offer its alternative plans for dealing with the complex issues that are attached to welfare provision.

The Government has made much of the broad language of "fairness", "respect" and "dignity" in terms of the overall culture of the social security system that it intends to create, and I am sure that those words would draw support from every member of Parliament and indeed the wider public outside the chamber. However, it is crucial that the cabinet secretary now sets out to the Scottish taxpayer some concrete proposals for the delivery of the powers and says how it intends to pay for any possible divergence from the policies of the UK Government.

Furthermore, in ensuring fairness, the Scottish Government also needs to show how it can improve the delivery of services in Scotland. In that regard, the Scottish Government has some pressing questions that it needs to address. I have no reservations in stating my support for a lower welfare, high-pay society. The UK Government's efforts in driving employment to a record high go some way towards a sustainable solution—one that gets people back into the workplace and increases financial independence while at the same time building a system that is available to those in need of support.

In the past, the Scottish Government has taken apparent pleasure in condemning UK Government policies such as the work programme, which incidentally has managed to get more than 43,000 long-term unemployed Scots back into work since 2011, but the Scottish Government now needs to state how it will incentivise work and design a system of social security that discourages welfare dependency.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): The member has asked the Scottish Government to outline its proposals; when will we hear what the Conservative proposals are? Can he begin to outline them for us today?

John Lamont: I think that the Conservative position is very clear. We have always believed that the role of the Government and of society is to give a helping hand to those in need while at the same time ensuring that the system that we put in place through welfare and benefits incentivises, encourages and helps those who want to get back to work to do so. I strongly believe that it should always pay to be in work, and I hope that the Scottish Government shares that aim.

The SNP and Scottish Government ministers have consistently called for a moratorium on all benefit sanctions imposed on those individuals who do not meet the conditions attached to their benefits. The Scottish Parliament will now have not only the responsibility for designing a social security system that works for those in need but a duty to every hard-working Scot to protect the structure of that system from those who may wish to abuse it. Does the Scottish Government therefore intend to enforce sanctions on those individuals who fail to adhere to the standards set?

Alex Neil: Can I make it clear that under the Scotland Bill as it stands, even with the devolved benefits, we will not—unfortunately—have responsibility for the sanctions?

John Lamont: But the Scottish Government will have the possibility of creating new benefits and the possibility of having conditions attached to those benefits. Ministers need to be clear about how any conditions attached to future benefits, for example, would be enforced or how they would impact on claimants.

Furthermore, the devolution of those powers to this Parliament gives us an opportunity to deliver some social security benefits in a way that takes better account of local circumstances. There is scope to use the existing expertise of local government in dealing with the administration of existing payments, along with greater knowledge of local labour markets, to tailor the delivery approach to best suit the needs of local people. Perhaps there is even an opportunity to better align some social security with our health and

social care system—those are certainly options that this Parliament should explore.

The Scottish Government now has an opportunity to outline its plans for social security to the people of Scotland, and the people of Scotland are undoubtedly listening and waiting to hear what the Scottish Government's plans are.

I move amendment S4M-15758.1, to leave out from "the vision" to end and insert:

"that the future delivery of social security policy in Scotland should always encourage the benefits of the workplace, with an emphasis on treating people with dignity and respect, and believes that welfare policy choices should also be made with fairness to Scotland's taxpayers in mind."

16:03

Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP): I open with a quotation from one of the architects of the social security system, Barbara Castle:

"There was no welfare state, and people had to rely mainly on the Poor Law—that was all the state provided. It was very degrading, very humiliating. And there was a means test for receiving poor relief."

I believe that Barbara Castle and her Labour colleagues of that time, as mentioned by Mr Findlay, would be appalled that today, in the 21st century, we are back to situations in which the experience of the unemployed, carers, disabled people and pensioners of our social security system—which was designed by its architects to be their right to protection and a safety net—is regarded by many, to use Barbara Castle's words again, as "degrading" and "very humiliating".

Our experience on the Welfare Reform Committee is that time and again—in formal evidence, at your say sessions and at committee visits, including one to Craigmillar last year—we have heard that those who are in need and vulnerable are left feeling degraded, humiliated and stigmatised by their interaction with the social security system.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights has praised the work of the Welfare Reform Committee. One of the anonymous submissions to the committee stated:

"As I look back at my time as a claimant I cannot help but see with clarity that my dealing with ATOS and the benefits system in many ways contributed to my becoming profoundly sick. The benefits staff were very polite, but they were part of what I would call a punitive, and abusive system."

I am therefore delighted that the Scottish Government has announced that a new benefits agency for Scotland will have dignity and respect at its heart. The new agency will be responsible for the delivery of £2.7 billion of social security

payments in Scotland. That is just the tip of the iceberg—it is only 15 per cent of the overall budget for social security—but it is nonetheless welcome. The Scottish Government will be able to influence the way that we deliver disability living allowance, personal independence payments, carers allowance, funeral payments and cold weather and winter fuel payments.

Significantly, the Scottish Government will also be able to top up or create new benefits. I welcome the announcements that the cabinet secretary has already made. The Scottish Government will raise carers allowance to the same level as jobseekers allowance; abolish rather than mitigate the bedroom tax; and take cognisance of the concerns regarding the delivery of universal credit, and particularly how it might affect vulnerable adults and those with addictions, as well as women who are seeking to leave the predicament of a domestic violence situation. That was highlighted by the Welfare Reform Committee's work in the area.

The condition of multiple sclerosis is known in my family. In a briefing from the MS Society Scotland, Audrey from Inverness is quoted as saying:

"My last assessment for DLA caused me to have an anxiety attack: The assessor wasn't listening to me and his subsequent report was full of inaccuracies."

I say to Audrey from Inverness that I hope that, in future, her experience will be one of dignity, fairness and respect.

16:07

Willie Rennie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights is right that this is a big day. It is one of those historic events, because we are for the first time debating how we will establish a new Scottish welfare system with, as he says, 11 benefits. In those circumstances, it is right that we all come together, just as happened in the days when the first welfare state was established. As Neil Findlay rightly pointed out, there was a cross-party effort, with the Liberals, reformers and socialists coming together to form the new fabric of our society. Although the system is relatively small, this is still a significant moment. We need to get the foundations right, just as Beveridge got them right all those years ago.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's tone—he is adopting the right approach. He involved a large number of stakeholders and held a range of events across the country to engage all the experts in the area to devise a system that is right for Scotland. I do not want to unnerve the cabinet secretary, but I also agree with him on his priorities. It is right to have dignity, respect and

fairness and that we have an accessible system that gains the confidence of the people. It is crucial that people in Scotland have confidence that the system will be there when they need it and are in difficulties. The cabinet secretary was right to say on the radio this morning that we all might need the welfare system at some point or another. I have relied on it in the past, as has my wife, and I am sure that many other members have done so, too.

The way that the cabinet secretary has set the foundations for the debate has been absolutely right. I regret some of the comments at the weekend from other members who are in the chamber, which pandered to the worst fears about the emerging welfare state. There is not going to be any “stampede”. We need to tone down the language so that we can build the proper foundations for the new welfare state.

I also happen to agree with the cabinet secretary on abolishing the bedroom tax—he must be getting deeply worried by now because that is three things I have agreed with him on. We need to get rid of the bedroom tax. I worked with Nicola Sturgeon on getting the UK Government to deliver the flexibility that was necessary to implement the mitigation measures. I have agreed with him on that ever since I met the housing association managers in Fife who were able to tell me point blank that people had given up on paying their rent. That showed that the system had ground to a halt. We need a system that gains the confidence of people.

In Scotland, we should bring carers allowance in line with jobseekers allowance over time. We can also do a lot of work on the work programme.

I was struck by my visits to some drugs rehabilitation projects, particularly one in Kirkcaldy. The people there said that there was a compulsion for certain users of the service to go for work capability assessments when they were not ready. The people in that organisation want the drug users to get back into work because it is the best route out of poverty and the best way to deal with their all-round problems—not only their drug abuse but their housing problems and family problems. We need to put faith in the organisations that work with drug users and others so that they can make the judgment about when it is best for them to go for a work capability assessment. In that way, we can personalise the service around individual needs.

I am pleased that the cabinet secretary is planning to work with Skills Development Scotland, the colleges and charities to develop such a system. It will not be easy but that is the kind of approach that we seek to adopt. Therefore, for the fourth time this afternoon, I agree with Alex Neil.

16:11

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I am glad that, in his speech, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners’ Rights reflected some of the Welfare Reform Committee’s comments, findings and recommendations because it is important that any system reflects the need for dignity, fairness and respect. I do not underestimate the challenges that lie ahead. Mistakes will no doubt be made and not everyone will be happy with every decision that is made but, if we start out with those basic principles and the other five principles that the cabinet secretary mentioned, we start off in the right way.

I have been reflecting that this might be my last speech—or at least one of my last speeches—in the Parliament. In a sense, that is apposite because, just under 37 years ago, just after Margaret Thatcher’s election, I left teaching to become a welfare rights officer and, for 15 years, I worked in many of the poorest communities in the old Strathclyde region dealing with the consequences of unemployment, deprivation and poverty and trying to help people through a complicated welfare and benefits system. One of the things that frustrated me day in and day out was the way that people were treated. They were not treated with dignity and respect, and there was certainly little fairness.

The way that Strathclyde Regional Council and the other regional councils in Scotland approached the matter shows that, in spite of adversity, difficulties and limited budgets—in those days, there were certainly limited budgets and limited powers—many good things can happen if politicians are determined to make them happen.

Not only did Strathclyde Regional Council invest in welfare rights officers to go out and help the disadvantaged but, in the water referendum, for example, it decided to use its powers to the full effect to stop water privatisation. It had a social strategy for the 1980s that concentrated on putting resources into the poorest communities and giving additional education resources to early years, which was groundbreaking at the time, and schools in the poorest areas. It also concentrated on home helps and homemakers who worked with families and helped to get them out of poverty.

In social work, we also had imaginative use of section 10 and section 12 moneys under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, which helped families when the Government benefits system let them down. We also had the courageous decision to use limited powers and budgets to help miners’ families in 1984 during the miners’ strike. I could take much longer, Presiding Officer, but I see that I am running out of time.

What I would draw from that experience—and what the cabinet secretary should draw from it—is that, if we are determined to make a difference, we can do so, despite the obstacles in front of us. We can make a difference for the carers, for families in which women and children are living in poverty, and for the disabled. It just depends on whether we are determined to make that a priority.

It frustrates me that, as I leave this Parliament, I know that, like everyone in this chamber, I have done well over the past eight or nine years but that my poorest constituents have not. If we are going to make a difference in benefits, we have to follow through on the words that I agree with, and show that, by our actions, we will make a difference for those who are disadvantaged in our society.

16:15

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I was pleased when the Parliament accepted an amendment of mine to the Welfare Funds (Scotland) Bill that enshrined dignity and respect in that legislation. I think that that showed the way in which this Parliament is going. I truly believe that dignity, respect and fairness should be at the heart of the new social security system that we shape. I want to see fairness, not fear.

Already today, we have heard from the Conservatives about how they want to incentivise work. Perhaps Mr Lamont can get to his feet and tell us how an 87 per cent cut to the employability fund will help the Scottish Government get people into work. If he wishes, he can stand up and give us his explanation. No? I thought that he would not.

Perhaps Mr Lamont could also tell us what he thinks about the situation that is now faced by many folks who rely on Motability cars to get to their work. The Welfare Reform Committee heard from folks whose cars had been lifelines, getting them to their employment and giving them freedom and independence. However, of late, 13,900 folk in Scotland have lost the higher rate of DLA and their cars. I say to Mr Lamont that that is not helping people get into work.

The stigma that has been caused by the language that the Tory Government has used about people who have had to rely on the social security safety net has led to other major difficulties. The MS Society Scotland has said that, due to public stigma, 33 per cent of folk do not claim the benefits that they are entitled to. That is absolutely shocking, and the Tories have a lot to answer for in that regard. On top of the bureaucracy, the paperwork and the assessments, the climate of fear that has permeated throughout our society is something that the Tories should be completely and utterly ashamed of. I hope that, in

shaping a new system, the Scottish Parliament will get rid of that climate of fear and cut down on the bureaucracy and paperwork and on the constant assessment that some people have to undergo.

We should retain and improve on some parts of the current system. In its briefing, Marie Curie talks about the current system of fast tracking benefit claims for those with a terminal condition. I am sure that the Scottish Government will ensure that that continues. Marie Curie also says that it would be useful if carers allowance for the families of those with terminal conditions could be fast tracked, too, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will consider that—I see that he is nodding his head.

Enable Scotland talked about the difficulty that is involved in filling out the horrendous forms in the current system, and the fact that some folk have to justify every bit of support that their children need in minute detail. I hope that we will look carefully at that and deal with it.

I hope, too, that we will build dignity, respect and fairness into the systems that we create over the coming months and years, and that we can eradicate the climate of fear and bring back the social security safety net that we all may need in our lives.

16:20

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): It is an honour to speak on social security in Scotland. The new powers that the Scottish Parliament now has present a huge opportunity for us to build a fairer Scotland. A new list of historic decisions will be made for the people of Scotland.

However, the complexity of benefits and of the whole area will be challenging. We need to ensure that any changes that we make are fair, suitable and do not have a negative impact on other benefits that people receive. Many recipients of social care contribute to their care costs and there is no point increasing someone's benefits if the increase is all absorbed by increased care costs. The Parliament has not just the chance to change benefits and the ability to create them but the opportunity to make major improvements to the process.

I often have constituents come to my drop-in surgeries who are confused about the social security system and who need support to complete forms. I would like to see major improvements in the claiming and decision-making processes for benefits. I strongly feel that it is important to boost the third sector organisations that provide support and advice to people who are applying for benefits and appealing decisions.

However, the relationship between reserved and devolved benefits will be a challenge. If we get this wrong, we will make things much more confusing for people; it might even lead to hardship. Let us not do that. Let us ensure that no one suffers as a result of the new powers that the Parliament has acquired. We must be user friendly, particularly for those who are less able and those in the minority communities who have historically had difficulties dealing with such issues.

It is all well and good to ask for new powers and to hope to deliver good services, but actually delivering good services is a challenge. I believe that the Scottish Government—whoever is in power—will do its very best for the communities out there. I want those communities to feel secure that the Scottish Government is capable of delivering services of which it can be proud. I just hope that we can live up to the challenge.

My hearty prayers and good wishes go to whoever is in government for the delivery of a sound, secure, safe and appropriate service to the people of Scotland. There is no point asking for more powers if we then fail the people to whom we have made promises. I wish the Government well and hope that we can ensure that no one is less well off after the new powers transfer to us.

16:24

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Social security is a concept that is enshrined in article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

“Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his”—

I would say her—

“dignity and the free development of his”—

or her—

“personality.”

What worries me is the Conservatives’ aim of repealing the Human Rights Act 1998 and the impact that that will have on people’s fundamental rights to social security. The cabinet secretary and many other members have talked about respect and dignity this afternoon. I am a member of the Welfare Reform Committee, and we have been asked about those things over and over again.

I want a system that quite literally takes by the hand a person with a long-term condition such as motor neurone disease or multiple sclerosis, with a terminal illness such as cancer, or with a mental health issue, and tells them, “It’s okay—we care, and we will support you. We will make your last days on this earth as easy as possible.” I want a

system that tells people who have difficulty getting into work or who are facing redundancy, “Don’t worry—we will help you with training and support to find a job.”

We have talked a lot about fairness today. For years, I have heard that that is all that people want. They want a system that gives them the fairness that they are looking for. The evidence that we have received at committee tells us that over and over again. People want a system that is caring and is easy to navigate during the toughest times in their life. We have heard many ideas, and we have had briefings from many organisations such as Marie Curie, MND Scotland and the Multiple Sclerosis Society Scotland, which has published a manifesto entitled “Get Loud for MS”—it should get loud with its manifesto, because we need to know what people need, want and aspire to.

Others have called for a system that fast tracks people who are facing terminal illness. Presiding Officer, you have no idea of what is happening with some of the families that I know—although you have maybe come across those situations yourself—in which people face continual reassessment and form-filling when they have only months left of their life to live. That life should be spent with their family, not filling in forms or going for reassessment and facing down a system that does not care.

We have heard today some of the Scottish Government’s proposals, which include increasing carers allowance to the same level as jobseekers allowance. The South Lanarkshire Carers Network, with which I have been involved for many years now, will be absolutely delighted to see that proposal, because we do not take cognisance of that issue. Another proposal is to abolish the bedroom tax, which we all want to do—well, perhaps not all members, but we on this side of the chamber certainly do, and we look forward to that happening.

The Scottish Government has also proposed the introduction of flexibilities around universal credit, which was most eloquently highlighted by my friend Clare Adamson, who spoke about the challenges that people face in that respect. The Scottish Government also proposes to scrap the 84-day rule, which removes income from families of disabled children when they are in hospital. It is a disgusting state of affairs when families are put under pressure like that because their child has gone into hospital.

It is not acceptable that a person with MND or any other disease is put through assessments and reassessments when they should be spending their last few days with their family. We have heard today a lot of words such as fairness, dignity and respect. If we can contrive to put together a

social security system with those three elements, I believe that we can demonstrate a system that values everyone in our nation.

16:28

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): As other members have said, the Scottish Parliament is to assume important new powers with regard to several aspects of the social security system as a consequence of the Smith agreement. The work that the Government has been undertaking in advance of that change is to be welcomed.

I appreciate that all options must be considered, including the option of having the DWP continue to operate Scotland's system in order that it can be evaluated, even if there is no appetite for it to do the work. I assume that option 5, which is outsourcing by procurement, was included for the same reason; I note that that option did not perform well against the six criteria. I would be very concerned if Scotland's social security system became a vehicle for private sector profit.

Last week we discussed "Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights—Year Two Report". SNAP has argued consistently for the benefits of taking a human rights approach to the commissioning and delivery of services—a point that the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland makes in its briefing for this debate. Much of the work done by SNAP so far has been on changing culture and practice in the delivery of existing services. Setting up a new system is a golden opportunity to embed that human rights approach from the very beginning.

The Health and Social Care Alliance and Enable Scotland both argue that a cultural shift in the delivery of social services can be created. Both organisations stress the need for a person-centred approach to decision making and budgeting that seeks the best outcomes for the individual and their family. Both also consider that this is an opportunity to change the way in which social security is described and discussed—members have mentioned the derogatory terminology that is used around benefits and welfare. I hope that a more positive attitude towards disability, for example, can be encouraged, and that as the process continues it will be inclusive and responsive to the concerns of the people who will be involved in the system.

I turn to the Labour amendment. I think that the majority of members recognise that addressing the inequalities that affect childhood are key to creating not only a fairer society but a more prosperous country, the economy of which will be supported by a highly trained and skilled workforce. Although we may all agree on that, there are shocking statistics on the extent of child

poverty and inequality in Scotland today. More than one in five children live in poverty, and at age five, the most disadvantaged children are 13 months behind the average in terms of development. Indeed, there is evidence of inequality of opportunity starting before birth. That is why we argue that addressing child poverty should be top priority, and devolved social security powers are one tool that we will have in the future. However, we need to be honest about revenue. Addressing such deep-rooted inequality will cost money. This Parliament will need to raise the revenue to effect these changes and we should not run away from saying so or from discussing the best ways of doing that.

The Tory amendment is intriguing, in a sense—I am being polite—in that it speaks of the "benefits of the workplace" and of

"treating people with dignity and respect".

The latter cannot be said for the welfare reforms that the UK Government has brought in, under the direction of Iain Duncan Smith. As for the "benefits of the workplace", the current UK Government has done its utmost to reduce in-work benefits. As someone who supports the UK remaining in the European Union, I can only hope that Mr Duncan Smith brings the same success to the leave campaign that he has brought to the welfare reform programme.

This Parliament will begin to gain substantial new powers from the time that the new parliamentary session is convened, and it will gain them increasingly over the course of the session. I agree with the cabinet secretary that we should work together to ensure a smooth transition, but the exercise of the new powers by the next Government, whoever forms it, must be robustly scrutinised by the Parliament, and its success must be assessed in terms of outcomes, not assertions.

16:32

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I offer some respect to Hugh Henry. If that was his valedictory address to us, there is no better subject that he could have been speaking about. He is not someone with whom I have agreed on every detail, but I absolutely share his commitment, which I acknowledge, to trying to make the lives of people in Scotland better—even if sometimes we differ on the methods of doing that. By saying that, I think that I have addressed dignity, fairness and respect, on which the cabinet secretary quite properly anchored the debate.

Sir William Beveridge's report underpinned much of what we are engaging with today. Social security has evolved a lot since the Beveridge report was started in 1941 with a survey, but

nonetheless the approach that was taken then is one with which we live today.

Perhaps an important question to think about is: what is the society of which we are a part and what is the society of which we wish to be a part in the future? We would all accept that we can all contribute to society. However, I am not certain that the Conservatives would agree with my assertion that we do not have to be a worker to contribute to society. The Conservative amendment anchors social security and support on being in employment. Lots of people contribute to society without being in employment, or without being able or willing to be in employment. We must separate the needs of people in our society from their ability to be part of our society financially. Many people simply cannot be that, and I fundamentally disagree with Conservative colleagues.

Quite a lot of the debate has been about mechanical issues. Inevitably, the cabinet secretary talked a great deal about how we will do this. In his budget for his proposed system, Beveridge interestingly capped the administration costs at 5 per cent. That is a pretty good starting place that the cabinet secretary could perhaps think about. In the modern, efficient world, with good-quality computer systems, we might do rather better.

It is also worth thinking that smaller uplifts in how much we expend could perhaps have bigger impacts than we think. Beveridge's system increased expenditure on social services by only 50 per cent. One would have thought for the radical transformation that it effected that it would have been much more than that. More fundamental, the changes refocused what we were doing. The system that had preceded it for the previous 30 years came, of course, from Lloyd George, who introduced the Old Age Pension Act 1908. The House of Lords had vigorously opposed the bill and, in 1911, its sails were trimmed, so that its powers to block legislation were reduced.

I fear that we are back in the position of the House of Lords having undue influence over public policy—the Tories plan to add members to it to that end—but we will see. The bottom line is that we must focus on people.

The original system was the Chelsea pensioner system, which was introduced in 1689 by King William and Queen Mary. My great-great-grandfather was a Chelsea pensioner from 1818 because he was an army pensioner.

Today, we are in a different position. We must ensure that we are able to afford what we do, but we must focus—first, middle and bottom—on the people whom we are trying to support. I am sure that we will do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): We move to closing speeches. I call Alex Johnstone, who has up to four minutes.

16:36

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): At the beginning of the debate, Alex Neil said that this was an historic day. I agree. These are indeed exciting times as we move forward and take advantage of the powers that will be given to us by the new Scotland Bill.

I must contrast my experience on the bill's tax provisions and those on welfare. I found the tax provisions simple and easy to understand. As a result, they have not been a particular source of discussion during the process. On the other hand, the welfare provisions were complex and difficult to understand. Although I would give them the benefit of the doubt and say that we did not understand them correctly initially, it has been necessary for substantial amendments to be made to them.

In the spirit of co-operation that we have had—most of the way—throughout the debate, I would like to take credit to some extent for having not accepted the welfare proposals as they originally appeared and contributing, I hope, to the improvement that we have experienced.

However, there are ways in which we will differ from others in the debate. Perhaps that is easiest to point out if I contrast my views with those that were expressed by Stewart Stevenson just a moment ago. I believe that work is an extremely important factor in encouraging people to participate in life and in society.

Kevin Stewart: Will Mr Johnstone give way?

Alex Johnstone: No, thank you.

As a result, I have no qualms about suggesting that social security should be tied, wherever necessary, to encouraging and supporting people back into work.

I also believe there to be no issue with conditionality being attached to the payments that we make. It is often said in debate here that, somehow, conditionality is inappropriate. Those who pay their hard-earned contributions to the schemes that we are going to develop will expect some form of conditionality in the system.

Turning to the minister's remarks, I could not agree more with his first point. It is essential that we get a smooth and safe transition; there should be no gaps between one provision and the next, because we cannot allow that to happen to those who are dependent on the support.

The minister perhaps failed to raise another issue that I would put in the same area: the cost of

providing services. Those of us who looked closely at the evolution of the Scottish welfare fund realised at its outset that the cost was too high a proportion of the total amount of money that was to be made available. That was perhaps due to it being the first scheme of its kind and the fact that a lot of the administration had to be set up from the bottom up by local authorities. Nevertheless, if the minister goes forward, as he said he would do, with his new social security agency for Scotland, we should all be concerned to ensure that the cost of running it does not take money out of the hands of those who need it.

There has been criticism of the work capability assessment. I understand why people are critical, but I worry that the alternative to such an assessment is some form of self-referral, which would be unacceptable. The challenge for all members of this Parliament is to find an alternative approach that does what is necessary without making the mistake of leaving a gap.

On a number of occasions the minister has given the impression, as members of his party often do, that a huge amount of extra funding will be available for new schemes. The truth is that extra funding is not the subject of any commitment that this Government has yet made.

The minister is right to say that dignity, respect and fairness must be the basis of the system that we create. We must also assure Scotland's taxpayers that when their money is taken for that purpose it will be used efficiently and effectively, and that we will work as least as hard on the creation of wealth as we do on its distribution.

16:41

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party. Social security has been a bit of a focus of mine while I have been in the Parliament, and I want to thank members of the Welfare Reform Committee—past and present—as well as the clerks to the committee, spokespeople and ministers and their predecessors.

An issue in which I was involved early on was the Parliament's approach to the imposition of the bedroom tax on our communities. I was grateful to the many policy experts and campaigners who came to the committee to discuss the range of options. Willie Rennie was absolutely right to talk about the involvement of such people in the next stage of developing a social security system in Scotland. There is a huge amount of expertise outside the Parliament.

A key point that the cabinet secretary made was that as new powers come to this Parliament we can move on from simply mitigating the effect of

the bedroom tax to abolishing it altogether. I very much welcome the cabinet secretary's comments; he will have our full support on that.

The responsibility on members of the Scottish Parliament in future will be to design and implement a new and distinctive social security system in Scotland, in many areas in which the focus, in the past, has been on complaints about decisions and systems that were made and designed elsewhere.

I was struck by a comment that Bill Scott, of Inclusion Scotland, made last year. He said that the system should stop treating claimants as suspected criminals. Many members will have seen reports at the weekend that some 85 per cent of the fraud allegations that members of the public have made, which have been eagerly solicited by the UK Government, have proven to be entirely unwarranted.

Alex Neil was right to say that social security should be regarded not as a system of handouts but as a basis for addressing need in our society. We should all be clear that we have a stake in a system of social security. We have a responsibility to pay in when we can; we also have a right to receive support when we need it. Christina McKelvie was right to put social security in a rights context. The system must take account of our circumstances and the varying ability that we all have at different times in our lives, given the particular barriers to employment—ill health, old age, disability and so on—that people face.

John Lamont made the fair point that the social security system interacts with many powers that this Parliament has, such as powers to do with housing, education and job creation—the list could go on. Devolution of new powers therefore cannot be seen in isolation from other areas of policy, and the Labour Party argues that it cannot be seen in isolation from the financial powers that are coming to the Scottish Parliament.

Social security is becoming a shared competence. We will share common standards across the UK, and we will gain flexibility to adjust the system in a range of areas, to suit need and reflect the policy choices that are made in this Parliament. The challenge for the next parliamentary session will be to make the new system work in a way that improves the lives of the people on whose behalf this Parliament has been vocal in complaining in the past.

Many of the issues will be tested during the upcoming election campaign. I wish members who are standing as candidates well. I hope that they will give priority to this agenda and be honest about the choices that we face as a society in the context of the benefits system—Dr Murray talked about that. She also talked about the options

appraisal for the governance of the new system, which the Government has kindly published, and we endorse the view that social security should be a public function accountable to Scottish ministers and to this Parliament. We cannot outsource our responsibility and ambition for a fairer Scotland to a department or agency that is accountable elsewhere. Neither, given our experience of private sector delivery, would it be appropriate for a new system to be contracted out to those who might seek to make profit from the poor circumstances of many of our citizens.

The focus of the Labour amendment has been on child poverty. In addition, we have agreements with the Scottish Government about raising support for carers and abolishing the bedroom tax, which we have already mentioned, but we want a Scotland where the wealth of their parents is not the defining feature in the life chances of our youngest citizens. That is why we have indicated another area in which we will seek to use the new powers by increasing the sure start maternity grant—a payment introduced by the previous Labour Government and which we remain committed to using to assist low-income parents expecting their first child.

I mentioned my hope that candidates in the election will be honest about the choices available to us. Hanzala Malik was right to say that there is a risk that the devolution of significant social security powers could create an expectation that Scotland's politicians fail to deliver upon. It is therefore vital that all parties are honest, both about where our priorities lie and about whether we are prepared to pay for our priorities and for a fairer Scotland. Labour is committed to using not just the welfare powers that we have argued for but the financial powers that we support for this Parliament. Since 1999, parties have had the ability to propose raising revenue, but with enhancement to the devolution settlement those powers become more and more flexible.

Hugh Henry made the outstanding contribution of the afternoon. He was right to say that the choice has now become whether or not to make change or only to complain about what we do not like. The Scottish Labour Party chooses change. We choose to make Scotland fairer by action, not just words, and we are proud to do so. I therefore support the amendment in the name of my colleague Neil Findlay, and I encourage other members to do likewise at decision time.

16:47

Alex Neil: As a fellow member of the 1999 intake, I pay tribute to Hugh Henry, who has served in this Parliament for the past 17 years as a minister, as a back bencher and as the convener of a committee. During that time, he has made a

distinguished contribution to the Parliament and we thank him for that. I also wish Drew Smith all the best, given that he is standing down after five years. I am sure that he is young enough—as Hugh Henry is—to come back at some future date.

I begin by underlining the commitment that I have given—with a nod to Kevin Stewart—about fast tracking benefits for people who are terminally ill. In any humane society, we would all want such an undertaking to be given, to ensure that anyone who is suffering from a terminal illness is fast tracked for assessment and payment.

That is a good example of many of the improvements that we can make to the social security system that do not cost a great deal of extra money. For example, I have announced that we will use flexibility to offer people the opportunity to have universal credit payments made fortnightly instead of monthly, because sometimes monthly means five-weekly. For many people, it is difficult to budget on a monthly or five-weekly basis with the meagre income that they have. There is little additional cost to the system in offering those people the choice of being paid twice a month—if they so wish—instead of just once a month.

Similarly, every stakeholder, including tenants organisations, has asked us to revert to the older system of housing benefit, under which the benefit is paid directly to social landlords and not to tenants. Under that system, 96 per cent of people wanted and had their housing benefit paid directly to the landlord, and tenants want to go back to that system. Of course, every tenant reserves the right to change that if they so wish, but every stakeholder believes that that system would be an improvement. That would not cost much money at all to implement and we are committed to that.

I will mention a couple of other areas that we are looking at. For example, if we were able to time winter fuel payments to help people who are off grid, that would materially improve their situation, and only an administration cost would be involved. Similarly, I believe that there should be much more co-location of those who dispense benefits and make decisions about individuals in relation to benefit applications and those who provide welfare rights services. That would mean that people could check almost right away whether they had been allocated the right level of benefit—they could get their award double checked to make sure that that had happened. That would help enormously by taking a lot of frustration out of the system. If that were possible, it would cost very little to do.

I turn to other issues that were raised. John Lamont mentioned IT systems. He might be glad to know that, for benefits that rely on major IT systems, in the initial period we will continue to use the DWP's IT systems. We have decided to

do that out of necessity because, if we were to invent our own IT system, it would delay the acquisition of the powers by some years. That is a worthwhile trade-off, even though we will have to pay the DWP for the pleasure of using its systems. In the interests of ensuring a smooth transition, it makes sense to continue to use those systems—which were undoubtedly designed by a Scotsman anyway—until we are in a position to have our own IT system.

I think that Willie Rennie mentioned the benefits of the work programme. We share his thoughts on the matter. Unfortunately, since the decision was taken to include in the Scotland Bill the devolution of the work programme to the Scottish Parliament, the budget that is allocated to the programme at UK level has been reduced from nearly £1 billion to just under £100 million. That means that although, when it was announced that the work programme would be devolved, we expected to inherit a budget of nearly £100 million, the budget that we will inherit will be more like £13 million.

Neil Findlay: While Mr Neil is on the subject, would he care to comment on today's revelations in the online journal *The Ferret* about the links between his party and the private welfare-to-work lobby, which is involved in developing discussions with the Scottish Government on the way forward for the work programme?

Alex Neil: I am totally unaware of any such connection. I am sure that I speak on behalf of the Minister for Housing and Welfare when I say that neither of us has any such links. I have not even heard of such an organisation. I have not read *The Ferret*, but I have no doubt that the relevant article will be in my box tonight, so that I can find out what *The Ferret* is saying. Maybe *The Ferret* has got it wrong—not for the first time, I am sure.

It is a tragedy that the budget for the work programme has been reduced so significantly, for the very reasons that Willie Rennie outlined. The measure can make a major contribution, not just in solving problems of social security and poverty but in getting people with particular addictions, such as addictions to drink and drugs, back into a more mainstream way of life. I hope that, at some stage, the UK Government will reconsider that decision.

I move on to cost. In my opening speech, I said that it was our objective to reduce bureaucracy such as form filling and all the other things that cost money. I mentioned the assessment process as a good example of an area in which we can improve the service for the individual and enhance their dignity and the respect with which they are treated. Streamlining the assessment process for the benefits in question and integrating it with the assessment process that local authorities follow would be financially beneficial. A lot of the assessments that are undertaken for self-directed

support are also undertaken for qualification for PIPs. If we had an independent medical assessment service that provided such a service to everyone, individuals would not have to repeatedly go through the same medical assessments for different benefits, whether they were provided by the local authority or the social security agency.

That is just one example of how significant amounts of money that are currently spent on administration could be saved and repetition could be reduced. That would benefit individuals, who would not have to go to so many assessments. The money that was saved could be reinvested in the system to further improve our delivery of benefits, as well as the benefits themselves.

We require such an imaginative and innovative approach. I am keen that the administration of the benefits system is as close as possible to the people who are affected. Although we will have a national agency, local delivery is an essential principle for success, efficiency and effectiveness.

In all those areas, I am delighted that there is fairly broad consensus in the Parliament. We should build on that consensus and build a new social security system of which we can all be proud.

Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S1M-15759, in the name of Sandra White, on the Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill.

16:56

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): It is a great pleasure for me and many others to bring the bill before Parliament. As some members will know, the bill started out as a proposal by former MSP Ross Finnie, back in 2010. At that time, the consultation received 120 responses, of which 83 per cent supported the proposals. Unfortunately, the bill fell due to the parliamentary election in 2011. However, it was then taken up in 2012 by Joe FitzPatrick MSP. Fortunately—or unfortunately, depending on one's point of view—Joe FitzPatrick had to withdraw the proposal upon becoming a minister in the current Scottish Government. I see that he has just come into the chamber.

It is worth noting that the second consultation received 414 responses, with 95 per cent in favour of the proposed bill. That highlights the fact that the bill is very important. That is one of the biggest responses to a member's bill that we have had.

After the bill fell in 2012, I took up the baton—the race has been more a marathon than a sprint—and I am proud to have stuck with the proposal to take it forward to this point. I hope that the principles of the bill will be agreed to today.

I thank the many individuals and groups who took part in the consultations and who continue to take a keen interest in what is going on. I also thank the members of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee for their hard work, dedication and support in scrutinising the bill. The committee reached the following conclusion:

"We report to the Parliament that we are content with the general principles of the Bill and recommend the Bill be agreed to at stage 1."

I must point out that Cameron Buchanan in particular did a sterling job when he appeared in the committee's YouTube video, calling for people to make their voices heard. I understand that the video has become quite a hit on YouTube. People should look it up.

I also thank the members of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee for their scrutiny of the bill and for their conclusion that that committee is content with the delegated powers provisions in the bill.

I would also like to pay particular thanks to Living Streets, Guide Dogs Scotland and the coalition of charities that supported the bill and dedicated a lot of time and resources to help in its drafting.

In essence, the bill seeks to restrict the obstruction of footways and dropped kerbs by parked vehicles, and the double parking of vehicles on carriageways and all public roads in built-up areas. A number of exceptions are set out in the bill and, in addition, local authorities would be able to exempt areas from the bill's provisions. The bill also seeks to prohibit vehicles from waiting while obstructing a footway or dropped kerb or when double parked, except in a limited number of circumstances.

For many users of footways, obstructive parking is a very real issue that can have a hugely detrimental effect on their daily lives. An excerpt from the submission to the committee by Guide Dogs Scotland sums up the issue perfectly. It says:

"In a Guide Dogs 'Streets Ahead Survey' ... Pavement parking was the top obstacle cited by all respondents (81.7%) rising to 88% for blind and partially sighted people, who listed it as a problem which they regularly encountered.

Parking on pavements affects all people who use the streets. It is particularly problematic and dangerous not solely for sight impaired, also for older people, people with pushchairs and walking toddlers, wheelchair users, mobility scooters, and other people with mobility and cognitive impairments. Pavement parking forces all these people to walk into the road amongst moving traffic."

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I apologise because I will have to leave for a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, but I want to congratulate Sandra White on her perseverance with the bill. From the many representations that I have received from constituents, I know that it is one of the most eagerly awaited members' bills that I have ever come across.

Sandra White: I thank Malcolm Chisholm for his intervention. I was going to mention him later in my speech, because he and Mark Lazarowicz, both of whom are from Edinburgh, have been very supportive. I also thank him for signing the motion, as requested. As Malcolm Chisholm said, the bill was "eagerly awaited", and everyone has constantly said that it is one of the best bills that we could possibly put through the Parliament.

Another issue that a lot of people do not seem to think about is that pavement parking costs local authorities lots of money in maintenance. The cost is not only for surfaces; when pavements are broken and hazardous people can trip over them, which can give rise to compensation claims. There is also the breakdown of underground pipes and

cables. People do not tend to think about that, but it is a really important issue. The City of Edinburgh Council made those observations in its submission on the bill. It stated:

“The Council supports the introduction of a blanket ban on both footway and double parking with the option to indicate where footway parking is permitted. This approach will help us build upon the successes of our current Active Travel Action Plan and allow our draft Parking Action Plan to address these issues effectively.”

I thank the City of Edinburgh Council and other councils for their contributions.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland believes that

“A more effective and enforceable legal framework for addressing obstructive and inconsiderate parking could assist local authorities and councils in meeting the requirements of the”

public sector equality duty,

“particularly as the 2010 Act makes clear that due regard involves the need to ‘remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic’”.

In other words, we must put forward provisions for the Equality Act 2010.

The bill’s provisions could also help to give effect to the United Kingdom’s obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In particular, article 9, on accessibility, states:

“To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States ... shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment”.

The convention makes it clear that that measure should

“include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility”.

One aspect that has been open to interpretation is legislative competence and whether the Scottish Parliament has responsibility for legislating in this area. That led to lengthy discussions with the Scottish Parliament’s non-Government bills unit, which took the view that the Scottish Parliament did not have competence, so the NGBU would not, as a result, provide support in drafting the bill. However, there was continued dialogue and work between the Scottish Government and its officers and Westminster.

I also have to mention Mr Chisholm and Mark Lazarowicz, who is a former Edinburgh MP. They worked with me and others to attempt to resolve that impasse. The Minister for Transport and Islands, Derek Mackay, and his officials got the amendments to the Scotland Bill through in order to remove any doubts about competence. Those amendments were brought to the House of Lords

at its latest reading of the Scotland Bill and agreed on. We should all be thankful for and proud of that. Once again, I thank the Scottish Government—in particular, the minister—for support in moving the bill forward and, of course, I thank the minister’s officials for all the work that they have carried out. The officials in particular never seem to get the credit for that, so I thank them very much for it.

With the support that I have outlined, any perceived obstacles to implementation of the bill now seem to be resolved. That is what this Parliament is all about; it is a Parliament that serves the people and it is a Parliament for the people. What better way is there to serve the people than to remove obstacles that prevent people from going out their door and on to the pavement, whether they have a pushchair, or they are blind or have another disability? People should have the freedom of movement that members in the chamber and people outwith it take for granted, even if it is just to go to the shops or the park, or to take their kid out in a pushchair. It will be a great moment for the Parliament if it decides to support the general principles of the bill. I thank members and look forward to hearing their speeches.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Kevin Stewart to speak on behalf of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. You have up to seven minutes.

17:05

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): As Sandra White outlined, many members have tried to introduce a bill such as the one that we are debating. I congratulate her on her tenacity.

The Local Government and Regeneration Committee welcomed the opportunity to consider the Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. Members of Parliament, especially those of us who represent urban areas, are all too aware of the problems that are caused by irresponsible parking—double parking, parking across dropped-kerb crossing points and pavement parking. Those issues are raised with us far too regularly. As a constituency member, I have received various complaints about them over the years.

If our inboxes and mailbags were not enough to convince us that the issue is of real concern to a great many people, the response to our call for evidence most certainly was. We received 63 written submissions, about half of which were from members of the public, and nearly 4,000 people completed our online questionnaire. We also

received nearly 500 comments on Facebook. The fact that many of the responses were not from people with disabilities shows that the issue is of significant concern at street level in many communities.

I also thank organisations such as Guide Dogs Scotland and Living Streets Scotland for their contributions, which were helpful during our consideration of the bill.

In our consideration, we heard from a lot of folk, as I said, including Police Scotland and some local authorities, which are responsible for enforcing parking restrictions. They said that existing legislative provision in the area is complex and confusing, and that the bill addresses the absence of clear rules. Based on the evidence that we took, we agreed that the bill seems to be a sound basis for strengthening the law in the area. We felt that the fact that irresponsible parking is such a problem in some communities demonstrates that the existing legislative provision is not working.

On the detail of the bill, we highlighted a few concerns that were raised with us. First, the scope of the definition of

“public roads in built-up areas in Scotland”

seems to exclude A and B roads. We felt that irresponsible parking is also a problem on some A and B roads and we recommend that the bill apply to them, as well.

Secondly, we were confused by the exception that would allow parking next to a dropped kerb outside residential premises with the occupier’s permission. We felt that the bill needs to be clearer about whether that relates to a dropped kerb at the end of a private driveway. If it permits parking over a dropped kerb at a road crossing, that seems to be against the principle of the bill. We also considered that it would be impossible to enforce.

Thirdly, the Road Haulage Association raised concerns about the 20-minute window to allow parking next to a dropped kerb or double parking to make a delivery. However, we felt that 20 minutes would be sufficient for most deliveries and that deliveries that would take longer could be anticipated and more time scheduled to allow the driver to find an alternative more appropriate parking space.

Particular concerns were raised about implementation of the bill—especially about the power for local authorities to establish exempt areas, and enforcement by Police Scotland or local authorities. Local authorities felt that the process of establishing exempt areas and the legal requirements to signpost them effectively would cost much more than Sandra White suggests. There were also concerns that the bill

could not be enforced effectively within existing resources.

We sought particular assurances that the bill would address the lack of consistency in how parking issues are dealt with across Scotland. We were, therefore, disappointed that Police Scotland and local authorities felt that the bill would do little to create a consistent approach across the country, and we noted the minister’s comment that further work would be required to address the issue. In highlighting those points, however, we note the Scottish Government’s commitment to supporting a similar bill in the next parliamentary session, and the minister’s assurances that some aspects of the policy will be given further consideration.

We hope that local authorities will strike the right balance between keeping footways accessible and ensuring that there are sufficient parking opportunities in built-up areas. The bill should not just displace the problem from one urban area to another.

The committee is pleased to have played a part in highlighting the bill’s aims and, perhaps, in encouraging the Scottish and UK Governments to resolve the issue of legislative competence, so I welcome the inclusion of the relevant powers in the Scotland Bill.

I will finish by congratulating the member in charge on her tenacity and indomitable pursuance of the issue, and by welcoming the Scottish Government’s commitment to supporting a bill in the next parliamentary session, when the relevant powers have been devolved.

The Local Government and Regeneration Committee supports the general principles of the Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill.

17:12

The Minister for Transport and Islands (Derek Mackay): Before I give my opening speech to Parliament, I thank Sandra White for her opening speech and the commendable work that she has put into developing the Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill in a complex subject area that we all acknowledge is challenging.

Kevin Stewart is right to say that it was Sandra White’s tenacious approach that has led to the bill coming this far and to a Government commitment to continue it into the next parliamentary session. Indeed, any incoming Government will now recognise that there is a great deal of consensus in Parliament on the issue and will want to take it forward.

Parking is an important issue for many people and is subject to a variety of acts and regulations. The bill aims to introduce clear prohibitions, while allowing for various qualifications and exceptions. Those aims align with our key strategic transport policy of improving the quality, accessibility and affordability of transport. The Government is committed to promoting, supporting and advancing the rights of non-motorised users to ensure that our roads and footpaths are accessible for all.

As part of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee's stage 1 inquiry, it received almost 4,000 responses to an online questionnaire and 63 submissions to its written evidence stage, all of which highlights just how much people are concerned about obstructive and irresponsible parking. Enter Cameron Buchanan, YouTube star—who knew?

The committee concluded in its stage 1 report that it is content with the general principles of the member's bill, and I share that view. Having said that, I acknowledge that a number of issues still require to be worked through, particularly the issue of this Parliament's powers to legislate on the matter.

After the bill's introduction, the Presiding Officer issued a statement stating that, in her view, the bill is outwith the current legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament. That statement has raised doubt about whether any act that flows from the bill will be fully within the legislative competence of the Parliament.

While there may be differing legal views on whether Parliament could legislate competently in this area, as the legislation may give rise to financial penalties and potential criminality it is absolutely essential that all doubt is removed. That is why the Scottish and UK Governments have agreed the general approach to the amendment of the Scotland Bill that seeks to address the legislative competence issues raised by the Presiding Officer.

The principal amendment was laid on 24 February and we are working with the UK Government on further minor and technical amendments to deliver the appropriate competence to the Scottish Parliament. As has been said before, it is not our preference to have legislation made in the House of Lords in relation to Scotland, but it is welcome that we have made this progress. However, any agreed amendments will not be in force before this Parliament is dissolved.

In addition to the legislative competence issues, the committee heard evidence from local authorities, Police Scotland and businesses, which have stressed the need for more detailed consideration on the implementation and

enforcement of the bill's provisions. I also acknowledge the committee's concerns about the challenges facing many local authorities in managing Scotland's roads to ensure that they work effectively for pedestrians and cyclists as well as motorists and businesses.

Sandra White acknowledged those concerns and the fact that the bill as drafted does not cover all roads in Scotland. We have to look at the challenging priorities in relation to the residential nature of many of our streets around town centres and not shunt the problem to another area, as has been described. That is why a careful consultation and fuller consideration will be required on some of the traffic management and planning issues.

Kevin Stewart: I speak now as a constituency MSP rather than as the convener of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. Can the minister give us an assurance that, when future legislation is formulated, A and B roads will be looked at? I know that there are not many trunk roads where parking is allowed, but there certainly are in Aberdeen and there are many problems in my own constituency and in that of Mark McDonald.

Derek Mackay: That is a fair point, and in taking forward the legislation the Government will have to consider all the issues around enforceability, decriminalised parking, where local authorities are at on the issue and the workability of it all.

We need to resolve the issues that were raised during and indeed after the committee's consideration of the bill, including getting the right balance between residential need and accessibility, town centre planning principles around regeneration, economic opportunity and so on. However, we need to do that keeping in mind the key principle of tackling irresponsible and inconsiderate parking, which is—pardon the pun—the driving force behind the bill.

It is for that reason that I can make a commitment that this Government, if re-elected, intends to introduce suitable legislation in the next parliamentary session. We would begin with further consultation on all those matters to ensure that we get it right and to ensure fairness in our active travel priorities and accessibility agenda.

We must ensure that any new legislation strikes the right balance and is fully workable so that it can deliver on the principles and the key objectives that successive Parliaments have now tried to deliver.

Although it may not be possible, for the reasons given, to legislate before this parliamentary session concludes, the fact that there seems to be so much consensus shows that we should take the issue forward. That is why this Government is committed to introducing legislation to address the

issues that have been raised by so many constituents and by members from across the political spectrum, not least by Sandra White, who got the bill this far, leading to a Government commitment.

17:18

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I, too, thank Sandra White for introducing her Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill and for her work on highlighting the problem of inconsiderate parking. It is an issue that the Parliament has been debating for some time now, and I am pleased that Sandra White has been able to pick up on the work of her predecessors—our former parliamentary colleague Ross Finnie MSP and her ministerial colleague, Joe FitzPatrick.

It is quite clear that parking on the pavement and across dropped kerbs is irksome and inconvenient to many pedestrians but it is potentially dangerous to others, including cyclists, blind or partially sighted people, children in prams and anyone using a wheelchair. Even for the nimble footed and traffic aware, being forced off the pavement on to the road increases the risk of being hit by a car or lorry but, for many more people, the kerb itself is a barrier. Badly parked cars can turn a simple journey into an obstacle course.

To my mind, the bill is about trying to change behaviour. It is about encouraging us all to be a little less selfish and a little more thoughtful when behind the wheel of a car, but it is also about rebalancing our relationship as a society with cars generally. Motor transport is vital to us economically, but we should recognise that it is also often simply about our personal convenience and that that needs to be weighed against safety, our environment and quality of life.

In recent years, we have seen a move to lower speed limits in built-up areas, the introduction of car-free home zones and an attempt to make cars more pedestrian friendly, if I can use that term to describe the removal of sharp edges and prominent insignia from the front bonnet. The safe routes to school initiative from the early years of the Parliament was another helpful move in the right direction, but for those of us who often do the school run, although things might have improved, it is unfortunately still not unusual to see double parking and pavement parking on the very pavements that prams and young kids are trying to negotiate on their way to school.

Before we all get too self-righteous or sanctimonious, I would ask how many drivers here have not at one stage or another parked on a pavement. I am sure that we all justified it at the time, because it was what everyone else in a

narrow street was doing or it was only for a minute or two. My point is that we all have the potential to behave one way as a pedestrian and another as a driver and there is a spectrum of selfishness or inconsiderate behaviour that we are all on and which we all need to address. I believe that the bill is not about punishing drivers; it is about addressing and changing that behaviour.

I turn to the proposed legislation. Although there is broad agreement about the general approach in the bill, there are also a number of concerns. I thank the Local Government and Regeneration Committee for flagging them up in its helpful consideration at stage 1. For example, it appears that, although the police and local authorities already have powers to tackle the problem of nuisance parking, several different laws can apply, depending on the circumstances. Furthermore, enforcement of those laws varies widely across the country. In many council areas, including my authority of East Renfrewshire, parking enforcement has been decriminalised, so parking regulations are now the responsibility of local parking attendants rather than the police. I share the committee's view that it might be helpful to take a more consistent approach and that a bill to clarify and consolidate the legislation would help to make it clearer to drivers exactly what is and is not acceptable in the way of parking.

Sticking with my local authority for a moment, the recent decriminalisation of parking has not been without its problems. Residents and shopkeepers have been up in arms about overvigorous ticketing, particularly outside local shops. Parking restrictions that had not been enforced for decades were suddenly zealously implemented, provoking a pretty strong reaction from those on the receiving end.

Local people have now been consulted on what parking restrictions would be appropriate. I will not pretend that every concern has been addressed, but the approach has at least begun to reflect parking need and local usage. My point is that, in introducing any new measures or powers over parking, it is better to take people with us. That emerged strongly from the evidence on the bill. I thoroughly endorse the committee's recommendation that any enforcement is

"accompanied by consultation and dialogue with local communities".

The Presiding Officer has made it clear that she does not believe that the proposed legislation is within the competence of the Parliament. That is not an insurmountable problem. My former Westminster colleague Mark Lazarowicz introduced the Responsible Parking (Scotland) Bill with exactly the aim of devolving the powers in mind. Unfortunately, like the previous members' bills on the issue, that proposal fell on dissolution.

However, it is my understanding, which has been confirmed by the minister and Sandra White, that Scottish ministers and the UK Government are working together to devolve the necessary powers. That might not happen before the end of this session of the Parliament in three weeks but, by agreeing to the general principles of the bill today, we will clear the way for the introduction of a Government bill in the immediate future.

I hope that Sandra White and supporters of the bill take consolation from the fact that, by simply taking the bill to stage 1, they have helped to raise awareness of the problem of inconsiderate parking. Just by debating the issue, they have already tried to change the problem. I am happy to show Labour's support for the general principles of the bill.

17:24

Cameron Buchanan (Lothian) (Con): I thank Sandra White for her flattering remarks. The saying, "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts," comes to mind—maybe we should beware of Sandra White.

The Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill seeks to address a problem that we would all like to be resolved. As members have mentioned, inconsiderate parking can be not only a nuisance but a serious impediment to pedestrians, who may have difficulties dealing with unexpected obstacles. I am glad that we can all agree on the need to tackle that behaviour, but we must find a solution that is proportionate as well as effective.

I will be pleased if the issue is settled in the next session of Parliament, as that will allow the time to scrutinise the proposals in detail and ensure that the public are protected from unintended consequences. The key is to protect vulnerable pedestrians without imposing undue burdens on law enforcement or getting in the way of perfectly reasonable or, indeed, necessary parking.

As someone with mobility difficulties, I speak from personal experience about how difficult it is when a pavement or dropped kerb is blocked and I find myself left with little option but to take a longer route and move around on to the road. To call that an inconvenience is an understatement. For people like me, such a situation can be distressing and even dangerous as they try to negotiate between cars. In addition, parents with pushchairs will, understandably, not want to be forced to go around parked cars and on to dangerous roads between other parked vehicles. That is also a key point.

Furthermore, frequent parking on footways can cause wear and tear that eventually manifests as uneven pavements. Such damage can represent a real danger to pedestrians, especially vulnerable

ones, and is the last thing that local authorities need.

We can all agree that such inconsiderate parking must be tackled, and I am glad that we have this chance to discuss our approach at length. The question that remains is how best to go about it. I have always maintained the position that legislation must be targeted and proportionate if it is to be effective and worth while. That must be applied to the bill. Sadly, the blanket ban that it proposes would fail the test of proportionality. Of course I agree that such inconsiderate parking should not be tolerated, but there are many instances when parking partly on a pavement is the only available option and can be done without obstructing pedestrians' access. Therefore, it would not be sensible to use a blanket measure.

I am sure that members are aware of instances in which parking with two wheels on a pavement has left sufficient room for pedestrians to pass while allowing traffic to flow freely on the road. That is a key point because it would obviously be counterproductive to impose a ban only for it to result in constant road blockages. As long as such parking can be done in a way that allows more than enough room for all pedestrians to pass freely, I do not see the problem with it and certainly do not see the benefit of banning it.

The compromise that I would like to emerge would find a balance between protecting vulnerable pedestrians and allowing harmless pavement parking to continue. For that reason, I am glad we have the chance to return to the issue in the next session of the Parliament should we wish. That would give us the opportunity to advocate a fresh approach that upholds the principle of protecting vulnerable pedestrians while avoiding the unintended consequences of which I spoke.

I can understand the temptation to push through a blanket ban because it is right to say that we should not tolerate forcing vulnerable pedestrians to move around parked cars on pavements or dropped footways. However, we would not be serving the public if we simply imposed a blanket ban and left motorists, as well as law enforcement officers, to clear up the mess. I will pick up on that last point later.

I look forward to listening to the debate.

17:27

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I, too, welcome the bill and congratulate Sandra White on introducing it. I do not thank her so much for telling me how much of an internet sensation Cameron Buchanan has become since his YouTube appearances.

This debate is personal to me because, as most members know, my wife, Stacey, has multiple sclerosis and mobility issues. Unless, like Cameron Buchanan or Stacey, people live with mobility issues, they do not understand the frustration. It was quite funny listening to Mr Buchanan talk about his frustration if there is an obstacle in his way and how polite he is in getting around it. My wife may be many things, but I assure members that, in such situations, polite would not be one of them.

The debate is about people having the decency to allow others to go about their business and get from one end of the town other. I am often reminded of the time when, as a member of Renfrewshire Council, I became the Renfrewshire access panel member for the council—ironically, Derek Mackay appointed me. At the access panel, I heard at first hand the difficulties that people had. They were not just the problems that I knew of; let us not kid ourselves: although they are part of my life, it is Stacey who deals with them daily, not me.

There are 47 access panels throughout Scotland and they know what is best for the people in their areas. They know about mobility difficulties and the problems that people with such difficulties encounter. I would encourage more local authorities and others to work with them to find solutions to those problems. The volunteers involved will be willing to work with them to make a difference.

The umbrella organisation for access panels is the Scottish Disability Equality Forum. The people who are involved in that body have wonderful taste, because they made me its national patron. The forum has mentioned something that Ken Macintosh touched on, which is that the issue is not so much to do with hitting someone with a big stick as it is to do with education. The forum believes that it could educate drivers and help them to understand that the lack of thought that they have for, say, 10 minutes might be what causes someone to miss a doctor's appointment or a hospital appointment or to be unable to do something connected to their business or their work.

I can understand why people get frustrated when faced with such situations. A number of years ago, I attended Renfrewshire access panel's open day, at which people had the opportunity to find out what it is like to be a disabled person, which I, obviously, knew about from Stacey's experience. The then provost, Celia Lawson, accessed the council headquarters, Renfrewshire house, in a wheelchair, to see what it was like, and I used a pair of spectacles that made me visually impaired. The funny thing was that, when I got into Renfrewshire house, I nearly battered my head off one of the television screens because

Renfrewshire Council had not thought that someone with a visual impairment would be 6ft 3in.

The Scottish Disability Equality Forum should be a statutory body in the planning process. We must work with the people who are involved in the forum, because they know the individuals who are involved, they know their areas and they know what they want to do.

We need to encourage the bill and put forward the policy. Doing so would send a message to people in Scotland that we are trying to help them. That is not about having a blunt instrument; it is about ensuring that we can educate drivers and that everybody—because this is a debate about equality—is able exercise their right to get from one end of our communities and towns to the other. That is why I back Sandra White in the debate and wish her all the best. I can see the difference that the policy would make to people's lives.

17:32

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (Ind): I, too, congratulate Sandra White on her tenacity in bringing the issue forward, despite all the obstacles that were put in her way, including the issue of legal competence. I am glad that she decided to persevere with her bill.

I am a member of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, which considered the bill and gathered evidence on it. Some of that evidence was extremely enlightening with regard to the measures that have been put in place by some local authorities to try to address the issue. In particular, South Lanarkshire Council has come up with an innovative plan to tackle on-street parking.

However, as others have said today, on-street parking is a blight—

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): One moment, Mr Wilson. Minister, if you could turn to face the front of the chamber and not turn your back on the chair, that would be extremely courteous.

John Wilson: On-street parking is a blight on many communities throughout Scotland. The issue for those communities is how to deal with people who park on and obstruct pavements. Some of the evidence that we heard from Police Scotland was interesting, as we were told that the police would not take action if a car was parked on a pavement, because they would have to determine who was driving the vehicle at the time that the car was parked. There is an issue about how the legislation that is currently in place is used. If the issue is taken forward in the next session of

Parliament, I hope that the process can be used to clean up the legislative landscape, so that we can get something that is clear and definitive and will enable people to ask for the legislation to be applied.

Although Police Scotland welcomed the bill, it stated in its submission that the enforcement of parking offences would be a low priority that would be conducted either alongside daily business or during bespoke operations to address significant problems. During oral evidence to the committee, the Police Scotland witness stated that it did not anticipate police officers issuing a large number of parking tickets as a result of the bill; instead, it anticipated the power being used to address specific community concerns and during campaigns. That concerns me because we need to be clear about how any legislation that we introduce will be applied. That issue came up during discussions and is contained in the committee's report. The legislation must be seen to be evenly applied where there are issues throughout Scotland.

As we have heard, organisations that gave evidence, such as Guide Dogs Scotland and Living Streets Scotland, identified the problems that many people have. We discussed dropped kerbs. Some local authorities, when they are streetscaping town centres, introduced dropped kerbs for wheelchair users and those who have mobility issues. We need clarity in future legislation about dropped kerbs and whether the enforcement of the dropped kerb provisions is more of a concern where streetscaping has taken place to allow accessibility and free movement through town centres and other areas.

The work that Sandra White and others have done to introduce the bill and get it to this stage shows that there is concern out there that we need to address. I look forward to the next Scottish Government introducing appropriate legislation that we can all get behind on behalf of the Scottish people and those most in need of support. We must ensure that double parking is dealt with and that offenders who continually park on pavements are dealt with appropriately.

The Presiding Officer: I call Cameron Buchanan to wind up. You have four minutes, Mr Buchanan.

17:36

Cameron Buchanan: So soon, Presiding Officer, so soon.

It has been useful to hear colleagues' views on this important issue as we decide how to take it forward. I think that we can all agree on the need to tackle such inconsiderate behaviour. It is only right that we protect vulnerable pedestrians and

ensure that access to public footpaths is not impeded in any way. However, it would be useful to bear in mind the fact that helping pedestrians does not have to involve impeding motorists. After all, it is likely that the majority of drivers are considerate in their parking and share the views expressed today about footway and double parking. With this likely to remain an issue in the next session of Parliament, we should use the chance to redefine our approach so that it becomes one that is proportionate and which is, crucially, targeted only at genuinely inconsiderate and unnecessary parking.

I have touched on situations in which footway parking can be both necessary to allow traffic flow and harmless to pedestrians, as long as—crucially—sufficient room is left to pass. Obviously, it is preferable to avoid such parking where possible, but we must recognise the reality that drivers are frequently left with no other option.

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): Today, I was walking along and found a car impeding the whole pavement. I had no option but to go on to the road. There was no space against the wall—the car took up the whole pavement and I had to walk into on-coming traffic. It took me 10 minutes because I had to wait for assistance—the guide dog refused to go into on-coming traffic.

Cameron Buchanan: I thank the member for that pertinent intervention. I, too, have had similar problems, although perhaps not where a car has taken up the whole pavement. I find it very difficult and, as the member can imagine, I get very nervous when I have to go on to the road to avoid parked cars.

However, we must recognise the unintended consequences of a blanket ban. We would do well to consider the demands that a blanket ban would place on traffic wardens and law enforcement officers. I think that we would agree that traffic wardens and the police have enough on their hands already, and neither they nor the public would welcome a massive increase in their duties. Issuing penalties to motorists who are not impeding pedestrians but still fall foul of a blanket ban would detract from officers' priorities, as well as simply being unfair. Ken Macintosh speculated on that. I emphasise that the potential to extract extra revenue from the public through parking fines is a negative, not a positive, when applied to drivers who have had no choice and do not even impede pedestrians.

The point is that we should use any chance to reform the approach set out by the bill so that we are careful not to impose counterproductive or unfair burdens as a side effect. Of course we need to tackle the scourge of grossly inconsiderate

parking, but let us ensure that we do not create new problems in its place.

Accordingly, I reiterate the Conservatives' support for the principle that vulnerable pedestrians and their use of pavements should not be blocked in any way by inconsiderate parking. It is only right that we ensure fair access to footways and do not tolerate the denial of free access by a careless minority. However, we have a responsibility to ensure that any legislation passed by this Parliament is proportionate, in that it accurately targets the source of the issue. Should we have a chance to look at this issue again, I hope that we use it carefully to craft a solution that protects both vulnerable pedestrians and the majority of motorists, who are considerate parkers.

17:40

Lesley Brennan (North East Scotland) (Lab):

I too congratulate Sandra White on persevering with the important issue of protecting vulnerable pedestrians. The Labour group supports the general principles of the bill.

When members speak to anyone who lives in a built-up area about motor vehicles parking on pavements, they will find that most folk have an opinion or an experience. I remember that, when my boys were small—I had twins when my eldest was two and a half—I often had to navigate cars that were parked half on the pavement and half on the road with a double buggy and a toddler standing on the buggy board.

There were times when I had to bump off the pavement on to the road with a toddler hanging on and then bump back up again. Going on to the road is obviously quite dangerous. I found it difficult—and that was 16 years ago when I was fitter and had much better vision. I therefore empathise with people who have a visual impairment or a physical disability, with older people and with children, who sometimes cannot see as their line of sight is blocked by vehicles parking on the pavement or double parking.

Pavement parking causes an obstruction for pedestrians and in particular for children; for people who are blind or partially sighted; for wheelchair and mobility scooter users; and for those with pushchairs or prams. As has been said, it is an offence to drive on to the pavement with or without the intention to park, but there have long been concerns about the extent to which the law is enforced in that respect.

Constituents have raised with me concerns about Police Scotland not attending incidents of pavement parking that pedestrians have deemed to be dangerous. As we have heard, Police Scotland does not seem to make such incidents a

priority, even if a vehicle is causing a significant obstruction.

Police Scotland stated in a consultation document in October 2013 that, given the financial savings that it required to make, parking enforcement was not a priority area. That resulted in the local paper *The Courier* publishing the headline:

“Councils fear ‘driver anarchy’ as Police Scotland withdraws from parking enforcement”.

Laws are only as good as their enforcement. The bill's provisions would be enforced by Police Scotland where parking is criminalised and by traffic wardens in areas with decriminalised parking enforcement such as Dundee, Aberdeen, Fife and Edinburgh.

Fife Council noted concerns—which are shared by many authorities—that the bill would raise expectations; that traffic wardens would have to widen their beats to cover more areas; and that, without additional resources, local authorities would be unable to enforce the provisions, especially given the Scottish Government's unprecedented cuts to local government.

I suppose that it is important to ask why drivers park in this way. For a few, it is due to thoughtlessness, but for many it is due to the physical constraints of the built environment. When many of our housing schemes and towns were planned for and built, the current level of car ownership and use was never expected. In addition to supporting and progressing the bill, we ought to acknowledge the constraints, look for innovative ideas on how to resolve the matter and talk further with town planners and transport planners.

The Presiding Officer: I call the Minister for Transport and Islands. If you could go to 5.52pm, minister, I would appreciate that greatly.

17:44

Derek Mackay: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We have had a number of useful briefings for this afternoon's debate on the proposals in the bill. I urge Cameron Buchanan, who seems to be the only voice departing from the consensus, to think again, given his wide experience of the issue and his understanding following the committee's investigation.

It is important that we support the bill at stage 1, because we would be agreeing to the principles of the bill. If there is time to consider the bill at stages 2 and 3, that would of course offer an opportunity to change the bill as Cameron Buchanan has requested and to refine it to his satisfaction.

It would be important if the whole Parliament were to agree at stage 1 to the principles of taking forward action on responsible parking. As all members have hinted, the legislation can largely be about common sense and about thinking about the needs of everyone. Sandra White has made that point repeatedly in discussing the need for the bill.

Even when there was doubt about legislative competence, Sandra White encouraged the UK Government and the Scottish Government to work together. Now that we have consensus, it is unfortunate that the necessary legislative change to remove all doubt will not happen in time to legislate during this session of the Scottish Parliament. I suppose that that gives us the time to refine the proposed legislation to everyone's satisfaction. Maybe then even the Conservatives will be able to come on board with it.

Cameron Buchanan *rose*—

Derek Mackay: I am glad that that invited an intervention.

Cameron Buchanan: After that vicious personal attack, what can I say?

We support the bill. I am against the blanket part of it and it needs a bit of tinkering and change, but we support it.

The Presiding Officer: Minister, I can return the time for you.

Derek Mackay: I am delighted to hear that from Cameron Buchanan. I was given the impression that the Conservatives would not support the bill. I come from Renfrewshire, and if the member thought that that was a vicious personal attack, I would have to say that the politics in Renfrewshire are a wee bit rougher than that. I mean that in all positivity.

Kevin Stewart covered issues of definition, as I would expect from the Local Government and Regeneration Committee. George Adam covered the personal experience of supporting his wife in her wheelchair, and the frustration of other people who assume that they have right of way.

John Wilson was right on the purpose of clarity and definition. We must get the legislation right so that what is enforceable is easily understood and so that the public know where they can and cannot, or should and should not, park. There is an issue about consistency, definition and clarity. Ken Macintosh was right about local opinion, consultation and taking people with us on what works at the most local level. Any legislation will be about localism, and it must provide the required clarity.

Lesley Brennan very helpfully pointed out one anomaly, of which there are many, in the complex

legislation—it is illegal to drive on the footway, but some would say that it is okay and competent to park on it. How would one get there to park if not by driving on the footway? Tightening up and refining the legislation will make the difference, which is why the Government has committed to embark on a consultation, which will ensure that we can cover as many as possible of the issues that have been raised.

Ken Macintosh also touched on planning and policy and, indeed, on cultural aspects of the policy. He was absolutely right to do that. As we look at the complete issue, we see that there is a balancing act between accessibility and the local need for parking provision. As transport minister, with a clear focus on roads and safety, I should say that I am concerned about the statistics on more vulnerable road users. Accessibility and safety must be paramount among the competing priorities in the balancing act.

We need a mixture of common sense and enforceability. The evidence is that parking legislation is more effective where there is decriminalised parking enforcement. Decriminalised parking has been introduced in a number of local authorities, including Aberdeen, Argyll and Bute, Dundee, East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, Inverclyde, Perth and Kinross, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire. A number of other councils are going through the necessary legislation to decriminalise parking enforcement. That leaves a number that will have to move towards that, to reach the consistency that many members talked about.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Derek Mackay: I will gratefully take an intervention from Kevin Stewart.

Kevin Stewart: In his speechifying, Cameron Buchanan talked about an added burden for wardens and the police. However, in Aberdeen, where parking enforcement is decriminalised, it is extremely frustrating for the citizen wardens who work in neighbourhoods where double parking and footway parking take place that they can do nothing about it. Can we get those folk the powers sooner rather than later so that they can help the neighbourhoods where they work?

Derek Mackay: The powers will give those officers a sense of empowerment and further clarity on what is enforceable, as well as assisting in the cultural understanding. Improvement in behaviour—if we get it right on education and awareness—could lead to less enforcement as people understand what is and is not acceptable.

There are issues around signage and the understanding of which streets could be affected, so it is important to get the legislation right. The

right implementation will help with the workability and practicality of how the measures would be enforced.

If there is one issue that has been on-going since this Parliament's creation on which the inability to legislate has frustrated people, there is no doubt that it must be this one. The issue seems so simple. The legislation is complex, but the objective of ensuring more responsible parking and tackling irresponsible parking is simple.

As transport minister, I have launched a number of initiatives to improve road safety. Because of the impact of traffic speed in built-up areas, I will imminently launch the in town, slow down initiative.

In reviewing the road safety framework, I want to see more careful driving and a more considered approach from drivers, which will make a difference to road safety. The rolling out of 20mph zones is to be encouraged, as well as other road safety campaigns. I have no doubt that, if we show that more vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians, have a sense of priority and accessibility, that will make a difference for their safety and just for a general, better commonsense approach in local neighbourhoods.

For all those reasons, the Government supports Sandra White's bill at stage 1. In the event that the bill cannot progress because of timing, and having resolved the necessary legislative issues, the Government has committed to legislate on the topic in the next session.

17:52

Sandra White: This is an important debate. It has been excellent, measured and thoughtful. All areas have been touched on. Members' experiences of the issues, including the first-hand experiences of Dennis Robertson and Cameron Buchanan, came to the fore in their speeches. I thank all MSPs from all parties for their speeches. I sincerely thank the minister for his pledge that the next Scottish Government, if he happens to be in it—I know that he will be, although perhaps not as transport minister—will take on board my bill. It is fantastic that the Government has said that—not just because of my work but, as I said, because of the work of Ross Finnie, Joe FitzPatrick and the many groups out there that have been pushing for this, too. I offer my heartfelt thanks to them for their work in helping me progress the bill.

Kevin Stewart: I realise that a lot of effort was needed to get some of the power devolved to ensure that this Parliament will be able to legislate on the issue in the future. Will Sandra White continue to ensure that colleagues elsewhere make sure that the power is devolved so that we

can deal with the matter as a Parliament once and for all?

Sandra White: That is an important issue. In my opening remarks, I said that people in other places, such as Westminster, the Scotland Office and Transport Scotland, as well as ministers and others, met and basically worked through the issues with me. I assure not only Kevin Stewart but the Parliament that if devolution of the powers slips one tiny bit, I will be on the phone or at people's offices to ensure that the Parliament gets the powers.

I believed from the outset that this Parliament had competence in the area, as I said, but the advice from your good self, Presiding Officer, was that we did not, although we had lawyers who said that we did. That is in the past, and we are where we are.

I am grateful to the MSPs from all parties who will vote for the bill tonight, and I thank them for their speeches. I want to talk about the substantive points that have been raised. For example, members asked what we can do about enforcement. I acknowledge the issue and I acknowledge that the bill is complicated.

I welcome what Kevin Stewart and others said, for example about dropped kerbs. During evidence taking, we also talked about crossing points, which I think that John Wilson mentioned. As streets and cityscapes are planned, people are looking at putting in dropped crossing points, which are slightly different from dropped kerbs and enable someone who is disabled or in a wheelchair to cross the road—instead of trying to cross and finding that there is nowhere on the other side where they can get back on to the pavement. Crossing points are an important issue.

Members talked about loading and delivery. The statutory waiting time is 20 minutes, which some members and local authorities think is absolutely fine and others think is far too long. On Sunday I was near Glasgow Botanic Gardens, in my constituency, and I saw a van drive up and park on the pavement right outside a bus stop. It stayed there for about three hours. The driver was not delivering anything—I do not know what they were doing—and it would have been hard for a disabled person to get along the road or off the pavement. Dennis Robertson and Cameron Buchanan talked about that. Someone who happened to be using a stick, a wheelchair or whatever could have got off the bus and not been able to leave the bus stop. That is what I call an inconsiderate driver.

All those things have to be looked at. I welcome that—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: One moment, Ms White. I ask all members who are coming into the chamber not to bring their conversations into the

chamber and to do Ms White the courtesy of listening to her.

Sandra White: Thank you, Presiding Officer. That is the first time that people have been told to listen to me. I usually just shout at the door. I am sure that members will listen to me.

A number of other issues were raised in the debate. Ken Macintosh and other members talked about education. I have said from the beginning of the bill process that I want the bill to be educational, not punitive. We must educate people. I do not think that all drivers are bad drivers, but—as is the case with everything—some drivers need more education than others do. We should concentrate on that aspect of the bill.

George Adam talked about the Scottish Disability Equality Forum and access panels, which it will be important to involve. I said to the committee that access panels should be placed on a statutory footing. They have experience, they know what is happening, and they should give advice on a statutory basis. Local communities must also be consulted and involved, as happens in the context of restricted parking zones, because the legislation requires councils to consult communities. I imagine that a similar approach needs to be provided for in the bill.

We have talked about disabled people and people with young kids. Social isolation is also a huge issue, which this Parliament takes very seriously. I am a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, which did an inquiry into the problem. The feedback that the committee got and the media coverage that our inquiry attracted demonstrated that people are suffering from social isolation. How much more isolating an experience can someone have than that of being unable to get out of their own front door because someone has parked on the pavement? As I said, a person might just want to go to the shops, but if they never know whether they will be able to get back into their house, that causes worry and might stop them going out, leading to social isolation.

I think that members have reached a consensus. I ask them to support the bill's principles at stage 1, at decision time tonight.

Business Motion

18:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-15771, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revision to the business programme for Thursday.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 3 March 2016—

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

4.15 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

18:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is decision time. There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S4M-15760, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on work, wages and wellbeing in the Scottish labour market, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations in the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee's 1st Report 2016 (Session 4), *Taking the High Road - Work, Wages and Wellbeing in the Scottish Labour Market* (SP Paper 874).

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-15758.2, in the name of Neil Findlay, which seeks to amend motion S4M-15758, in the name of Alex Neil, on social security, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (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)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 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, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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 33, Against 78, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-15758.1, in the name of John Lamont, which seeks to amend motion S4M-15758, in the name of Alex Neil, on social security, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 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, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 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)
 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 14, Against 98, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-15758, in the name of Alex Neil, on social security, 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brennan, Lesley (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 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, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 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)
 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)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central 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 98, Against 0, Abstentions 14.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the devolution of new social security powers; welcomes the extensive consultation process that the Scottish Government has carried out with stakeholders and benefit users into the future delivery and approach of social security policy in Scotland to ensure that it has services that will be accessible, fair and command the confidence of users; agrees the vision and principles

that will be at the heart of the Scottish Government's position, which are underpinned by an emphasis on treating people with dignity and respect; welcomes the policy choices that the Scottish Government has outlined to ensure that there will be a fair approach to new social security powers, and agrees that the smooth transition of these powers will be a priority for the Scottish Government and be to the benefit of all of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S4M-15759, in the name of Sandra White, on the Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Footway Parking and Double Parking (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Caring in Craigmillar

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-15407, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, on Caring in Craigmillar. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it considers the outstanding contribution made by Caring in Craigmillar to older people in the greater Craigmillar area and beyond; understands that the group has operated a Phonelink telephone care call service 365 days a year since 1998 in addition to the care that it provides at its premises; looks forward to the further outreach work that it will provide as part of a wider city homecare collaboration network; notes that it started out as the social welfare arm of the Craigmillar Festival Society, which is considered an outstanding organisation and which is now over 50 years old; welcomes Caring in Craigmillar's planned return to 63 Niddrie Mains Terrace in Edinburgh, where it previously operated from and which will now provide the group with a wider community hub, and believes that Caring in Craigmillar is an excellent model for other organisations across the country to follow.

18:05

Kenny MacAskill (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP):

I thank members from all sides of the chamber for supporting my motion. That is as it should be, because Caring in Craigmillar is an outstanding organisation that acts without fear or favour, political partiality or prejudice, for the welfare of the elderly not simply in Craigmillar but throughout east Edinburgh.

The debate affords me an opportunity not just to praise an outstanding local organisation but to flag up a national issue, and I hope to be able to input some lessons that have been learned that could be emulated elsewhere. Caring in Craigmillar is a truly remarkable organisation, and I will detail some of its work and history. Moreover, care of the elderly is one of the major issues of our time; it is one that is trying local and national Government and testing communities.

Like every member, I am fortunate to have innumerable voluntary organisations in my constituency. There are too many of them to mention individually but, collectively, they make the community a much better place. They do it through the input of time and effort by people who often receive no remuneration, and in some instances they go well beyond contracted hours or job specification. We are blessed with them.

I have a soft spot for Caring in Craigmillar, which I have gotten to know during my nine years as the constituency member for the area. The organisation has come a long way and it operates in a community that has had more than its fair

share of challenges. For many years, it was synonymous with poverty and deprivation.

Caring in Craigmillar is the welfare arm of the Craigmillar Festival Society, which itself is now more than 50 years old. That sprang from the community and remains rooted in it. The Craigmillar Festival Society and its constituent organisations provided a template for others to follow and are a testament to what can be done by good people with energy, drive and ideas. They were intent on overcoming the obstacles that were faced by many to provide chances for all. In that, they have succeeded for countless people and are witness to how communities can take control of their own destiny and help to shape their own future. The modern buzzword is social capital, but I prefer to describe it as heart and soul. Craigmillar has that in abundance, and Caring in Craigmillar is the embodiment of it.

The organisation has now run for a generation and has expanded from providing day care to providing a PhoneLink service that proves invaluable to many people scattered across the city who are often isolated in their own homes. Its day care project is one of the longest-serving day care projects in the city. It provides more than 34,000 hours of care to individuals in a group setting annually and is one of only two Saturday day care projects. A Wednesday evening additional needs club is also provided.

The PhoneLink care call service takes place twice daily and makes upwards of 80,000 calls annually. Caring in Craigmillar regularly attracts funding that allows it to top up the work of the council award. It has replaced one community bus and has raised half the funds for a second one. Its work is outstanding, but it is also expanding.

The organisation required to move from its former premises at 63 Niddrie Mains Terrace several years ago, but it is now returning there. As well as being in many ways Caring in Craigmillar's spiritual home, it provides premises that are far more suitable for current and future needs. It is a place that is known to the community, given its long history, and one that is sited centrally. It was first opened in 1936 by the university settlement and dubbed "Craigmillar College". It is fitting that Caring in Craigmillar should return there. That will create a new open access community facility to serve the growing regeneration.

Craigmillar has been undergoing redevelopment. Houses were knocked down, and that ripped the very heart out of the community, but thankfully new homes are now appearing. The old community is returning and is being joined by new arrivals from all parts. It is necessary to have the facilities to serve that community, and it is therefore right that Caring in Craigmillar becomes

the principal tenant of those centrally situated premises.

Caring in Craigmillar is doing so with a dedicated staff and management board. It would be remiss not to mention the general manager, Midge Lamb, and the day care manager, Peter Calvey, who have been with the organisation for more years collectively than they may care to remember. However, it has been forged by them, often on an anvil of considerable difficulties. Craigmillar is a better place for the work that they have done in it and in the wider community. I record my thanks and appreciation for the excellent work that they and all the staff have done.

I move on to aspects that, although they are replicated elsewhere, are worthy of consideration for wider use. Care of the elderly is one of the major issues of our time. An increasing ageing population is a good thing: gone are the days of deaths within months of retiral and little chance for people to enjoy twilight years at the end of an extensive working life. However, that brings challenges for us as a society. As well as the elderly population extending, the nature of our communities is changing. Families are more likely to be separated from each other, and generations live apart, not just in different households, but in different communities. Sometimes, they live in different countries.

Craigmillar is maybe more fortunate than many, but it still faces challenges. The integration of health and social care is the right thing to do, but the challenges are considerable and are not just financial. Understandably, private sector operations have seen an opportunity to provide a service in care of the elderly, and they are needed. Many do an excellent job, although sadly some do so at the expense of their workforce. Others—thankfully, they are few—can be entirely undesirable and need to be weeded out by statutory agencies.

The benefit and lesson of Caring in Craigmillar is that it is from and for the community. It is a charity that is operated by the community, that is staffed in the main by the community, and that works for the community. That reduces costs, but it brings innumerable intangible benefits.

The PhoneLink service extension is a medium of modern technology that is being used to benefit a community that is often marginalised, if not excluded. Although nothing can compare with face-to-face engagement, that service offers reassurance to family and companionship to many elderly people who are housebound or alone. It can ensure that vulnerable individuals can be monitored, and it affords conversation, which is vital to the human spirit. Its cost is significantly cheaper than that of a personal attendance and,

although it should never be a substitute for personal attention, it offers additional benefits.

I thank Caring in Craigmillar for its sterling work and offer its model as a template to the minister for others.

This may well be my final speech in the chamber and the Parliament, in which it has been a privilege to serve. I thank all the staff and colleagues of each and every party. It has been an honour and a privilege. I may not be returning to Holyrood, but I will most certainly return in and around Craigmillar, and I will definitely return to Caring in Craigmillar. [*Applause.*]

18:13

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I congratulate Kenny MacAskill on lodging the motion.

We are talking about elderly groups. Kenny MacAskill and I are certainly not that elderly— [*Interruption.*] Linda Fabiani says that we are not that young, either. We will see her after about that.

It has been an absolute honour and pleasure for me and others to work alongside Kenny MacAskill for many years. I have done so not just since I was elected to the Parliament but alongside him in the Scottish National Party before we were elected. That has been a great pleasure, and I know that he has worked tirelessly not just for Craigmillar but for the area in Edinburgh that he represents and others. Obviously, a lot of people do not know about that. He has done a lot of work behind the scenes, and it has been a great privilege for me to know him as a colleague and—I hope that I can say—a friend.

I just want to mention something that Kenny MacAskill did not say. Craigmillar people sent me some information, and they end by saying:

“We could not have done it without you, Kenny, and for that we are eternally grateful.”

I end this part of my speech by again saying thank you to Kenny MacAskill.

As Kenny MacAskill mentioned, he and other MSPs have many groups in their areas that do sterling work for the elderly in their communities. I certainly do. I cannot mention all of them, so I want to concentrate on one particular group in my area, which is Glasgow Old People’s Welfare Association. We call it GOPWA for short. Just two weeks ago, it celebrated its 68th year of working tirelessly for the older people of Glasgow. It has over 1,000 volunteers who give their time, and it runs day care centres throughout Glasgow residential homes and sheltered accommodation, neighbourhood visiting services, outreach services and more than 100 weekly clubs. It does form filling, it gives advice and information, and it

provides many other services that benefit senior citizens in Glasgow.

Sheena Glass and her team are to be commended for all the work that they do, and it is a privilege for me to know them and work with them. The Glasgow Old People’s Welfare Association is also involved with the David Cargill centre, which provides a varied programme of activities from Mondays to Fridays including armchair exercises, music, general knowledge quizzes and bingo, and it has also supported the Donald Dewar centre in the north-west of Glasgow for 22 years. It arranges transport to bring older people to the centre to enjoy activities, entertainment and lunch. The staff at both centres are absolutely fantastic.

GOPWA also fundraises for the older people to be able to go on visits to museums and theatres. As Kenny MacAskill mentioned with regard to Caring in Craigmillar, community transport is important and a community bus is a lifeline for older people.

GOPWA does such a lot of good work throughout all the communities. It holds tea dances and other events, and it embraces all the cultures in Glasgow and collaborates with other services to make them more accessible and compatible. Just recently, it has worked with the Muslim people who live in the Woodlands area. I think that Hanzala Malik will talk about that, as he has also been involved. GOWPA holds club nights to bring the elderly of all the communities together.

I echo what Kenny MacAskill said—I do not know what we would do without such organisations, which do such a lot of great work. Once again, I congratulate Kenny and I wish him good luck in the future. He has made his last speech in the Parliament, but I am sure that we will see a lot more of him.

18:18

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Good evening, Presiding Officer. I congratulate Kenny MacAskill on securing this debate about Caring in Craigmillar. Kezia Dugdale MSP sends her apologies for not being able to join us and wishes the organisation the very best. She recognises the good work that it does. I join her in congratulating the organisation, its staff and its volunteers on the truly local community spirit that they have, and I say well done to them.

The value that third sector organisations such as Caring in Craigmillar provide to people who are elderly, disadvantaged and suffering from isolation is priceless. Sometimes, we do not consider the value that such organisations bring to our communities. I assure them and the people who benefit from their provision that local authorities

and Governments are just not capable of providing the one-to-one service that they provide. I feel personally indebted to such organisations.

It is particularly important that local areas have day care facilities. A phone line service that gives morning and evening phone calls to people who are in need is a clear way of reducing isolation.

We always underestimate people's need. I know for a fact, through the experiences of my constituents, that any contact is always welcome, because it reassures people in their daily lives.

In my constituency, elderly care centres such as ASRA, Mel Milaap, Shanti Bhavan, the Chinese day care centre and GOPWA all play a vital role in supporting and helping community groups. Many such groups make a difference to the lives of elderly people in our communities. I thank them for all the hard work that they do.

Many of us tend to overlook the amount of hard work that volunteers do. I know that they are sometimes accused of being busybodies and interfering, but we should ask the people who receive the services, because they will tell a completely different story about how valuable the services are and how they value the contact. The third sector is the backbone of today's society and we should never be too shy to respect it, recognise its contribution and thank it for its contribution. I say again to all the volunteers and staff in community groups: please keep up this very valuable work.

Kenny MacAskill has—rightly—recognised one such group for its good work, which we can see on the website. I am pleasantly surprised to see that such good work is being done. It needs to be supported consistently. Kezia Dugdale has promised that she will always be there for the organisation because she recognises the good work that it does.

To close, I will make a personal point. I genuinely and truly wish the very best for all the third sector organisations that make such a valuable contribution to our society. Like many of my colleagues, I will always be there to support them.

18:22

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate Kenny MacAskill on securing what I now know will be his final debate before he retires as the member for Edinburgh Eastern. I wish him well for the future.

The motion is very much a constituency-focused one, as Caring in Craigmillar is a grass-roots support service that aims to help the elderly, disabled or vulnerable at a dedicated care centre. As a north-east MSP, I do not mind admitting that I

was not aware of the group or its activities. However, I have been interested to learn about its work during the past 15 years and about the positive contribution that it appears to make in providing assistance to the most vulnerable people in the east of this city.

The motion talks about the PhoneLink service, which has operated since 1998, and I am told that it was originally funded by a grant from the Craigmillar priority partnership, which was established and funded in 1995 by the then Conservative Scottish secretary, Michael Forsyth. That was part of the Conservative Government's innovative work to tackle poverty. I further understand that much of the Craigmillar Festival Society's work of that time was funded through European objective 2 and European social funds, which were secured by Michael Forsyth and the Conservative Government. Perhaps Mr MacAskill will correct me if that was not the case.

One of the key objectives of Caring in Craigmillar is to combat loneliness and isolation by providing group activities and outings, facilitating social interaction and providing new opportunities to make friends. That is important because, as we know, loneliness and isolation are affecting an increasing percentage of elderly and socially disadvantaged citizens. People with disabilities, people with a range of long-term conditions and people who are restricted physically, psychologically and socially may all experience isolation and loneliness. Many elderly people live alone because of bereavement, and many more have little or no contact with family or friends.

Centres that provide respite from such circumstances are vital to the wellbeing of the most vulnerable people in our society. In an age when so many channels of communication are available, it is telling that there is still a significant problem with social isolation and loneliness in Scotland today. We should all remember that it is everybody's problem, which should not be ignored or tolerated, and that a change in attitude is required in our society if its impact is to be reduced.

The motion looks at how Caring in Craigmillar can be a model for other organisations to follow. As we have heard, a large number of excellent projects and community activities are already in place in many parts of Scotland to identify and tackle the widespread issues of social isolation and loneliness. I feel that I should mention one project in my region.

The Aberdeenshire Signposting Project works with people who are affected by or at risk of developing low to moderate mental health problems to increase their level of social contact and their usage of locally available leisure and educational facilities. It does that by putting people

who are referred to the project by general practitioners and others in touch with sources of appropriate support, help and advice.

All such support services, including Caring in Craigmillar, need to be assessed regularly so that proper standards of care are being given to the community's most vulnerable people. Enhanced staff and volunteer training programmes should always exist to ensure the highest standards of care. To do otherwise would defeat the purpose of such groups and organisations.

I thank Kenny MacAskill for bringing Caring in Craigmillar to the Parliament's attention by securing this evening's debate to highlight an important project in his constituency, and I wish him well in his endeavours after he leaves this place.

18:26

The Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health (Jamie Hepburn): I join other members in thanking Kenny MacAskill for securing the debate. As he said, this is likely to be his last contribution in Parliament. It would be remiss of me not to comment as he prepares for a new life outside Parliament after 17 years of tirelessly representing his constituents—first in the Lothians then, since 2007, as a constituency MSP first for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh and latterly for Edinburgh Eastern. He was, incidentally, the first member of the SNP to win a constituency seat in Edinburgh.

I want to avoid commenting on whether Kenny MacAskill and Sandra White fall into the category of being elderly—I suspect that that would serve only to get me into trouble. However, I do want to reflect on the fact that in his time as a member of the Scottish Parliament, Kenny MacAskill has made a substantial contribution to civic and political life. Indeed, that contribution began even before he was elected, as he helped to shape my party as a modern political force.

It is of course as the Cabinet Secretary for Justice—a job that he described as the only one he ever wanted in Government and a post that he held with distinction for seven years—that he will be best remembered. In that time, he took forward far-reaching reforms in the courts and judiciary, as well as reform of the fire service and the creation of Police Scotland in 2013.

Kenny MacAskill also began the reform of penal policy—in particular, in relation to how we treat women and young offenders. He took a particular interest in making sure that young people have positive opportunities to use their energies. Many thousands of young people in Scotland have benefited from life-changing opportunities as a result of cashback for communities, which is the

scheme that seizes money from criminal networks and reinvests it in projects and new infrastructure to provide diversionary activity. As minister for sport, I have been able to visit many locations that have benefited from that investment.

For all his achievements in ministerial office, I am sure that it is as an outstanding constituency representative that Kenny MacAskill will want to be remembered. It is therefore apt that his last contribution in Parliament is on an important constituency matter, so I am pleased to close this debate on Caring in Craigmillar. It has been gratifying to hear so many positive stories about the care that our older people and people with disabilities and support needs are receiving in Craigmillar and east Edinburgh. We would be hard pressed not to be impressed by the scope of the organisation's work, which—as Kenny MacAskill set out—continues to expand.

Caring in Craigmillar provides an invaluable service to older people and people with learning disabilities who would be socially isolated in the community without it, so I add my congratulations to the organisation on receiving this well-deserved recognition today.

As Kenny MacAskill set out, Caring in Craigmillar aims to combat loneliness and isolation by providing a range of group activities and outings, by facilitating social interaction and by providing new opportunities to make friends. It provides an excellent service to its clients in running projects and activities six days a week, including outings and holidays. Caring in Craigmillar's Wednesday club helps people with disabilities to meet and interact with new people and to participate in social and fundraising activities, thereby improving their social skills and integrating them more in their community. The men's group that Caring in Craigmillar supports has regular days out, often with a lunch and a meal at the centre in the evening, which brings together people who are at risk of becoming isolated from their community.

The services are hugely important and it is great that Edinburgh Eastern benefits from them. It would, of course, be great if every community had such services. We know that many communities are lucky to benefit from similar projects. It was instructive to hear Sandra White talk about the experience in her constituency. In my constituency, we are fortunate to have Cumbernauld Action for Care of the Elderly, which provides similar services. Hanzala Malik was right to make the point that such organisations and their volunteers are the backbone of our society.

Nanette Milne mentioned Caring in Craigmillar's important PhoneLink service, which provides a lifeline for vulnerable people in the area. The service checks on people in the morning and

evening. It provides not only reassurance that someone will be alerted if they are ill or have a fall, but a friendly ear for a chat, which we know is important to wellbeing.

I have not had the pleasure of visiting Caring in Craigmillar, although I should say even at this stage, if it is appropriate, that I would be happy to visit in the future. However, I have seen at first hand the benefit of such a service, as I visited the Good Morning Service in Springburn last year, which provides a similar service. From that experience, it was clear to me that the many service users who benefit are being provided with an important service.

Kenny MacAskill touched on our changing demographics and the challenge of providing care in that context. As Nanette Milne said, he posits in his motion that Caring in Craigmillar is a model of good practice for other parts of the country to learn from. I want to be clear that, where there is good practice such as we see in Caring in Craigmillar's services and other local organisations that provide similar services, as an Administration, we will always be keen to roll out that best practice to ensure that other areas learn from it and can benefit from similar services.

We are investing in similar approaches: we are addressing loneliness and isolation right now. Alex Neil, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights recently announced an additional £250,000 towards tackling loneliness and isolation, which includes £80,000 that Age Scotland will distribute to its local groups Scotland-wide to use towards lunch clubs and other social events, including classes and tea dances. We have also awarded £34,000 to Age Scotland for a specialist post for its phone service, the Silver Line. We will always do what we can to replicate good practice. I assure Kenny MacAskill and others that we greatly value the work of Caring in Craigmillar and the many similar organisations around the country. We seek to learn from that experience and to roll it out further.

I again thank Kenny MacAskill for securing the debate to highlight the important work that is done by Caring in Craigmillar, and for allowing us to hold it up as a great example to other areas of what can be done to tackle loneliness and isolation in our communities.

Kenny MacAskill will be very much missed in Parliament. He has said that he does not intend to be a stranger to the community of Craigmillar, but I ask him not to be a stranger to the Scottish Parliament. I look forward to being able to continue to work with him in the future, albeit in a different context, and I wish him all the best for the future.

Meeting closed at 18:34.

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