



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 22 September 2016

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 22 September 2016

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:50]

General Question Time

Rural Payments (Digital Mapping System)

1. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what type of digital mapping systems it uses for making and assessing rural payments. (S5O-00171)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): Our rural payments and inspection division uses a digital mapping system known as the land parcel identification system to support the validation of common agricultural policy payments, including payments under the basic payment scheme.

Emma Harper: Can more be done to ensure that the mapping system is as accurate as it can be? For example, is the Scottish Government making the most of available technology?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, I believe that we are. We use a geographic information system, which is supplied by ESRI (UK) Ltd, one of the largest GIS suppliers in the world. Our mapping is updated regularly using Ordnance Survey MasterMap data, along with aerial photography specifically commissioned by RPID to update our land parcel identification system. I am happy to arrange for RPID staff to brief the member to provide further information.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): The minister will be aware of the importance of getting the mapping system right in order to meet European Union regulations on CAP payments. Audit Scotland's report in May raised serious concerns about the ability of the information technology system to minimise disallowance. Will he confirm that the mapping system is sufficiently accurate and up to date to ensure that the Scottish Government will not have to pay disallowances of up to £25 million?

Fergus Ewing: I do not believe that the Audit Scotland report criticised the mapping system per se, and I was encouraged—as I am sure the member will have been—by the very positive reaction to my announcement in a statement to Parliament that, to deal with the difficulties, we are bringing forward a national loan scheme of up to £300 million, which will be injected into the rural economy in November. I was delighted to see that Finlay Carson, along with NFU Scotland,

recognised that that will provide certainty and clarity to rural communities in the winter months.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware that a number of mapping systems are used in crofting. Registers of Scotland, the Crofting Commission and, indeed, the CAP payment claim forms have maps of crofts. Does that cause any confusion in relation to the mapping system that is used for the CAP payments?

Fergus Ewing: I suppose that it is fair to say that confusion is not entirely absent from crofting legislation. On the other hand, I do not think that the mapping system contributes to that confusion. If the member wants to write to me with any particular concerns, I would of course be happy to consider them further.

Energy Storage Systems

2. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it encourages investment in and the development of energy storage systems across Scotland, and how it intends to further support those initiatives throughout this session of Parliament. (S5O-00172)

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I am not entirely sure that that is the question in the *Business Bulletin*, Mr Torrance. Can you answer that question, minister?

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse): Energy storage at all scales can play a crucial role in Scotland's low-carbon energy system.

Scotland's existing pumped hydro storage assets offer a proven means of large-scale energy storage. We are working with the industry to outline the many benefits of the technology and to make the case to the United Kingdom Government to support new capacity.

The local energy challenge fund is supporting the demonstration of innovative energy storage technologies. For example, we provided £3.2 million to the Edinburgh and surrounding towns heat energy action through thermal storage—EAST-HEAT—project to support the deployment in homes throughout the Lothians and Falkirk of the thermal storage battery that was developed by the Scottish company Sunamp. In addition, the Levenmouth community energy project has received £4.3 million to build on the hydrogen production and storage facilities at Methil, which include facilities to provide low-carbon fuel for Fife Council vehicles. The surf 'n' turf project in Orkney has also received £1.175 million. That project will produce hydrogen from onshore wind and marine energy, which will be stored, transported and

converted back into electricity for use in buildings and berthed ferries at Kirkwall harbour.

Further support for the development and deployment of energy storage will be considered as part of the Scottish Government's new energy strategy, a draft version of which is due to be published around the end of the year. We continue to work on storage solutions and grid connections to them.

David Torrance: An energy storage proposal is moving forward in the Kirkcaldy area after developers identified spare capacity at a local substation and appropriate land nearby. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to overcome higher transmission charges for Scottish grid connections in order to attract similar investment throughout Scotland?

Paul Wheelhouse: David Torrance highlights an issue that is of great concern to the Scottish Government. We have been calling for a change to the transmission charging regime for years. We welcomed the partial improvements that were implemented through project transmit but, as we made clear earlier this year when Longannet power station was closed, there is still a long way to go until there is a fair system that does not discriminate against Scotland and call much-needed power supplies into question. Scottish ministers regularly meet the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets and National Grid, and continue to encourage them to ensure that the transmission charging regime stops penalising Scottish generation.

I am aware of a project in Mr Torrance's constituency led by AES UK and Ireland. We have been in regular dialogue with that developer, including as recently as 19 August, to hear about its grid-scale lithium-ion battery technology. We look forward to trying to help that company overcome any barriers.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): Will the minister elaborate on the potential that the Scottish Government sees in liquid air storage technology to reduce our reliance on imported gas for heating?

Paul Wheelhouse: Alexander Burnett highlights an important matter. In our draft energy strategy, which we hope to publish around the end of the year, we will try to tackle the overwhelming problem that 54 per cent of Scotland's energy consumption is required to provide heat, mainly for space heating purposes. We look to alternative technologies to support the continuing supply of heat to our communities and tackle fuel poverty affordably. There are exciting projects on that, including projects to explore hydrogen and other technologies.

Social Care Workers (Cost of Living Wage)

3. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how much paying at least the living wage to social care workers from October 2016 will cost health and social care partnerships. (S5O-00173)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): We have made national estimates of the cost of increasing wages to the living wage level. That analysis has been placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre—bib number 57809.

Although we have estimated at a national level the investment that is required to pay the living wage, circumstances will vary across authorities in Scotland—for example, in the volume and balance of contracted-out care and the progress that some councils and providers have already made towards payment of the living wage. Health and social care partnerships are working closely with providers to assess the cost of implementation in their areas and to determine, negotiate and agree the appropriate approach.

Colin Smyth: Does the cabinet secretary accept that the national estimate to which she refers has proved to be wholly inadequate? Will the Scottish Government agree to review that estimate for the coming year, starting by simply asking integration joint boards what the actual costs have been? Will she put in place a proper, long-term framework that ensures that future funding takes account of the actual costs in each area, increases as the living wage increases and takes account not only of the living wage but of training and career progression?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government has provided significant investment to fulfil that commitment: £125 million has been made available to partnerships to enable the living wage to be paid to care workers who support adults and to help to meet a range of existing costs that local authorities face in the delivery of effective and high-quality services. I am absolutely confident of the living wage being paid from 1 October. I hope that Opposition members will welcome that. As we discuss the matter with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the sector as part of the spending review, we will ensure the sustainability of the payment of the living wage.

General Practitioners (Recruitment)

4. **Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact changes to the structure of national health service boards will have on the recruitment of general practitioners. (S5O-00174)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): We are transforming our

primary care services, and we are working with all health boards and key stakeholders to support GP recruitment and retention. That includes investing more than £2 million in a GP recruitment and retention fund, increasing our GP training places and creating a £20 million support package for GP practices.

As was set out in the programme for government, we will begin work in this session of Parliament to examine the number, structure and regulation of health boards, as well as their relationship with local authorities. In taking forward that review, I want to reduce bureaucracy and remove any barriers to effective patient care. The review will, of course, take account of forthcoming proposals for an islands bill, which will include a commitment to island-proof future Government legislation and policies.

Tavish Scott: I am grateful for that answer. Does that mean that the cabinet secretary will not sweep away NHS Shetland? Will she ensure that the future of the NHS will be about the recruitment of the GPs who are badly needed not just in Shetland, but in many other parts of Scotland?

Shona Robison: In his letter, Tavish Scott said:

“While we support the principle of a review of health boards on the basis of improving patient care, it cannot lead to a solution which centralises health services away from the Islands.”

As he knows, most primary and community health services are now under the auspices of the world of integration through our integration joint boards and, of course, many acute services that are provided to the island communities are already provided by other territorial boards.

I can give Tavish Scott the guarantee that any review of or changes to health boards will be carried out on the basis of improving patient care. That and no other consideration will be the starting point for the review.

The Presiding Officer: Before we move on to the next item of business, members will wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery Mr Robin Newton, the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly. [*Applause.*]

Members will also wish to join me in welcoming His Excellency Dr Rizal Sukma, the ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Kingdom. [*Applause.*]

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am aware that general question time did not start until 10 minutes later than planned, due to unforeseen circumstances. I seek your guidance. Is there any provision under standing orders to allow for an additional 10 minutes of general question time either now or at

the end of business to allow members to raise the issues that they were scheduled to raise?

The Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Kelly for that point of order. I intend to have discussions with him and the other business managers about whether members wish to get the 10 minutes back and when that would happen. We will arrange those discussions after First Minister's question time.

First Minister's Question Time

12:02

Engagements

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):

To ask the First Minister what engagements she has planned for the rest of the day. (S5F-00242)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):

Engagements to take forward the Government's programme for Scotland.

Ruth Davidson: I agree with the Scottish Government that, in many cases, a community sentence may be the best option in sentencing, but does the First Minister agree that the crime of rape should not be among them?

The First Minister: I absolutely agree that the crime of rape should be treated with the utmost seriousness and severity. Indeed, statistics show that in the overwhelming majority of rape cases—93 per cent of them—a custodial sentence is incurred. Average custodial sentences for rape and attempted rape are now 17 per cent longer than they were back in 2006-07. I think that all that is right and proper.

Sentencing in individual cases is a matter for the courts and it would be wrong for me, as First Minister, to comment on any individual case. Community payback orders are, of course, a sentencing option that is available to courts, but courts will make their judgments based on recommendations that take into account risk assessments, public protection and the background of the individual. When a non-custodial sentence is given, the court will have considered all relevant matters in the case. Individuals on community payback orders are also subject to robust and on-going risk assessment and, where appropriate, that will include multi-agency public protection arrangements.

However, there is no doubt in my mind that the offence of rape, and indeed that of attempted rape, should be treated with the utmost severity.

Ruth Davidson: I thank the First Minister for that response but, although she recognises that 93 per cent of sentences in rape cases are custodial, that leaves 7 per cent that are not. This morning, we read once again of more evidence where that is the case and where these types of crimes are receiving community payback orders, which is one of this Government's key justice policies. Such crimes include sexual assaults against children, rape and child rape.

This morning, Rape Crisis Scotland said:

"It is difficult to see in what circumstances a CPO could ever be an appropriate sentence for rape, or rape of a young child."

Surely everyone here can agree that Rape Crisis Scotland is right.

The First Minister: I have the utmost respect for the work that Rape Crisis does, and I absolutely agree that its views on all matters of rape and sexual offences should be listened to very seriously.

As I have made clear, I agree that rape is one of the most heinous offences that can be committed in our society, and I believe that it is incumbent on all of us and everybody with any influence in the criminal justice system to ensure that the offence of rape is treated seriously. The simple point that I will make—and which I genuinely hope that Ruth Davidson will accept—is that, as First Minister, I do not decide the individual sentences that courts pass down. That is rightly and properly a matter for courts, and before a court makes a decision on the appropriate sentence in any case, it will take account of a range of information and circumstances, the risk to the public and of course the circumstances of the offender, including, in many cases, their age.

It is right that, in our society, it is the courts—the independent judiciary—that decide on sentences. However, in setting policy, it is very clear to me that we need to treat rape and, indeed, other sexual offences with the seriousness that they merit. That is why I have pointed to the statistics for rape cases. The percentage of cases in which a custodial sentence is passed down is higher for rape than for almost all other offences, and the average length of custodial sentence is now longer. According to criminal proceedings statistics, the Crown Office is bringing more successful prosecutions for rape and attempted rape, with 125 convictions in 2014-15, up from 89 the year before. Police Scotland has also improved the investigation of rape and other sexual crimes with the setting up of the new national rape task force.

I therefore hope that nobody across the chamber doubts in any sense the seriousness with which we all take these issues, but equally I hope that members across the chamber accept that fundamental point of principle with regard to criminal justice in our society—that it is not politicians who decide sentences in individual cases. It is the courts, and rightly so.

Ruth Davidson: I thank the First Minister for her response and the manner in which we have been able to discuss what are sensitive issues. I know that everyone in the chamber will be united in our disgust at such crimes.

However, I am raising the matter today because concerns about CPOs have been well documented for some time now. The Scottish Government says that there are sanctions open to the courts when CPOs are breached but, as we have discovered, nearly a third of orders are broken every year with scant evidence that people are being punished.

We also know that one in five CPOs are being handed out without any work requirement being placed on criminals who receive them. I repeat that we on this side of the chamber absolutely accept the need for community sentencing, but what is the First Minister doing to address those issues with regard to CPOs?

The First Minister: I think that Ruth Davidson is right to raise this issue generally and right to raise particular issues around non-custodial sentences. Of course we have to monitor on an on-going basis the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences such as community payback orders. As I think that I said in an earlier answer, individuals on community payback orders are subject to robust and on-going risk assessment. Where such an order is breached, it is open to the court to introduce different sanctions, including imprisonment.

It is also the case—this is, I think, very pertinent to the issue of the effectiveness of these disposals, which is one of the issues that Ruth Davidson is raising—that individuals who are released from a custodial sentence of six months or less are reconvicted more than twice as often as those who are given a community payback order instead. That tells us that when non-custodial sentences are handed down in appropriate circumstances they are more effective than short-term prison sentences in reducing reoffending.

I absolutely accept that these are issues of the utmost seriousness and that we have to look at all the evidence, but I hope that all of us will agree that where it is appropriate—I absolutely stress that phrase “where it is appropriate” and that I am talking in general terms, not about particular offences—keeping people out of prison and helping to rehabilitate them in the community to ensure that they are less likely to reoffend is in general terms a good thing. Absolutely none of that takes away from the seriousness of certain types of offences, which should always be treated with the utmost seriousness by our courts.

Ruth Davidson: We can all agree that reducing reoffending is important, but people and the public must have confidence that the sentence is appropriate for the crime, and that includes punishment. The trouble is, I am afraid, that too often the response from ministers is simply to

declare that the system is working fine and that everyone should just accept it.

However, I say to the First Minister that CPOs are not working fine. They were a Scottish National Party creation and they are this Government’s policy, but we have learned again today that they are being applied to serious crimes such as rape when they should not be, that up to a third of them are breached and that up to a fifth of them do not contain any punishment element at all.

I believe that we now need a calm, considered, fresh review by the Scottish Government of the way that CPOs are being handed out. Will the First Minister take that action, which is so obviously needed?

The First Minister: I say again that, on the issue in this morning’s media that has given rise to Ruth Davidson’s questions, I of course share the concern that many people will experience, but I would make a number of points to Ruth Davidson. First, she may or may not be aware—that is not meant as any criticism—that an independent evaluation of CPOs was published in 2015, and it showed that they are viewed with a degree of confidence by most sheriffs and are seen as an improvement on previous community sentences. It is also the case that, as I said, those who are given a CPO are less likely to reoffend and be reconvicted. Again, we have statistics that bear that out.

It is also important to say that CPOs can include electronic monitoring sanctions if there is non-compliance with them, and that anyone who breaches a CPO and fails to take up the opportunity that such a non-custodial sentence presents for them will find themselves facing sanctions, which include imprisonment. The most recent figures that we have, which are for 2014-15, show that 17 per cent of CPOs were revoked due to them being breached.

Again trying to find a note of consensus here, I agree that, when somebody commits a crime, as well as our thinking about how we rehabilitate them and reduce the risk of reoffending, there has to be a punishment element to the sentence that is passed down. We have to get that balance right in our policy framework, and then we have to entrust the decisions in individual cases to the independent judges and sheriffs who make those decisions.

My responsibility as First Minister—it is one that I take very seriously—is to make sure that we get the policy framework right. In seeking to do that, we will always listen to views, and we certainly always look at the evidence that tells us whether non-custodial sentences are being effective. I would hope that all members across the chamber would feed into that, but we must also accept that,

having set the policy framework and the policy objectives, we must trust the independent judiciary to make the decisions that they deem appropriate in individual cases. It would be absolutely wrong—in fairness, I suspect that Ruth Davidson would be one of the first to say that it was wrong—if I as First Minister started to pass comment on the individual sentences that are passed down by judges.

I think that we have the right framework in place, but that is not to say that it is perfect or that it cannot be improved. I say in all sincerity to members across the chamber that we will continue to consider, to evaluate and, where necessary, to make changes in the interests of keeping the public safe and making sure that we are doing what we need to do to reduce reoffending.

Alzheimer Scotland (Meetings)

2. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister when she will next meet Alzheimer Scotland. (S5F-00275)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yesterday was world Alzheimer's day and I pay tribute to the invaluable work that Alzheimer Scotland and, indeed, other third sector organisations do to support people with dementia and their carers in our local communities. The Minister for Mental Health will speak this afternoon at the annual national dementia awards. In addition, Alzheimer Scotland's national dementia carers action network and the Scottish dementia working group meet the Minister for Mental Health at least twice a year.

Kezia Dugdale: I thank the First Minister for that answer.

Between 2010 and 2015, the Tories cut Scotland's block grant by 5 per cent. That is an economic policy that damages our public services and increases the inequality in our country, and it is an economic policy that we should reject. Does the First Minister agree with me that this Parliament should act as a block to Tory cuts?

The First Minister: Kezia Dugdale knows that I agree with that, but she also knows—because we have discussed it many times in the past—that before we have a debate in this chamber about who in Scotland bears the burden of Tory austerity we should first unite to try to stop Tory austerity happening in the first place.

Kezia Dugdale is right to point out that, according to the Fraser of Allander report, the Tories have cut Scotland's budget in the years since 2010 by 5 per cent in real terms, but she will also know that that report looks to the future and says that there is a likelihood of further Tory cuts to Scotland's budget of up to £1.6 billion by the end of this session of Parliament.

We have a new Chancellor of the Exchequer who has said—and I am prepared at this stage to take him at his word—that he is going to reset economic policy, so I hope that Kezia Dugdale will join with those of us on the Scottish National Party benches to say to the Tories, "Put an end to austerity. Put an end to austerity at source, and do it now."

Kezia Dugdale: I am glad that the First Minister can agree with me that Tory cuts of 5 per cent are unacceptable, so how can it be that today's Accounts Commission report shows that the SNP has cut local council funding by not 5 per cent but 11 per cent? The SNP has not just passed on Tory cuts, it has doubled those Tory cuts, and the report tells us who is paying the price. Older people who need help to get washed are not getting it. Elderly folk who five years ago would have had help with their meals are not getting it. The number of elderly Scots getting any care at all has fallen by 12 per cent. What is worse is that we know that the SNP is planning more cuts to councils and that cuts to councils are cuts to care. The First Minister has the power to stop those cuts. Why will she not use it?

The First Minister: The most recent outturn figures that we have show that social work spending has increased by 6 per cent in real terms since this Government took office and that social care spending has increased by 5 per cent in real terms since 2008-09. Both those figures are from 2008-09 until the most recent figures that are available.

The report published by the Accounts Commission today is an important report with lots of important messages for all of us. It says that, if we keep doing things the same way as we are doing now, there will be an additional financial burden on social care services by the end of this session, but that is why we have integrated health and social care. It is the biggest reform of health and social care services since the establishment of the national health service, ensuring that we can find better ways of delivering services, with more prevention and more community-based services to reduce admissions to hospitals and care homes.

It was in my party's manifesto, although I do not think that it was in Kezia Dugdale's manifesto, that we would invest an additional £1.3 billion over this session of Parliament in health and social care partnerships. The first instalment of that has been the £250 million transferred into health and social care partnerships in this financial year. We know that we face the challenge of an ageing population and we on this side of the chamber are determined to face up to that challenge and to work with local councils to address it.

Kezia Dugdale concedes that the biggest pressure on the Scottish Government budget is cuts being imposed by a Tory Government, but even though she accepts that the Tories—if Jeremy Corbyn is re-elected on Saturday—will be in power for many, many, many years, she expects us simply to shrug our shoulders and accept that. I do not think that that is good enough.

Kezia Dugdale: The First Minister tells the chamber that she has put £250 million extra into health and social care. What she forgot to tell the chamber is that she took £500 million out last year, and that is why we had to vote against her budget. The Accounts Commission report tells us that overall spending is falling. In fact, it says that the cuts are unsustainable, and the truth is that they do not have to happen. I am asking Nicola Sturgeon to do only what she has wanted to do her entire political life: make different choices from the Tories. When she writes her budget in the coming weeks, the First Minister will make a choice. She can double down with even more cuts to care, or she can back Labour's plans to use the powers of this Parliament. What is it to be?

The First Minister: Kezia Dugdale does not oppose Tory austerity. She wants to shift the burden of Tory austerity on to working people the length and breadth of this country. She put that proposition to the people of Scotland just four months ago and she is sitting on that side of the chamber because her party came third in the Scottish Parliament elections.

We will continue to face up to the challenges in our social care services. That is why we have integrated health and social care, which is something that, in all the years that Labour was in power, it shied away from doing. That is why we are taking the difficult step of transferring resources from acute health services to health and social care partnerships to build up the capacity of our social care services and help to develop more community services to keep our older people, where appropriate, out of hospitals and care homes and enable them to stay in their own homes. That is why we are taking all those actions and why we will reflect carefully on the Accounts Commission report to inform the serious decisions that the Government will continue to take.

I ask Kezia Dugdale to reflect on the position that she and her party are in. She regularly stands up and says that the future looks to be a Tory Government at Westminster and she has the nerve to come here and lecture me on the implications of Tory cuts that her party is powerless to do anything about. The Labour Party is a complete and utter shambles. Perhaps it should be taking more responsibility for the Tories' ability to continue to impose cuts on Scotland.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S5F-00247)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Tuesday.

Patrick Harvie: Last week, a newspaper levelled a serious allegation against the Scottish Government. It said: "SNP pledge to 'sabotage' bid to cut benefits". For once in my life, I hope that the *Scottish Daily Mail* has it right.

The Scottish Greens have published detailed proposals that show how about 13,000 people a year could be protected from the benefit sanctions regime if devolved employment programmes refused to co-operate with it, so I welcome the words that we have heard from Angela Constance. Although we cannot stop the United Kingdom Government putting conditions on work-related benefits, we are not going to give it any information or respond to inquiries if we think that that might lead to a sanction. I welcome that, but I would like to understand its scope.

Will the First Minister confirm that that commitment goes beyond the already announced voluntary schemes for disabled people and those who have long-term health conditions, or will it be a universal approach for all people who participate in devolved work programmes under the Scottish Government?

The First Minister: I thank Patrick Harvie for raising an important issue. The tenor of his question suggests that he knows how serious the Scottish Government is about using the limited social security powers that we are getting to introduce a social security system that has dignity and humanity at its heart.

In its current form, the sanctions regime that the Tories have imposed breaches those principles. I know that from the many people I see in my surgeries; we all see people who have had sanctions imposed on them for reasons that should never mean that they have to face those circumstances. As we develop the detail of the system that we are putting in place, we want to ensure that we mitigate the effects of the sanctions regime as far as we possibly can and that we do not co-operate with a scheme that piles human misery on human misery.

As Patrick Harvie knows, we have embarked on consultations that will lead to a social security bill in Parliament during the next year. The fine detail of that will flow from the consultation work that we are doing. The principles that Angela Constance has articulated are very clear and I look forward to having the assistance and co-operation of Patrick Harvie and his colleagues, and indeed members

from across the chamber—at least, from most parts of the chamber—in putting in place a system that, in its detail, lives up to the principles that we have articulated.

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful for that answer. It sounds as though the First Minister has gone further than in the past and that we will see employment programmes that are all voluntary and which do not impose socially harmful and counterproductive sanctions on people in Scotland.

Another aspect of the consultation that the First Minister referred to involves the need to have an additional allowance that respects and reflects young carers' position in life and the work that they do. Does she acknowledge that a great deal of the impact on them will be alleviated if we address the financial aspects and ensure that a young carers allowance is seen in financial terms and not only in terms of benefits in kind?

The First Minister: Again, I agree with the thrust of Patrick Harvie's question. The point of employment programmes should be to genuinely help people into work and not to put in place a system that is full of tripwires that mean that people fall over and end up being sanctioned. To help people into work will be the ethos that is behind the devolved employment programmes that we put in place.

Patrick Harvie will know that a young carers allowance is one of the things from the Green Party manifesto that we have agreed to consider. We are considering how that could best work to give effective help to young carers. Just in the past couple of days, I have read an update on the early discussions that we have had on developing that policy.

We have not concluded yet what the best scheme would be, but we will do so shortly. I look forward to another Government policy that is about recognising the work that is done by carers and in particular young carers, the impact that caring responsibilities have on their lives and the responsibility that is on all of us to help them to live a full life, notwithstanding those responsibilities. Again, I look forward to the co-operation of Patrick Harvie and his colleagues as we develop that policy.

Cabinet (Meetings)

4. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the First Minister what issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Cabinet. (S5F-00243)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Matters of importance to the people of Scotland.

Willie Rennie: New figures show that children in Scotland can wait two years for mental health

treatment. The Scottish Government promised that they would receive treatment within 18 weeks, but that promise has not been kept this year or last year. Why is the First Minister letting those children down?

The First Minister: I say to Willie Rennie that the issue is really important and I disagree with his characterisation. I think that Scotland was the first country in the world to introduce a target for access to mental health treatment for children and adolescents.

We recognise that we have more work to do to make sure that all children and young people get the access to mental health services that they deserve. We have been increasing investment in those services and increasing the number of clinicians who work in them. We have substantially increased the number of psychologists who work with young people with mental health issues.

Of course, as we covered in First Minister's question time two weeks ago, we are seeing a significant rise in demand for those services. Although that puts pressure on services that we have a responsibility to meet, we should welcome that increase in demand to the extent that it shows that young people are more able to come forward because the stigma around mental health issues is decreasing.

Our mental health strategy, which we will publish shortly and which is backed by £150 million of new resources, shows the seriousness with which we take the issue. We will continue to take steps to improve services so that all young people get the access that they need and deserve.

Willie Rennie: The First Minister says that the problem is that more young people are asking for help. It is not their problem; it is the Government's problem for not being ready. We saw this coming and we gave warnings about it. We have a plan to invest in primary care, emergency services and services for young people. What was the response from the Scottish National Party Government? It was to delay spending the £70 million that was available for mental health support because it could not get the strategy agreed on time. Will the First Minister commit to spending that £70 million on services for young people today?

The First Minister: Willie Rennie is raising an important issue but he should try to engage with it in a way that helps all of us to face up to and address it. The first thing to make clear is that it is not fair of Willie Rennie—I think that anyone who has been watching the exchange will know that it is not fair of him—to say that I described more young people coming forward for help as a problem. I did not do that; I said that it was a good thing, which we should welcome, and I went on to say that it was my responsibility and the

Government's responsibility to make sure that services can meet that increased demand. To be fair, that is what I said.

I also set out some of the actions that we are taking. Willie Rennie talks about spending. We have set out plans to invest an additional £150 million in mental health services; there is £54 million to reduce waiting times. We will spend £10 million to support new ways of improving mental health services in primary care settings, which, to be fair to Willie Rennie, he has repeatedly raised, and we will spend £15 million specifically to support better access to child and adolescent mental health services and a range of other initiatives that are all about positively recognising the increase in demand and taking steps to meet it.

I absolutely accept that it is for the Opposition parties to put pressure on the Government, to scrutinise the Government and to hold it to account. I hope that, on this vital issue, we can find a degree of consensus. This is one of the most serious issues that we face as a society; it is about not just treating young people with mental health problems but preventing mental health problems. We could have a much bigger discussion about that. The Government is absolutely committed to the actions that we have set out and I genuinely hope that we will have Willie Rennie's support as we implement those actions.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Does the First Minister agree that depicting women who serve in public life as sexual predators or—I quote—as a “poor excuse for women”, or referring to them with homophobic slurs, can never be excused as amusing satire and is in fact crass and deeply offensive?

The First Minister: I agree. I do not know specifically what comments Annie Wells is referring to. If it is the incident at the weekend—*[Interruption.]* This is serious. As I hope everybody knows, even my sternest critics would accept that I would never, ever condone homophobia. I genuinely hope that there is nobody across the chamber who would argue with that.

Some of the terminology that we have heard used in satire over recent days is terminology that I would never use. I do not condone it and I can well understand that people would be offended by it. However, it is not appropriate or reasonable to describe, for example, a lesbian woman who has been out as a lesbian for 30 years as homophobic because she personally is not offended by some of that terminology.

Let us all unite in condemning homophobia. We were just talking about mental health, and some of the reasons for mental health problems among

lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people relate to homophobia and homophobic bullying.

Let us bring a bit of seriousness to the issue. I take responsibility; such comments are targeted at me and my party as much as at anybody else. However, let us not use such things, as often happens, as things to throw at one another as politicians. Let us instead unite as a Parliament to say that homophobia has no place in our society. We should all challenge it on all occasions.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the significant support for the community maternity unit at the Vale of Leven hospital, which I was pleased to visit with her in the past. Will she ensure that the health board's proposal to close the unit is designated as a major service change and, therefore, one that must be subject to sign off by Scottish ministers?

The First Minister: As Jackie Baillie knows, the decision about whether a particular service change is deemed a major service change is one that is taken in consultation with the Scottish health council. Those discussions on the changes that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has put forward are on-going, and the health secretary will ultimately make that determination once that recommendation has come to her. The proposal that Jackie Baillie talks about, as well as some of the other service change proposals that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has made, are proposals. They must be consulted on and they must be properly considered with the interests of patients absolutely at their heart. Where there are major service changes, the ultimate decision will lie with the health secretary.

Jackie Baillie talked about our visit some years ago to the community maternity unit at the Vale of Leven hospital. That was when, as health secretary, I was working hard to secure and safeguard the Vale of Leven which, at the time when this Government and I took office, was under serious threat from the Labour Administration that preceded us. The Vale of Leven hospital got a future because of the decisions that this Government has taken and we will always act in the interests of local health services.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the First Minister for her reaction to the death of a young boy outside his school in my constituency last week, and whether she thinks that traffic exclusion zones around schools should be more widely considered.

The First Minister: Any loss of life on Scotland's roads is a terrible tragedy, and the death of a young child is especially poignant. Our thoughts are with the young boy's family and

friends at this unimaginably awful time for them. It is, of course, for local authorities to decide on road safety measures around schools; they do so in consultation with parents and local residents, and according to the specific circumstances in which schools are situated. Innovative measures, such as the traffic exclusion zone that I understand was recently trialled in Haddington, could certainly be part of those considerations. I encourage local authorities to consider such proposals, where it is appropriate to do so, because one thing on which I think we all agree is that the safety of children must be paramount.

Paralympians

5. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Government has to honour Scotland's Paralympians. (S5F-00248)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am sure that everyone in the chamber and across Scotland is proud of the achievements of the 33 Scottish para athletes who were part of team GB and the 17 medals that they brought home to Scotland. I am certainly looking forward to welcoming our Paralympians and Olympians home at a reception next week at Oriam, our new national sports performance centre at Heriot-Watt University. The event will be followed by a public event at Festival Square, here in Edinburgh. We are all proud of all our Paralympic athletes, but if I may, I will make special mention of Libby Clegg and Jo Butterfield because, as well as winning gold medals, they both set new world records—something to be doubly proud of. [*Applause.*]

Kenneth Gibson: I am sure that the First Minister concurs with me that the success of team GB shows just how much hard work has been put in by coaches and athletes, supported by their families. For Scotland to increase its medal tally from 11 in 2012 to 17 this year is truly heartening.

As a strong supporter of the this Ayrshire girl can campaign, does the First Minister agree that the silver medal that was won by swimmer Abby Kane, of Largs, in the 100m backstroke, is particularly inspirational? To what extent will the new £12 million para-sports facility that is being built in Largs aid Scotland's future Paralympians?

The First Minister: I agree entirely with Kenny Gibson's comments about Abby Kane. Abby Kane made team GB at the age of 13, which is an inspiration in itself. She went on to win a silver medal in Rio, which is fantastic. She has single-handedly demonstrated to a generation of young people, and young girls in particular, what they can achieve by hard work and dedication. I absolutely salute her prowess and her bravery—and the sheer delight that she has given us all

during the competition over the past couple of weeks.

We made a direct investment of £6 million into the overall investment in sportscotland's national centre at Inverclyde, which will open in spring 2017. That fully inclusive facility has been designed to enable athletes to train and stay, specifically to aid preparations for future games. I am sure that Kenny Gibson welcomes that. The centre will also be available to members of the local community, which is important. Therefore, it will provide a valuable asset in the area for people who might never be Olympic or Paralympic athletes but who nevertheless enjoy and should be encouraged to enjoy sport.

Mental Health Services (Young People)

6. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to reduce waiting times for young people referred to mental health services in Forth Valley and across Scotland. (S5F-00266)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The continued increase in demand for mental health services for young people shows, as I have just been saying, that in the past there were far too many children who were unseen and whose needs were unmet. To respond to that, we have doubled the number of psychologists who are working in child and adolescent mental health services. We are also investing an additional £150 million over this parliamentary session, and we will publish our new mental health strategy at the end of this year.

The Minister for Mental Health has made clear to all national health service boards that any fall in performance towards our target of 90 per cent of young people being seen within 18 weeks is not good enough and that we need to improve performance. Our £150 million investment includes almost £5 million for a mental health access improvement team, which has already started work with NHS Forth Valley.

Dean Lockhart: Any additional support to address urgently what is a concerning situation is to be welcomed. However, as has been mentioned, since the 18-week referral-to-treatment target was introduced in December 2014, the proportion of young people in NHS Forth Valley who have started treatment within that timeframe has fallen from 56 per cent to only 28 per cent, making the region one of the worst performing in Scotland.

My concern is that that figure of 28 per cent is not just a number—it highlights the fact that many young people are in desperate need of support, and that is the case not just in Forth Valley but across many areas of Scotland. The evidence

shows that over half of all diagnosable mental health problems start before the age of 14, so it is vital that young people in my region and in other areas get the help that they so urgently need when they need it.

Will the First Minister therefore listen to the calls from the Scottish children's services coalition to develop an urgent action plan for boards that need that urgent support, such as NHS Forth Valley? It is not just a question of more money; it is a question of more expertise being available. Will the First Minister encourage the Minister for Mental Health to join me in meeting representatives of the health board to see how we can best address that urgent and concerning situation?

The First Minister: The Minister for Mental Health would of course be happy to meet the member and will discuss those issues with health boards on an on-going basis.

Dean Lockhart is right about statistics. We all regularly quote statistics in the chamber, but all of us have to constantly remind ourselves that behind every one of those is a human being. That is a timely reminder for all of us. That is why it is important, first, to see the increase in demand not as a problem but as a sign that more young people are coming forward for help that they previously did not get, and then to recognise our responsibility to meet that demand.

The performance of NHS Forth Valley is unacceptable, and that has been made clear to it. However, Dean Lockhart is also right that it is not just about extra investment—although the health board is receiving help through extra investment—but that it is also about expertise. That is why I draw his attention to the last part of my first answer to him, in which I said that we have established a mental health access improvement team, which has already started working with NHS Forth Valley, so that that expertise, as well as the additional investment, can be brought to bear in bringing down the waiting times in the way that we expect.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Does the First Minister agree that it is probably high time that some members recognised that a huge effort is being put in on the ground to improve mental health services, particularly in NHS Forth Valley? For instance, there has been a complete redesign of service in NHS Forth Valley, with significant additional investment in CAMHS, which has led to a big increase in activity over the past year. Can the First Minister confirm what extra investment and support have been made available to help our dedicated professionals, who deserve our praise, to improve their service?

The First Minister: Bruce Crawford is right that we have to remember the dedication of the people working on the front line. They face increased demand, but the fact that waiting times in some areas are not as good as we want them to be is not down to any lack of dedication or hard work on their part. That is why I come back to the point that our responsibility is to increase capacity to meet that extra demand.

As I said, NHS Forth Valley is receiving support from our new team and from Healthcare Improvement Scotland to help it to deliver on its redesign, which Bruce Crawford was right to mention. We are also investing an additional £1.3 million in NHS Forth Valley over the next four years to support reductions in waiting times specifically and a further £725,000 over three years to support innovation in the delivery of CAMHS. That is in addition to the £0.5 million that was provided to the board this year to support further development in specialist CAMHS workforce and delivery. Intensive efforts are being made to support those at the front line to deliver those services, and that will be replicated across Scotland in different ways so that we have services that are capable of meeting the increased demand that young people are creating by coming forward because, thankfully, the stigma around mental health issues is beginning to reduce.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I agree with the First Minister that progress has been made to reduce the stigma around mental health issues, but there is no escaping the increasing waiting times that we have heard about. This week, the Scottish health survey revealed a postcode lottery, with children and young people in the most deprived communities more likely to have lower levels of good mental health. Last week, 10,000 members of the 38 Degrees campaign group took the time to reply to the Government's consultation, which closed on Friday, to say that more investment is required. Although additional funding is to be welcomed, does the First Minister share my concern that £150 million over five years might not be enough? What steps will the Minister for Mental Health take to keep that under review?

The First Minister: Monica Lennon is right to make many of those points and particularly to draw attention to the link between deprivation and mental health issues, which is very much in our minds as we develop the mental health strategy. She also referred to the fact that a number of people have submitted views to the strategy consultation, and those will be taken into account.

The £150 million investment is for a range of targeted improvements to increase capacity and improve waiting times. We are not just throwing a particular sum of money at the problem; it is dedicated, targeted money to deliver specific

improvements. Of course, we will keep that under review as we implement the new mental health strategy. There is an absolute determination on the part of the Minister for Mental Health and the Government as a whole to ensure that we have services in Scotland that can meet the increased demand for mental health services.

I return to something that I said earlier, which Monica Lennon was right to hint at. The issue is as much about prevention as it is about treatment. We as a society—we are not alone in this—must have a bigger debate about how we improve young people's mental wellbeing and not just treat their mental health problems.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Does the First Minister agree that the biggest thing that she could do to deal with the issue is to have a specialist in every surgery in Scotland? That is the biggest spend-to-save initiative that she could ever make.

The First Minister: We agree that there need to be more services in primary care—I indicated that in a previous answer. We are committed to having more link workers working in primary care settings, to improve the patient experience. In principle, I agree with the sentiment of the question. However, with an issue as complex as this one, I caution against anybody suggesting that there is one magic-bullet solution. We need to do a range of things to improve not only prevention but treatment and access to services, which is why the comprehensive holistic strategy that we will produce by the end of this year is so important. The point that Mike Rumbles raised will certainly have a part to play in that, but there is a range of other things that we must do as well.

Standing Safe Campaign

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-01290, in the name of Margaret Mitchell, on the standing safe campaign. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the campaign Standing Safe, which is being launched by the University of the West of Scotland on 14 September 2016; understands that the campaign is a student-staff partnership initiative raising awareness about and warning against sexual violence on campus; notes that the campaign states that incidents of sexual violence have seen an upward trend in Scotland since records began in 1971; acknowledges that the campaign, which will be led by students across the university's different schools and supported by the university's senior management, the Dean of Students, Student Services, SAUWS and Student Ambassadors, aims to address peer-on-peer violence in universities; recognises that it has established a number of external links, including with Lanarkshire Rape Crisis Scotland and NHS Lanarkshire, with the purpose of working collaboratively through focus groups and student-led workshops to tackle sexual violence on campuses and the harmful attitudes that underpin it; further understands that a collaboration with local artists as a means of providing the students with learning experiences is planned; wishes all those involved in the campaign success across all the university's campuses, including the campus in Hamilton, and notes the view that other university campuses across Scotland would benefit from a similar campaign.

12:48

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I welcome to the Parliament Dr Kallia Manoussaki and students from the University of the West of Scotland who have been involved in the launch of the standing safe campaign. In particular, I commend Kallia for the invaluable work that she has done, which has led to the promotion of the campaign.

I pay tribute to the University of the West of Scotland for being prepared to raise its head above the parapet and highlight and seek to address the issue of sexual violence on university and higher education campuses. That is known to be an issue not just in the United Kingdom but worldwide, but the university's public acknowledgement of the problem has led to both the issue being debated today and the recent launch of the campaign.

By way of background, according to Scottish Government statistics, since records began 45 years ago in 1971 there has been a continuous upward increase in the number of incidents of sexual violence, including rape and sexual assault, in Scotland. The Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 was passed in response to the worrying increase in the number of sexual offences. The

legislation aims to provide a more robust legal framework in which to deal with perpetrators.

To recap, sexual violence and harassment is a widespread, yet largely hidden, problem, which is no respecter of persons as victims are drawn from diverse backgrounds. It is a sobering revelation that—according to Rape Crisis, which commented in a recent BBC report—one in seven female students experiences sexual violence and/or sexual assault while at university, and that 68 per cent have experienced sexual harassment. Those figures do not include the sexual harassment and violence experienced by men.

Quite simply, if it is already recognised that such incidents are prevalent in the student age group and at that stage of life, it makes absolute sense for universities and further education institutions, whose ultimate goal is to educate, to address the issue with their student populations. However, there is a concerning lack of specific and explicit guidelines to which student victims of sexual assault can be referred for support. Most UK universities lack a clear strategy to support students to learn about and tackle the root causes of sexual violence and to understand what they can do about it.

All of that brings me to the launch of the standing safe campaign on 14 September at the University of the West of Scotland's Paisley campus, which I was delighted to participate in as the convener of the Justice Committee. The campaign is a student-led initiative in which students, aided and facilitated by staff, are working in partnership with key stakeholders such as the Lanarkshire rape crisis centre and the NHS Lanarkshire gender-based violence prevention unit.

The aim of the campaign, through focus groups and student-led workshops, is to tackle sexual violence and harassment on campus by crucially addressing the harmful attitudes that underpin it. Sadly, those attitudes are not new and are linked to rape myths and victim blaming. The project seeks to aid students' learning through collaborative working and employing innovative ways of engaging with students such as the use of creative artwork.

The standing safe campaign has three main aims: to engage students in an attempt to make them analyse and think about ways to change attitudes that can be harmful; to support and teach about safe bystander intervention; and to provide a practical toolkit to ensure that students know how to access help should they require it.

To further those aims, at the campaign launch last week, Ann Hayne, the manager of the NHS Lanarkshire gender-based violence unit, gave a fascinating presentation on how to help victims to

cope with and recover from trauma, which is a crucial factor for them to deal with in order to move on with their lives.

The unit has produced an excellent award-winning video of an animated film called "Trauma and the Brain". Police Scotland is using the video to train officers, which is a mark of its practical value. Promoting the video among the student population and making it available to student counselling services is just one example of the innovative and collaborative working that is at the core of the campaign.

In conclusion, the University of the West of Scotland's standing safe campaign represents an immensely important and groundbreaking initiative that will potentially lead to identification, early intervention and, crucially, the prevention of sexual violence and harassment on UK campuses.

It is to be hoped that, by tackling harmful attitudes within the 17 to 25 age group, we can reduce instances of sexual violence not just for this generation but for future generations of students as they go on to enter the world of work as adults. However, that will happen only if other further education campuses adopt a similar campaign.

It is a privilege to have had the opportunity to raise awareness of this pioneering campaign through today's parliamentary debate and to give my whole-hearted support to it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I welcome you to your role as convener of the Justice Committee. I enjoyed that role and I am a bit regretful that I cannot do it any more.

12:55

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I welcome Margaret Mitchell's debate on this subject. She and I attended the event in Paisley last week. I want to acknowledge the work of Hannah Brown and the stamp out media patriarchy—STAMP—group, the Students Association of the University of the West of Scotland and the staff who are working with them to change attitudes at university.

As a former co-convener of the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on men's violence against women, and as a campaigner on the issue, I believe that a woman's right to feel confident about her own safety—to stand safe—should be automatic. However, of course, it is not. That is why I have campaigned to get Clare's law enforced in Scotland and to make revenge porn a criminal offence, working with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies to keep on getting across the message that sexual violence against women has no place in Scotland, including in its

universities, colleges and other learning establishments.

It is never okay to use violence on someone in any context. However, the reality remains that at least one in every four women in this country will encounter some sort of sexual violence in their life. There is still a stigma about being a victim, and we hear a lot about victim blaming, the underlying message of which, even though it is rarely stated, is that somehow the incident was the woman's fault and that she really wanted it. No, she did not. Not in any way did she. She took the violence only because there was no possibility of her fighting against it. She was just as much the victim as the elderly priest who was shot in France recently. Sexual violence can be as fatal as that gunshot.

I joined the staff and the students at the University of the West of Scotland's Paisley campus last week, along with my colleague Margaret Mitchell, and I think that we learned more from them than we gave to them, and we are grateful for that. They were launching their own standing safe campaign—a microcosm and a great example of how we can work together to raise awareness while shifting attitudes on gender-based violence and forcing it out of our lives so that it is no longer the natural consequence of an old firm match or a joke to snigger over in the pub. If we can get to that place, we will see a real sea change. There is a movement—a shift—that is kicking down the historical tolerance of sexual violence, and I think that campaigns such as the one that we are discussing today are exemplars of that change.

In the Scottish Parliament, we are setting out a concrete, visible series of measures that are designed to get us closer to that ultimate aim of personal safety and of ensuring that people can stand safe from any violent or sexual assault. I am sure that members across all parties will work together to ensure that that happens.

Just last week, we were in the chamber debating the potential of a new specific criminal offence of domestic violence. That legislation will help to bring justice for victims and will also cover sexual violence of the mental and emotional kind—coercive behaviour of the sort that young people can experience when they are at university. They are coerced and then they think, “My goodness, I cannot be a victim”, but they are a victim, and we need to show that they are and blaze that trail.

The only effective method of creating a safe environment is to use two complementary sets of tools: local community groups working to eliminate this criminality; and a clear justice system that works to enforce the law. I am sure that Margaret Mitchell will take forward that endeavour with great gusto.

The Scottish Government has achieved a lot and continues to argue for more protection for victims and a more robust legal system that can deliver guilty verdicts for a very precise crime of sexual violence. I really welcome the work of STAMP, the UWS students and their staff and partners.

All of us who are involved in whatever way in working towards the eradication of these heinous attacks stand safely together. Having the right legislation in place is important and so is the kind of community action that standing safe is promoting. As a result of awareness raising and through peer contact, young people will be better able to protect themselves from risk, and those who suffer will have better access to support services. Further, hopefully, they will not be bystanders.

I am a realist. I do not think that men's violence against women is suddenly going to end, but I firmly believe that we are on the right road towards making it completely and totally unacceptable. There is no acceptable level of sexually motivated gender-based violence. I hope that we all stand safe with the students of the University of the West of Scotland.

13:00

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): The motion lodged by my colleague Margaret Mitchell comes at a particularly relevant time as Scotland continues to suffer from a reported upward trend in sexual violence. As my colleague said, it is worrying that the number of reported sexual assault crimes has increased by 10 per cent over the past 10 years, including a 9 per cent rise in the year to 2015. Reported rape and attempted rape continues to follow the same pattern, including a 5 per cent rise over the same year.

Colleagues will surely agree that those figures are stark and paint a picture of Scotland as a country that is failing to deal with the problem. As one of my party's spokesmen on justice issues, I want effective efforts to be made to tackle the root causes of that. Laws alone cannot do that, and I am pleased that today we are paying tribute to a campaign that recognises that and seeks to address the root causes.

When it comes to sexual violence, a particularly vulnerable demographic is the 17 to 25 age group. That is a time in a young person's life when they are finding themselves as a human being in many senses. Sexuality is part of that and can be greatly affected by circumstances. As young people leave school, many will be leaving home for the first time and will come into closer contact with their peers and generally have greater flexibility to do what they want without seeking parental guidance.

Young people can sometimes be impressionable and open to views both good and bad, which can set them on different courses. Without a guiding hand, a combination of those factors can pose dangers for some. That can happen even when they have grown up with the benefit of good moral principles. What is often missing is a means through which mutuality, fairness and respect can raise awareness among those who are at risk of causing danger to others and themselves.

Sadly, as has been said, a culture of victim blaming continues to exist in some parts of society, which can lead to people taking the wrong path and one that they will later come to regret. At the same time, there are those who suffer sexual violence or are close to those who are the victims of sexual violence. Such experiences can deeply affect and change lives for the worse. Again, we must ensure that there are adequate resources to help victims and potential victims who, with some guidance, can avoid finding themselves in situations that they cannot get out of.

The standing safe campaign is a joint effort of the staff and students of the University of the West of Scotland. By working with experienced external organisations such as Lanarkshire rape crisis centre and NHS Lanarkshire, the campaign can bring extensive experience and ability with these issues to the university campus. That experience is being used to deliver a number of innovative projects that seek to inform the students. As Margaret Mitchell said, there have been focus groups, workshops and social events.

I thank all those who have been involved in the project, and Margaret Mitchell for bringing the matter to the Scottish Parliament. As I have pointed out, sexual violence is moving in the wrong direction and we will not tackle its prevalence in society without looking at the full picture. I therefore welcome the joined-up approach of the standing safe campaign in tackling the causes as well as the consequences of sexual violence among a particularly at-risk age group. I hope that this framework can provide some inspiration elsewhere, where it may be helpful in other university contexts.

I repeat my thanks to all those who are involved in the project and wish them the best in their endeavours.

13:04

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank Margaret Mitchell for bringing the debate to the Parliament and highlighting the work of the students and the campaign at the University of the West of Scotland.

The years spent at college and university are meant to be life expanding, stimulating and very challenging. They are often remembered fondly as a time in a person's life when they had fewer responsibilities, good times with new friends and studied and achieved goals and qualifications that supported them throughout their lives. For too many women that is not the case, and sexual violence and harassment are a serious threat on campuses across Scotland.

Reported crime in Scotland may be at a 40-year low, but crimes of sexual violence, domestic abuse and rape are on the increase, even though they are historically underreported crimes.

The recent figures on the introduction of Clare's law reveal that almost 1,000 women in Scotland felt the need to check their partner's history, and that 42 per cent of them received information about a potentially dangerous partner. That has shown the importance of transparency and the law's relevance to students, given that they are often away from their own community and familiar networks.

It is difficult to accurately measure the scale of the problem of sexual violence on campus, but research carried out by *The Telegraph* suggested that a third of female students had experienced sexual assault or harassment as a student. Research also suggests that stalking, which is often a precursor to sexual violence, is high among student populations.

Although there is a lack of recent data, the National Union of Students 2010 study "Hidden Marks: a study of women students' experiences of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault" showed that the perpetrator in 60 per cent of sexual assault or stalking cases was a student, and that in 49 per cent of those cases they were at the same institution.

Sexual violence can have a devastating impact on someone. Although most cases involve a male perpetrator and a female victim, I recognise the vulnerability of all students to sexual violence and the need to challenge threatening behaviour.

Universities and colleges must tackle sexual violence; they must have clear pathways for students to raise concerns, so that the students can be confident that their complaints are taken seriously. Institutions must not shy away from strongly challenging unacceptable behaviour. An institution's reputation is vital to the recruitment process and its international standing, and there are concerns that some cases are downplayed. That is not acceptable. I welcome the positive examples of some universities in Scotland taking a very strong position on unacceptable behaviour.

There is a need for more significant cultural change, which will be difficult to achieve, but it is

crucial if we are to see a reduction in the figures. The rise in lad culture has led to everyday sexism often being laughed off and accepted, leaving women—often young women who are away from home for the very first time—being verbally assaulted and sexually molested.

The crime pattern is changing. We have seen an increase in hate crimes and sexual crimes. Indeed, crimes that are in many ways more individual and intimate are on the increase. The environment in further and higher education institutions can leave women vulnerable and at risk. It is to be welcomed that universities and colleges are taking proactive steps to make it clear that sexual assault and violence will be correctly dealt with as criminal matters and that there will be steps to support victims and to challenge a culture of accepting sexual harassment.

Institutions have a duty to ensure a safe environment for all their students and campus campaigns have a key role to play in making sexual violence and harassment unacceptable and taking positive steps to change our culture. Although campuses have a unique set of circumstances in terms of the age profile and living arrangements of students, their behaviour does not happen in isolation. We all have a responsibility to challenge sexism and misogyny in our society—attitudes that underpin much of the unacceptable behaviour—and make our society safer and more equal for all our sons and daughters.

13:09

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I welcome Margaret Mitchell's motion and restate this Government's full support for it. I join her in welcoming the staff and students from the University of the West of Scotland to the chamber today.

Violence against women and girls is a fundamental breach of human rights, and we are committed to doing all that we can to prevent and ultimately eradicate it. Sexual violence causes untold trauma to victims and to survivors. Let us be clear: it is not about sex; it is about power and control. The victims of rape and sexual assault are almost always female, which demonstrates clearly that this is an issue of gender inequality that is based on the norms and the assumptions of our society.

As Margaret Mitchell, Christina McKelvie and Gordon Lindhurst mentioned, there is still too often a focus on the victim's behaviour and choices, rather than the perpetrator's behaviour and choices. We must continue to challenge those norms and assumptions because there is simply

no excuse for sexual violence, and perpetrators of such violence must be fully held to account for their actions.

That work has to start early—indeed, even earlier than university. We are working to tackle gender norms and stereotypes in schools so that children and young people can enjoy mutually respectful, responsible and confident relationships with their peers.

In 2014, we published updated guidance that encourages respect from an early age and supports teachers dealing with the issues in schools. We also support initiatives in schools, including Rape Crisis Scotland's national sexual violence prevention programme, and are providing additional funding to accelerate delivery of the mentors in violence prevention programme across schools in Scotland. That programme aims to engage more young people across secondary schools to talk about gender-based violence because we want young people throughout Scotland—no matter where they go after school—to be aware of the issues, have the opportunity to consider and challenge the thinking behind them in a safe and open dialogue and be empowered to stand by their peers and be leaders among them to effect social change.

Through that work, we want to create the conditions for young adults who enter further and higher education to have healthy respect for others and an understanding of consent, but there remains much to do. Rape and sexual assault reports have steadily increased year on year. We believe that that is partly due to more people feeling confident of reporting. Initiatives such as Rape Crisis Scotland's support to report project have made a significant difference. However, one incident of sexual violence is one too many, and we must make further progress to stamp it out for good. That is why I commend the University of the West of Scotland on the standing safe campaign and its strong focus on prevention and early intervention.

As I have had the pleasure of visiting university and college campuses over the past couple of weeks during the freshers fairs, I have been struck once again by the importance of the campaign. Claire Baker summed up nicely how students—both male and female—feel about the excitement of their new stage in life, which must be how we see the time at university.

The standing safe campaign is a fine example of a collaborative, university-led approach to the issues. That aligns with the Government's equally safe strategy for preventing and eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls. Our strategy takes a gendered approach that recognises the fact that systemic women's inequality is at the heart of the problem and that a

focus on changing attitudes and tackling inequality is needed. That is as true on our campuses as it is elsewhere in society. Only through that will we achieve our vision of a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse and from the attitudes that help to perpetuate them.

Under that strategy, we are taking action. Last year, the First Minister announced an additional £20 million over the period 2015 to 2018 to tackle violence against women and girls and put in place better support for survivors. Furthermore, £1.85 million has been allocated for Rape Crisis Scotland to enhance awareness and the support that is available for survivors of sexual violence across the country.

In addition, we have allocated just over £292,000 this year to the University of Strathclyde to develop a toolkit for the prevention of violence against women, for the purposes of embedding the equally safe strategy in higher education institutions. The University of the West of Scotland will have much to offer the development of that programme through its standing safe campaign. The University of Strathclyde project that we are funding is considering all forms of violence against women and girls—including domestic abuse, which some young people will also experience.

In the recent programme for government, the First Minister confirmed that a domestic abuse bill would be introduced in the coming parliamentary year that will make Scotland one of only a handful of countries around the world to have criminalised psychological abuse and coercive control. The creation of that new offence will bring clarity for victims so that they can see explicitly that what their partner is doing, or their ex-partner has done, to them is wrong and can be dealt with under the law. It will also improve the police's ability to intervene in specific cases.

Through explicit acknowledgement that psychological abuse is a criminal offence and is unacceptable, we aim to shape and develop society's attitude towards what is domestic abuse. That was debated in Parliament last week, and I am very pleased that the Government's motion received unanimous support across the chamber.

We are strengthening the law in other areas, too. The Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016—the Parliament passed the bill in March—creates a specific offence of sharing private intimate images without consent. It also includes statutory jury directions for certain sexual offence cases, and we are taking the necessary steps to enable the act to be commenced in the first part of 2017.

I conclude by reiterating the Government's strong support for Margaret Mitchell's motion, for the work of the University of the West of Scotland and, indeed, for everyone in the further and higher education sector who is taking action in this field. It is for all of us to play a part in creating a Scotland that is truly equally safe for all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. That concludes the debate. I suspend the meeting until 2 pm.

13:16

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Good afternoon. Following this morning's events and the curtailment of general question time, the next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-01629, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a business programme.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Joe FitzPatrick): The purpose of the motion is to allow general question time to continue just prior to decision time.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 22 September 2016—

delete

followed by Securing Scotland's Position as the Perfect Stage for Events

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

followed by Securing Scotland's Position as the Perfect Stage for Events

followed by Continuation of General Questions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The remainder of general question time will be taken at 4.50 pm, before decision time.

Local Taxation

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-01580, in the name of Derek Mackay, on reforming local taxation.

14:01

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): I welcome today's debate on reforming local taxation. The timing means that we have had ample opportunity to digest the findings of the commission on local tax reform's report from last December and to reflect on the various alternative reforms that were advanced at the May election. I thank all the commissioners, especially those from beyond the world of politics and government, for their dedication and commitment to the report.

The commission's report, "Just Change: A New Approach to Local Taxation", is an excellent piece of work that sets out the fundamental concepts clearly, alongside some groundbreaking research. It was inevitable that any report would not satisfy all shades of opinion, but the work is authoritative, robust and insightful.

The commission's remit was to examine in considerable detail alternative systems of taxation rather than to make a recommendation for a particular tax. Perhaps the best articulation of why that remit was right—especially for a cross-party and cross-Government commission—was by the commission itself when it concluded:

"We recognise that political parties in Scotland will attach different weights to the considerations we have set out ... and will therefore draw different conclusions about the best way forward."

I am sure that that recognition of different and perfectly valid views will be reflected in today's debate. In having the debate, we are implicitly acknowledging the achievement of the commission—and the work by the previous Local Government and Regeneration Committee—in creating the space for change, as is evidenced by the different alternative forms of local taxation that were advanced in manifestos for the elections earlier this year.

It is important to recognise that the report and the reforms that the Government is undertaking are not the end of the story—they are the beginning.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): I thought that the beginning was nine years ago with the Scottish National Party manifesto for the 2007 election, in which the party said that it would abolish the fundamentally unfair council tax. Nine

years later, the cabinet secretary says that this is the beginning.

Derek Mackay: I am sure that Mike Rumbles has repeatedly reflected on the fact that the SNP put a proposition to the people through the 2016 manifesto and that we were handsomely rewarded by the electorate of Scotland. That is why we are in government and embarking on further legislation. On our proposition on local taxation, we genuinely want to engage with other parties and wider Scottish society to take the next steps forward.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Derek Mackay: I would like to make progress before I take a further intervention.

We have a mandate to progress with our proposal. A range of views remain on what our next steps should be, and differences remain among and between the parties that are in the Parliament. However, I hope that we can unite on one point: that the journey to a fairer and more sustainable local taxation system has only just begun. The next steps should be about progressivity and the progressive nature of what can be delivered—an approach that is absent from the Tory amendment.

We should all welcome the debate as part of the journey to critically examine all the proposals in a constructive spirit. The task that is before us will not be simple or straightforward. The present council tax was created by the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and it has been largely unchanged since.

The commission put its finger on the situation when it noted:

“Amongst all the taxes we pay, Council Tax is especially visible—every household gets a bill”.

That is in contrast to other taxes. VAT and a number of other taxes are part of the cost of goods and services, so they are not always visible. The realisation of that is what sets “Just Change” apart, as it recognises the political challenges.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary’s openness. Will he address the concern of my constituents in Strathkelvin and Bearsden that the council tax that a council raises will stay in that council’s area?

Derek Mackay: I categorically assure every local authority area that every penny that is raised in council tax will stay in that local authority area. How we propose to allocate revenues towards education is as was proposed in our manifesto, which is through the revenue support grant. What is fairly illustrative about that is that it is similar to

how the mechanism of business rates works, and I have not heard the complaint that that mechanism has not worked to local government’s satisfaction. The principle is there, but I am clear that what is raised locally through council tax will stay with the local authority.

Council tax is certainly complex, but that is not the only difficulty. “Just Change” noted the complexity of the current council tax reduction scheme. However, I want to be clear that, although a huge number of regulations—amounting to around 200 pages—define the scheme, that is in part because it needs to work for a vast range of people in real-world situations. That can range from covering people who receive income from multiple sources that could never be captured by a P60 to ensuring that those with specific difficult circumstances—for example, carers—get the reliefs that we think that they need. Council tax reduction is not universal.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee ruled last week that the council tax reduction scheme is ultra vires. What is his view on that?

Derek Mackay: I am familiar with previous challenges to the competence of the council tax reduction scheme. For example, Jackie Baillie used to propagate the argument that it was ultra vires—outwith the powers of the Parliament. She is shaking her head, but I have checked the record. Of course, the argument about the competence of the scheme was being made prior to the transfer of social security powers.

When the UK Government abolished council tax benefit, we were able in partnership with local government to design a scheme to support the most vulnerable in our society through changed liabilities. I absolutely believe that the scheme is within the Scottish Parliament’s competence. We want to enhance and improve the welfare nature of the scheme through changing households’ tax liabilities. I think that that will be welcome news, as part of the reforms, to hard-pressed households that are in difficult circumstances.

I have touched on the complexity of the council tax reduction scheme and the necessity of that complexity to ensure that we protect people now and into the future. The scheme applies reductions that amount to about £340 million to just under half a million households, which is approximately one in five households. Without the scheme, those who are on low incomes or who for whatever reason have no income would be exposed to the full extent of the present council tax system and would be liable for the full council tax, even though they would not have the means to pay. That is a telling thought, given that the commission

“heard much evidence pointing to the futility of taxing those who simply could not pay.”

The council tax reduction scheme offers some support in that respect. In fact, it is more progressive for the lowest-income households. I accept the commission’s criticism of the scheme’s complexity, but I emphasise its importance in achieving the aim of support.

“Just Change” looked at a number of alternative taxes, including a land value tax, which would require further work. Although the economic principles are undoubtedly appealing, we must recognise the difficulties in determining land values in urban areas. I am sure that that debate will continue, but we are embarking on work to secure agreement on a consultation about levying a tax on development and on vacant and derelict land, which would reduce land banking and increase the supply of homes. We will take that forward in a stakeholder round-table meeting imminently.

“Just Change” considers income to be an important potential source of local tax; that includes drawing on the experiences of Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs in identifying Scottish taxpayers in readiness for the introduction of the Scottish rate of income tax earlier this year.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I am keen to understand whether what the cabinet secretary proposes is the assignment of local taxes for the local community or whether it is just a share of national taxation across Scotland. Is the approach local or national?

Derek Mackay: We have proposed a share of the national element of income tax through a formula, but we have still to engage with local government on that. We will want to explore that with local government.

There is certainly an attraction to assigning elements of income tax to local areas. I believe that that would incentivise growth and interest in local economies and wider interests, and it would provide greater financial accountability and less dependence on central Government grants. That is certainly in the spirit of what many people are trying to achieve.

We are keen to explore the alternative of tax assignment that the commission identified, and we will formally consult on that before taking the matter forward. That could improve the public understanding of how local services are funded, which is especially desirable given the preconceptions that were reported in “Just Change”, and therefore enhance local government’s financial accountability. It could give local government a material stake in the economy, and it would make overall taxation to fund local

government more progressive and linked to income.

Jackie Baillie: People would regard the assignation of taxes as creating instability and uncertainty for local government. Taxes may rise or fall. In the event that the yield fell, what would local government do? Would it just have to make cuts?

Derek Mackay: I have said to members that we want to discuss with local government how the process could work. We are not putting forward a concluded proposition. That engagement is worth having to understand the benefits and the risks of any such proposition.

The council tax regulations that I have laid set out changes to the council tax and the council tax reduction scheme. If the Parliament agrees to them, they can be delivered from as early as the next council tax year—from April 2017. The changes to the council tax will increase the charges on properties in bands E, F, G and H by 7.5 per cent, 12.5 per cent, 17.5 per cent and 22.5 per cent respectively.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Derek Mackay: I have about 30 seconds to go, and I really need to move to the end of my speech.

I believe that the regulations will unlock finance for education, as expressed in the SNP manifesto pledge, and the council tax reduction scheme changes will provide protection.

Those initial reforms can be delivered at low administrative cost to achieve their purpose. Longer-term change will need more discussion, consensus and engagement. I am certainly committed to that under the motion and through engagement with political parties. I am also committed to that in a positive, constructive and collegiate way.

I recognise that we have embarked on a journey in local taxation. We want to make local taxation more progressive, to deliver the steps that we received support for at the election and to engage further on what can be delivered next in view of the “Just Change” report.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the opportunity for change created by the December 2015 report of the Commission on Local Tax Reform; recognises the initial changes to council tax proposed by the Scottish Government, and supports continued discussion by all parties, with local government and wider society, of measures to improve progressivity and local financial accountability over the current parliamentary session.

14:15

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to discuss local tax reform in this extended debate.

It is fair to say, and I should acknowledge, that my party has something of a chequered history when it comes to local taxation. The commission on local tax reform stated:

“history shows that reforms to local taxation are politically challenging”.

That might be something of an understatement. It was back in the mists of time in the 1980s that a ratepayers’ revolt against a rating revaluation led to the then Conservative Government agreeing to scrap that form of local taxation. Its replacement was, of course, the immensely popular community charge. We all remember thousands taking to the streets to celebrate its universal acceptance and success.

Despite its undoubted popularity, the community charge was short lived. It was replaced in the 1990s by the council tax system, which was intended to be a property tax and personal tax hybrid system. The council tax is not a pure property tax, such as the rates were, in that properties are valued in bands, and the proportion between the highest property band and the lowest was set at three, which reflected the fact that a personal element was involved.

The council tax has its advantages. It is an efficient tax that is well understood and generally accepted, and it is relatively easy to collect. However, it also has its disadvantages. There is no direct link between the size or value of somebody’s property and their ability to pay their tax bills. Single people who live in larger properties will pay much more towards local services than a family of working people who live next door in a smaller property and consume many more council services will. Because there has been no revaluation since the council tax was introduced, many properties now find themselves in the wrong band. That can lead to frustration for constituents who cannot understand why they pay more council tax than those in the identical property further along the street.

It is not surprising therefore that, over the years, there have been a number of attempts to find a replacement for the council tax. Famously, we remember the SNP being elected in 2007 on a manifesto pledge to replace the council tax with a local income tax. My party did not support that, but I accept that the SNP’s success in that election was down in some way to that pledge, which capitalised on the concerns that many people—particularly retired people—had about how their council tax bills were rising.

In the parliamentary session that followed that election, the SNP was not successful in taking those plans forward. It is curious, though, that when it became a majority Government in 2011, it did not pursue the idea of a local income tax, even though it had a parliamentary majority. It now seems to have abandoned the notion altogether.

Instead, we have seen a nine-year council tax freeze, which the Scottish Conservatives have supported. The freeze has given council tax payers relief from what were often painfully fast-rising bills. In the early days of the Scottish Parliament, my constituents often raised council tax bills as a serious issue; that rarely happens now, which I am sure is the case for other members, too.

The Scottish Government’s latest attempt to find a replacement for the council tax involved establishing its commission on local tax reform to look at all the options, with a report published in December last year. It is a thorough report that considers a number of ways forward. The Scottish Conservatives did not participate in that discussion, as we preferred our own separate commission on competitive and fair taxation, which Sir Iain McMillan chaired. The Government and other parties criticised us for not taking part in the Government commission, but we felt that it would be duplication to work on two separate reports at the same time.

The Government’s commission came to the clear conclusion that

“The present Council Tax system must end.”

Unfortunately, its members were unable to agree, beyond that, on what should replace the council tax. In contrast, our commission proposed that the council tax structure should remain largely as it is but be reformed to have a fairer and more progressive local tax, with an increased multiplier for those at the upper end and additional protections for low-income households.

It was somewhat flattering to us to see that, when the Scottish Government finally announced its plans for the council tax, it had ignored more or less completely what its commission had recommended and decided to adopt something similar to what our commission proposed. We welcome that endorsement of all the hard work that was done on the Government’s behalf.

Winston Churchill famously said of democracy that it is

“the worst form of Government”

in the world, until we consider the alternatives. The council tax is a bit like that. Everyone knows that there are problems with the council tax, but no one has yet proposed a better plan to replace it.

However, we can continue to have that conversation.

Patrick Harvie: Even if we were to accept the unhappy reality that Mr Fraser paints, in which council tax is described as the least-bad option, is there a reason in principle why, if council tax is going to continue, it ought to be based on antique property values rather than current ones?

Murdo Fraser: Mr Harvie makes a fair argument for a revaluation—I accept that there is a sound logical reason for it. However, counter to that, it would be an expensive and bureaucratic exercise and I can guarantee that we would all have huge queues at our doors of constituents who were unhappy that their properties had been revalued and that their bills were going up as a result. However logical revaluation might seem, there is a political judgment to be made about that.

My party supports proposals to end the council tax freeze, which would allow councils the freedom to increase council tax annually by up to 3 per cent. We support additional protections for low-income households and we support those who are in properties that are in bands G and H paying a bit extra.

We depart from the Scottish Government in two respects. First, we oppose the increases for those who live in properties that are in bands E and F. Those properties can be relatively modest and we do not think that it is justifiable for all those who live in such properties to have a hike in their council tax.

Just as seriously, we oppose the approach that ministers are taking to how the increase in council tax will be dealt with. Ministers want to create a school attainment fund from which money will go direct to schools. We agree with that ambition, but ministers want to fund it by clawing back from councils the additional money—£100 million—that will be raised by the increase in council tax revenues and taking it centrally to pay directly to schools.

Mike Rumbles: Will Mr Fraser take an intervention on that point?

Murdo Fraser: If I have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask Mr Rumbles to be quick.

Mike Rumbles: What does Mr Fraser think about the cabinet secretary's statement that all the money that is raised will be kept by local authorities? Does he agree that what the cabinet secretary did not say was that the Government will actually take money away from councils, so council tax payers will be charged more, have their services—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Rumbles, that is hardly quick.

Murdo Fraser: Mr Rumbles made his point perfectly well.

It is not surprising that the Government's proposal has been met with outrage in local government circles. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has made clear its opposition to the plans, which it sees as breaking the link in which taxes that are raised from local householders are spent on local services. There is absolutely no precedent for what is being proposed, which undermines local democracy and local accountability.

I know that our concerns in that regard are shared not just by many of those who are in local government but by other Opposition parties in the Parliament. Our amendment highlights our concern about the SNP's centralising proposal and I hope that it will have the support of other Opposition parties.

Our plan would be to raise funding from those who are in properties that are in bands G and H only, which would raise an extra £30 million annually to put into local government. That would be new money for local government when, as the Fraser of Allander institute warned just last week, it faces another punishing round of cuts. That money could defend and support vital local services.

Crucially, we will defend the principle of local democracy and accountability and resist the centralising tendency that is all too typical of this SNP Government.

I move amendment S5M-01580.1, to leave out from "recognises" to end and insert:

"but regrets that the Scottish Government's proposals for Council Tax reform undermine the principle of local accountability and autonomy and fail to address a number of issues identified by the commission; notes the opportunities to remedy this over the current parliamentary session, and commits to further discussions by all parties to seek to establish an enduring system of local government finance."

14:24

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): They say that we can learn much from history. Let me delve into the recent past to set a little context for the debate this afternoon. It is truly instructive.

Like others, I take members back to 2007, when the SNP said in its manifesto:

"Local taxes can be fairer. The SNP will scrap the council tax and introduce a fairer system based on ability to pay."

That was the first of many broken promises. Then came 2011 and another manifesto, in which the SNP said:

“Over the period of the next Parliament, we will consult with others to produce a fairer system based on the ability to pay to replace the council tax.”

That went well, did it not? The SNP promised to replace the council tax but instead it has merely tinkered with it—so the broken promises continue.

Roll forward to the 2016 manifesto. Where is that promise to scrap the council tax? I could not find it; in fact, it has completely disappeared. That is perhaps the biggest broken promise of them all.

What we have instead is a set of proposals that are so timid, so lacking in ambition, that one wonders where it emanated from. Alex Neil, who was responsible for local government, is anything but timid. I cannot imagine a scenario where he would sign off on something like this. Was it the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister? I think that we should be told—but no, the cabinet secretary is not going to enlighten us.

After all, history is littered with quotes from John Swinney and Nicola Sturgeon. Remember the “discredited council tax” or “the unfair regressive council tax”? My personal favourite was Nicola Sturgeon saying in April 2007:

“Labour’s hated council tax is totally unfair and any tinkering with bands would not make the system any fairer.”

What delicious irony: here is the SNP simply “tinkering with the bands” and keeping, in their words, a “hated” and “unfair” council tax—exactly what the SNP said that it was against. They say that actions speak louder than words—the SNP’s actions in this case are a mere whimper.

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): Will Jackie Baillie give way?

Jackie Baillie: Why not? The member is not the quietest of them.

Kevin Stewart: I most certainly am not.

In the “Just Change” report, the commission talked about not only property taxation, but land taxation and income taxation. As the cabinet secretary has rightly said, this is the beginning. We are also talking about consulting on a vacant and derelict land tax and assignation of income tax. Will Jackie Baillie support those moves? Are they not progressive?

Jackie Baillie: I think that that was a speech, Presiding Officer, but I will let that stick.

Let me enlighten the minister. The first recommendation of the commission was to end the council tax. The motion before us today does not even give a commitment to do that. Frankly, I

will not take any lessons from the Scottish Government on that point.

It is an absolute irony that the SNP can today, without embarrassment, tell us that this is about change, when all that it has done is tinker at the margins. A decade on, the SNP has not scrapped the council tax, and its proposals for reform are disappointing and lacking in ambition. The council tax is regressive: proportionately, the very poorest shoulder the larger burden. The SNP has merely tinkered round the edges.

The SNP had an opportunity to do things differently. I served on the commission for local tax reform with Andy Wightman. Gathered in the room were experts, practitioners and elected members from local government and from this Parliament. We heard from professionals and directly from communities themselves about what they wanted to see. The officers serving the commission brought together data and modelling to help the members in their work, and we are grateful to them for doing so. Everything that anyone needed to know about local government finance and the options available was in the commission’s report. There were 19 separate recommendations, and I have referred to the very first one, which was:

“The present Council Tax system must end.”

Derek Mackay rose—

Jackie Baillie: I think that the cabinet secretary should listen to this.

Seven words—the shortest recommendation, but the most powerful—but the SNP cannot bring itself to implement the unanimous view of the commission by scrapping the council tax.

Derek Mackay: Jackie Baillie mentioned embarrassment with policy. Does she recollect that, during the course of the election, it was the Labour Party that abandoned the welfare element of local taxation policy? Is she not further embarrassed that she was proposing to replace a property tax with another—Labour—property tax?

Jackie Baillie: I am not remotely embarrassed that, under Labour’s proposals, 2 million households would be better off. Eighty per cent of people would pay less under our proposals, which are far more progressive than the SNP’s ever are.

The commission was a cross-party approach. The cabinet secretary spent about 12 of his 13 minutes telling us how good the report was. There should not have been any surprises there; it was chaired by a member of his Government, so I do not understand why there is a need for delay.

Unlike the SNP, Scottish Labour used the commission’s work to design our policies. We believe that the unfair council tax should be scrapped, and, as I told the cabinet secretary,

under our proposals, nearly 2 million households would be better off and would pay 80 per cent less than they do today.

In addition, we would provide local government with a basket of taxes, including a land value tax on vacant economically inactive land and a tourist tax, and we would devolve the surplus from the Crown Estate. We have a range of measures that are designed to transform local government funding.

Local government funds important things such as teachers, schools and care workers for our older people. Last year, the SNP cut £500 million from the local government budget for 2016-17. We discovered from the Accounts Commission report that was published today that the cuts are not the 5 per cent that was passed down from the UK Government in the block grant; the SNP decided to land a staggering 11 per cent cut on local government—a deliberate choice to cut local services. That is a clear case of continuing austerity—our very own brand of SNP austerity, which is austerity on stilts.

The SNP has a choice: a choice to properly reform the funding of local government—a choice that it has not yet made, because it is too timid. All it will do is continue to centralise control in Edinburgh. I therefore fear for local services and local democracy.

I move amendment S5M-01580.2, to insert at end:

“further notes the SNP manifesto commitments to scrap the Council Tax in both 2007 and 2011 and that the Scottish Government has failed to deliver on those pledges; recognises that its current proposals for reform “fall short of making the Council Tax a ‘proportionate’ tax” as noted by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe); acknowledges that, in her report, the Scottish Government’s poverty adviser said that the “Council Tax is widely viewed as no longer fit for purpose” and to “be bold on local taxation”; recognises the level of cuts to funding that local authorities have faced in recent years and the consequent impact on the services that local people rely on; commits the Scottish Government to bring forward reform that is more progressive than the current proposals as well as using the powers of the Parliament to invest in Scotland’s economy and its people.”

14:31

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I am delighted that in these precious two hours we are debating local taxation and discussing the report of the commission on local tax reform. I had the privilege of sitting on that cross-party commission, which the Scottish Government established. We undertook our work in good faith and I thank my fellow commissioners and the members of staff for their diligent hard work in getting us to where we got to—I think that two of them have joined us in the chamber.

As a commission, we agreed that

“There is now a real prospect of beginning a programme to make local taxation fairer—more progressive, more stable, more efficient and more locally empowering.”

We entrusted those charged with taking forward our work to respect the spirit in which the commission was established and in which it discharged its obligations.

We agreed our first recommendation, which is that

“The present Council Tax system must end”—

that took us two nanoseconds. Importantly, we also agreed that

“This is an opportunity that must not be missed.”

That was our closing recommendation, and in my view it is the central issue before Parliament. We have an opportunity that must not be missed.

We have five years, but we do not yet have agreement on some fundamental principles—principles that are taken for granted in the constitutional architecture of local government in other European countries. Many of those principles were enshrined in international law by the Council of Europe in 1985, in the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The former minister and co-chair of the commission, Marco Biagi, confirmed in this chamber that that is an international treaty

“to which we are bound ... It commits us to applying basic rules guaranteeing the political, administrative and financial independence of local authorities.”—[*Official Report*, 17 June 2015; c 66.]

As I outlined earlier this week, those rules are being breached by the Scottish Government, most notably in the proposed intention to appropriate £100 million from council tax resources and reintroduce rate capping. It is doing that not by statute, as the Tories did—I did not agree with them, but at least they had the courage to do it by statute in the Rates Act 1984—but by stealth, through the back door. If Angela Merkel were to do that in Germany, it would be illegal under article 28 of the German constitution. Indeed, in evidence to the Local Government and Communities Committee this week, COSLA pointed out that this is the first time in the history of local taxation since the introduction of the poor law in 1579 that local taxation has been appropriated for national spending priorities.

None of the important detail is being addressed. I had a constituent who lived in a band E property that is now worth quite a bit less—£20,000 less, in fact—than nearby flats that are in band B. Yesterday, Joan Hewton, who is Lothian assessor and president of the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation’s Scottish association, said that she expected there to be many appeals next year, and

that virtually all of them would fail because the current statute insists on 1991 values being used. The commission on local tax reform found that 57 per cent of properties were in the wrong band. If we organised income tax on that basis, the First Minister would be paying no tax today, as she was a student in 1991. Perhaps that is also true for the finance secretary; I do not know whether Mr Mackay was still at school then.

I have another constituent who had problems paying his council tax. Yesterday, the sheriff officers were knocking at his door. According to Citizens Advice Scotland's evidence to the commission, council tax arrears are now the most common debt that its clients seek advice on. In the words of one money advice worker in east Sutherland, council tax arrears are often the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Those are just two aspects of the council tax system that the commission looked at and took evidence on, and that are crying out for reform. The Government has said nothing because it has not yet even responded formally to the commission's report.

I urge ministers to read Citizens Advice Scotland's evidence and the testimonies of people who, tragically, would be better off if their wages were arrested. I ask them to appreciate that the work we undertook in the commission was about sorting out so many problems that have been lying unattended for far too long and which are in the gift of this Parliament to sort out.

Since the commission reported, a growing number of influential voices have appealed for the kind of ambitious transformation that we sought to initiate. The chair of the commission on housing and wellbeing, the former Auditor General, Robert Black, said in his report, "One year on":

"One recommendation was to reform the current system of property taxation—the Council Tax. This would seek to put an end to a system that disproportionately affects the poorest households ... Regrettably, there has been no sign that the Scottish Government will reevaluate property values, nor adjust how the tax is calculated, despite many properties sitting in the wrong band."

Although he acknowledged the Government's proposals, he argued that

"these changes mean very little to those paying an unfair level of tax."

Naomi Eisenstadt, the First Minister's independent adviser on poverty and inequality, urged ministers to

"be bold on local tax reform."

We have heard from the First Minister that she will accept all the recommendations of Naomi Eisenstadt, who further noted that

"this is a central moment of political decision, an opportunity to introduce a much more progressive system, one that will have important implications, particularly for working households at or just above the poverty line."

The Scottish Government's proposals are an embarrassment. It is shameful for a Government whose finance ministers stand here and tell us that progressivity lies at the heart of their tax plans to perpetuate probably the most regressive tax in the UK. However, we can change that, and I think there is a progressive majority in this Parliament to do so. We can, for example, do a revaluation. That is not a complex matter, but one that is simple and straightforward and uses modern techniques.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Will Andy Wightman clarify how much a wholesale revaluation would cost and how long it might take?

Andy Wightman: The commission on local tax reform took evidence on that and the figures are in its report. I do not recall a specific figure.

Countries such as Denmark not only have regular revaluations through mass appraisal and computer techniques but split the land values into site value and the value of improvements for every property in the country. Estonia, which has the most competitive tax system in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and levies tax only on the land in urban and rural areas, also does that. Such things are straightforward; the land register contains 70 per cent of properties and information on property values is fed in every single day.

We can accommodate new liabilities through transitional reliefs and tapers, as in Wales. Elderly households can be given deferral options, as legislated for in Northern Ireland in the Rates (Deferment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010—the document that I hold in my hand. None of those things is terribly difficult. Today we published an alternative statutory instrument using powers in the Local Government Finance Act 1992. Ministers could lay an instrument next week to achieve much of what I have suggested.

I urge parties across the Parliament to rise to the occasion, seize the moment and implement the many lessons and recommendations in the commission's report. We will work constructively with all to do that. I urge ministers to have the decency to respond formally to the report.

I move amendment S5M-01580.3, to insert at end:

"regrets the Scottish Government's current lack of ambition in the reform of local taxation; endorses the conclusions and recommendations of the Commission, in particular that the present Council Tax system must end, that the new system should offer greater flexibility to local government and strengthen local democracy, that the system of local taxation has to include recurrent taxation on

domestic property and that liabilities should be linked to up-to-date property values, and considers that the proposals outlined in the Scottish Green Party's Fair Funding for Public Services paper and its alternative Council Tax statutory instrument represent a fair and progressive way forward for local government finance."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate. Time is tight, so I ask everyone to keep their speeches to under five minutes.

14:39

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I stand as an unashamed advocate of devolution—of devolving power, responsibility and autonomy as close to the people whose lives are affected as possible.

The Gaelic for devolution is *fèin-riaghladh*, which literally means self-governing. With new and old powers over taxation, all of us in the chamber enjoyed the recent campaign during which we offered the electorate different proposals on tax, including the council tax. Although it was the current Government's party whose manifesto won a majority, I personally enjoyed the exchange of ideas on how tax is a means of, and an illustration of, self-government, and I continue to appreciate speaking to members on all sides of the chamber about how our taxes can be built on a solid foundation of accountability, fairness and localism.

Today's debate is the start of reform. As the cabinet secretary said, the commission on local tax reform noted that, of all taxes, the council tax is especially visible and seems to attract most debate about devolution, localism and accountability.

In our 2016 manifesto—which I promoted throughout my local campaign in the largest council area, the Highlands, where people perhaps feel the furthest from Edinburgh, and which I was still elected off the back of—we outlined our intention to start the reform of council tax bands in a fair, balanced and progressive way. Alongside our proposals for raising tax, we very importantly identified the specific uses for the extra funds that would be raised, to ensure that our society is fairer and more prosperous.

Those principles are not new, but how we apply them is. This Government has a proud record of delivering for local communities and mitigating the toll of the last recession on families up and down the country. I have seen that at first hand in the Highlands. By freezing the council tax for nine years and continuing to provide the extra funds to councils for basic public services, the Government ensured that council tax was affordable for hard-pressed families across Scotland. However, we recognise that the time has come to lift the freeze in order to give councils greater freedom, while

simultaneously ensuring that any increases are capped at 3 per cent, in recognition of the continuing economic challenges that face many.

Mike Rumbles: It is hard to reconcile what the member has just said with what is happening in Aberdeenshire, for instance, where the Government's proposals will take millions of pounds away from the local authority, because the grant will be cut. What is happening is the opposite of what she is saying.

Kate Forbes: I would make two points in response to that. We have made it clear that every penny that is raised in a council tax area will be spent in that council tax area; and our plans are progressive, because it is those with the broadest shoulders who will take on the burden of the increases.

We recognise that times have changed and that it is time to lift the freeze. By changing the property bands for those who reside in properties in bands E to H, the council tax is more progressive because, as I have just said, that means that those with the broadest shoulders will pay a fairer share. In practical terms, it means that three quarters of Scottish households—1.8 million Scots—will pay no more council tax than they do at the moment.

As an accountant, I recognise that the council tax is a lever, and I want it to be used to protect family incomes, support local services and deliver a vision of a fairer and more equal society where children will never be discriminated against in our education system because of poverty.

With regard to levers, I also want to put on record my support for the Government's plan to give councils the option of offering no discount for second homes as a method of tackling rising house prices for full-time residents. As I highlighted in my rural housing speech last week, that issue is of vital importance to people in rural constituencies, and the planned action is an extremely positive step.

The Scottish Government's plans on local taxation are ambitious but also fair. I also recognise that this is the start of a process and not the end.

14:45

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): By common consent, no system of local government finance is perfect, and it is certainly the case that no system is universally popular. In view of the history of local government finance in Scotland and across the UK, it is a measure of its resilience that the council tax has lasted—although not without criticism and not without flaws—for the past 23 years. In the past, strong criticism has been levelled against the

council tax. Many people will remember the words of Alex Salmond, who said:

“There will be no misunderstanding. We are determined to abolish the unfair council tax.”

These are changed days indeed, as Jackie Baillie noted.

I will set out where I agree with the Scottish Government’s approach. After years of debate and aborted proposals for a range of alternatives including local income taxes and land value taxes, ministers have settled on reform of the existing council tax system. I welcome their belated acknowledgement that the council tax is, in essence, a sound system of local taxation. It is hard to avoid, it is transparent, it is comparatively cheap to administer, it has a high collection rate and—in so far as it is possible—it is accepted by taxpayers. We on this side of the chamber also endorse the ending of the council tax freeze.

However, that is not an endorsement of rising council tax bills. As Conservatives, we look to councils to keep a lid on spending to curb taxpayers’ bills, but it is right and proper that those who are elected to serve as councillors should ultimately make decisions on local taxes and bear responsibility for those decisions. At this point, I must depart from the Scottish Government’s plans. It is hard to see the logic of, on one hand, restoring local accountability through ending the council tax freeze while, on the other hand, clawing back a proportion of local tax revenues to be distributed as ministers decide. The creation of an attainment fund is a welcome step; ministers’ proposed method of funding it is not.

As COSLA president David O’Neill said last week,

“There is a clear and honourable link between taxes raised from local householders being spent on local services and this has been a Scottish tradition for generations. The Scottish Government will destroy that link with their plans to use council tax money for a national policy.”

Derek Mackay: Will the member take an intervention?

John Scott: I would really rather not. The cabinet secretary will know that we are short of time already. Forgive me.

The attainment fund is a policy of the Scottish Government and it is the responsibility of Government ministers to identify the funding for it from the Government’s own budgets instead of saddling local councils with the bill.

People in band E houses will see a £105 rise, those in band F houses will see a £207 increase and those in band G houses will see a £335 increase. At the very top, band H householders will see their bills increase by £517. Those reforms will affect 674,793 households across Scotland.

Although we welcome the proposed exemptions—if not the council tax reduction scheme, which we believe is not within the gift of the Scottish Government—the changes impose a significant additional burden on ratepayers in Scotland that will give further credence to the growing view that Scotland is an expensive place in which to live and work. In my constituency, many higher-rate taxpayers in the aerospace industry have transferable skills that are much sought after and are in demand worldwide. This will do little to encourage them to remain in Ayrshire and in Scotland. As the Government knows, it is difficult enough to retain existing businesses and jobs in Scotland. This additional layer of taxation is just one more obstacle to overcome in trying to encourage further inward investment.

Of course, we all want to see the attainment gap closed, and that work needs to be funded. Nonetheless, we feel that this is robbing Peter to pay Paul. Local authorities are constantly seeing their roles reduced by the Government’s centralising agenda, as functions and responsibilities that used to be theirs are removed and taken to the centre to be put under the ever-tightening grip of the Scottish ministers. In the long run, that is bad for local democracy and accountability, and it is discouraging for local councillors and council staff, who are wondering what their role will be in five years’ time as they approach next year’s election.

As David O’Neill pointed out, this is a “universal solution to a very targeted issue.”

Although we know that the money, an additional £100 million a year, will be spent on a laudable aim—closing the attainment gap—I just hope that the gap does, indeed, get closed by this measure. I say to Mr Swinney and Mr Mackay that we will be watching them closely. If the money is spent and the gap does not close, the people of Scotland will pass their judgment on them at the next election.

14:50

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I swear that I saw a shiver running down Derek Mackay’s spine when John Scott threatened to watch him. The minister had better watch out.

This debate has been mired in rhetoric from the very beginning—all the way back to the poll tax days—up to the present day. If members look back to 2007, they will see that Nicola Sturgeon regarded the council tax as “hated”. She said:

“tinkering with bands would not make the system any fairer but would require a damaging revaluation.”

That is an interesting perspective. Even back in 2007, she said that “tinkering” was insufficient, but that is exactly the proposal that we have got today.

All that is despite the other high rhetoric that we have heard in between 2007 and now. Indeed, in 2010, the council tax was regarded as regressive and unfair. In 2011, the Government was going to have a cross-party review, but it took until 2014 for that to happen. Even Marco Biagi, when he launched the commission on local tax reform, regarded the council tax as an unfair measure. Andy Wightman quite rightly pointed out that the commission report said that the council tax should end. Therefore, even up to the present day, the rhetoric has remained strong, but now we have a different policy, which is to retain the exact thing that was before regarded as hated and regressive.

The rhetoric has been ramped up again. We have just heard from Kate Forbes that the proposal on council tax is progressive. I do not know what Nicola Sturgeon was thinking back in 2007. Why did she not hear Kate Forbes in the future saying that its proposals on council tax were going to be progressive?

The SNP even said in its manifesto that Adam Smith principles would be adopted with the implementation of the changes. It talked about the proposals being reasonable and balanced, and said that they would promote fairness. Those are all now the principles at the heart of the hated and regressive council tax, so I find it quite dispiriting that the rhetoric remains high even though the principles have changed.

Derek Mackay: Willie Rennie is providing a critique of others, which is fair enough, but will he expand on the detail of the Liberal Democrats' position on council tax? They seemed pretty vague on the matter in their manifesto.

Willie Rennie: I am glad that Derek Mackay has been studying our manifesto; he is obviously worried about what John Scott will think next.

We have been in favour of a local income tax. We were prepared to join the commission in the spirit of cross-party consensus to seek a long-standing solution for the future. We thought that that was the right thing to do, because local taxes have been the subject of heated political debates over the years. We were prepared to put in our lot with the commission, but we were desperately disappointed when 16 of its 19 recommendations were rejected by the Government within months of the report being published.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: Not at the moment. We were in favour of ending the council tax. We are now in favour of looking at land value taxation, because we believe that that merits further consideration. In fact, the commission considered that issue. It looked at bringing back into use derelict land,

particularly in urban areas. That works in other countries.

Kate Forbes: Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: Not at the moment. It would be possible to adapt the system to work in partnership with the business taxation system, and perhaps to simplify the process. People would also not be penalised for making improvements to their property.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: Not at the moment. Those are the benefits of a local land value taxation system. Bringing that into a wider reform programme would have significant benefits. Therefore, we welcome today's proposal that we should continue working on an enduring system, but what the Government is proposing is inadequate.

As members will know, we are also in favour of introducing a real progressive increase in taxation. We want to introduce a penny on income tax, which would not bring in the timid amount that the Scottish Government is proposing for education but would bring in £500 million. The SNP now seems not to regard that proposal as being progressive, but it sees its council tax proposal as being progressive. The world has just turned upside down; I do not know what the minister is thinking these days.

All those proposals are part of a wider package that is required to ensure that we can invest in public services and that we have a proper local system of taxation for the future—not one that just takes money from one part of the country and gives it to another in an arbitrary fashion but one that can invest in public services and deliver a progressive system for the future.

14:55

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on reforming local taxation. The debate is timely and, I hope, a constructive opportunity for the Parliament to come together and discuss continuing reforms to local taxation. That is the key point, because the current Scottish Government reforms are not the last word on the matter, as the cabinet secretary made clear in his opening speech. As convener of the Local Government and Communities Committee, I am keen to support that approach and that debate.

I take issue with members who claim that the current suite of reforms is too timid. Following several years of the council tax freeze, local taxpayers' council tax will rise again by up to 3 per cent. That is not timid; it is sensible. We well remember the massive hikes in council tax in

years gone by, which impacted on many of our communities. A 3 per cent ceiling provides my constituents with a welcome degree of protection.

Patrick Harvie: Bob Doris may feel that 3 per cent is the right limit, but why should it be decided nationally and imposed locally, rather than local councils being given control of their own rates?

Bob Doris: Patrick Harvie makes a reasonable point. We are not yet sure of the procedures that will underpin the 3 per cent ceiling. Dialogue must continue on that.

I will address the proposed reform of the multipliers that set council tax levels for people who stay in properties in bands E through to H. For people in band E properties with incomes of more than £25,000, bills will increase by £106 on average. In the wealthiest properties—in band H—the increase will be an average of £517 each year. If we place that in the context of the additional 3 per cent increase, it is no surprise that the Scottish Government is introducing an enhanced council tax reduction scheme to benefit 54,000 households on incomes of less than £25,000 and plans for tapered support for certain households above that income threshold. The Local Government and Communities Committee is scrutinising the statutory instruments that underpin those changes and we got consensus that the changed system is fairer. Whether it is less regressive or more progressive is perhaps a debating point, but there was consensus that it is fairer, and all members should welcome that.

If we were to revalue and were to go for a proportionate system of council tax bands, it would mean that the council tax for band H properties would rise not by £500 but by 250 per cent. We must remember that some of the properties that are currently in band H would no longer be in that band and other properties would move up to it. That is a huge tax increase for any constituent at any band level. It is not that I am unwilling to make such a change, but an important principle of taxation is that we must try our best to get a degree of consensus from our local taxation base as we move towards more progressive forms of taxation. To be clear, the local taxation base is all the constituents whom we represent.

Andy Wightman: Will Bob Doris give way?

Bob Doris: I apologise to Andy Wightman because I do not think that I will have time for his intervention.

Of course we should eventually move towards a revaluation but not at the same time as a 3 per cent increase in council tax and additional increases to the bills for bands E to H that range between £95 and £554, depending on which local authority area someone stays in. However, plans must be prepared at some point for how we

move—with consensus, I hope, and in the medium term, I would say—to a revaluation.

The money will be spent on educational attainment, and that will be done in a redistributive way. *[Interruption.]* Mr Rumbles might learn something if he listens. What will happen is that money will be taken from wealthier families and invested for children who are living in deprivation, including children in middle and upper-class areas who are afflicted by poverty, and whose educational attainment is suffering. I am proud of the reforms, but they are only the first stage.

15:00

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to contribute to this important debate, which I hope will be a reminder to the cabinet secretary that the principal purpose of this Parliament is not for ministers to transmit the will of the Scottish Government to MSPs and to the people but for MSPs to transmit the will of the people to the Scottish Government. People are looking to the Parliament to show a lead, to be bold and to make progress from the Scottish Government's nine years of frozen initiative, annual budgets, short-term programmes, missed opportunities and lack of imagination.

In the 2015 general election, the Scottish National Party claimed that it would form a progressive anti-austerity alliance, yet its flagship policy of the council tax freeze was, and is, not progressive but regressive, in that it benefits most the richest people in the biggest houses. Of course, it has not countered austerity, either; it has deepened it. People are complaining that local authorities are introducing and putting up charges. What do we expect when the council tax has been frozen for nine years?

The Labour Party's stance in this debate is straightforward. We should be using a universal and progressive system of taxation on property to invest in the collective provision of public services to lift the whole of society. Instead of using local charges to raise revenue for local government, we should be using fair taxation on the basis of the old socialist idea of from each according to their means to each according to their need.

I do not doubt that we need to change the mood of the country to open people up to the possibility that it can be better than this, and to the idea that good, democratic, accountable public services demand good, democratic, accountable public investment. The question before us is not whether we should raise the money, but how we should raise it. To the Conservative Party I say that we in Labour reject the view that the wellbeing of others and the public interest are achieved only when

people pursue personal self-interest. We stand for need before greed and people before profit.

When the SNP first formed a Government in 2007, it did so, as we have heard, on the basis of scrapping the council tax. The SNP even hailed it as

“the biggest tax cut for Scots in a generation”,

which could only have been a reverential nod to the infamous Lawson budget of 1988, which brought about the abolition of all but one of the higher rates of taxation, bountiful tax cuts for the better-off and the biggest tax redistribution from the rich to the poor in the whole of the last century. Of course, the SNP’s proposed local income tax was neither local nor a tax on income. The tax was to be set nationally by the nationalists, and it was a tax on earnings rather than a tax on income; income from interest payments and income from share dividend payments were excluded.

The Labour Party’s stance is clear. We need to ensure that a tax on property remains, because property plays a central role in wealth accumulation and wealth inequality. According to Shelter, the wealthiest tenth of households possess five times the housing wealth of the poorest tenth. Wealth inequality is twice as big as income inequality in this country. According to the report by Shelter called “Know your place”,

“Housing is the single greatest repository for wealth held by individuals in the United Kingdom.”

Therefore, if we are to seriously tackle inequality, we need to concentrate not just on income inequality but on wealth inequality.

Let us win the battle of ideas and persuade people that local government can be an agent of change, a vehicle for investment, a generator of jobs and a provider of publicly run public services and—who knows?—a bit of municipal socialism, too.

We need new horizons. We should be according our old people the dignity that they have worked for, our young people the chance of a job, fair work and a decent home and our children good education. We have it in our gift to create such things, if only we had the will, the courage and the determination.

This does not depend on independence—we can use the powers of this Parliament to do it now. Let us seize this chance to make that change and have the courage of our convictions.

15:05

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): One of the big successes of the Scottish National Party in Government has been the end of the ring fencing of local government funds. When I was a

Glasgow councillor under the Labour-Liberal Democrat administration between 1999 and 2007, there was constant cross-party complaint about money being ring fenced. Glasgow might have invested well in libraries, for example, only for a pot of money to appear that was ring fenced—for libraries. I am therefore very pleased that local authority control has been increased under the SNP.

The next question, though, is how we reform local taxation. Again, I believe that we should try to give councils as much control as possible in the same way that we have done with expenditure. Moreover, the fact is that the council tax is not fair and the rich are paying too little.

One of the main conclusions of the commission when it reported last December was that there is no easy solution to this challenge and no one single tax that meets all requirements. Property tax usually does not take full account of income, while income tax can miss out the wealthy who have a low income. My key personal targets in any reform would be to ensure that those with wealth and those who have a higher income pay a fairer share.

Clearly we face certain practical constraints along the way. I have had the land valuation tax proposal explained to me a number of times and it seems attractive in principle. However, I—and I suspect other colleagues—would struggle to explain it in turn, which means that the challenge of getting a wide public understanding for it would be huge.

Andy Wightman: Will the minister give way?

John Mason: If the member does not mind, I will not give way, because I have quite a lot that I want to cover. I should also say that I am not yet a minister, and probably never will be. [*Laughter.*]

Local income tax is also attractive, at least for part of the tax base. However, given the present system, in which Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs has a monopoly on collecting income tax, it might well be impracticable. As a result, the commission’s broad conclusion to make property and income the main basis for local taxation seems good to me. As it also suggested, allowing local authorities to add smaller taxes such as environmental, resource, sales, or tourist taxes would give additional freedom and accountability at local level.

I was extremely disappointed by the decision to leave the European Union, but obviously we now need to grasp any opportunities that might come along. One opportunity might be to vary VAT rates in the UK, which is something that is not allowed under EU rules and which is why VAT is being assigned in part to the Parliament. As a result, Scotland could have a different VAT rate from the

UK and local authorities, too, could set a different rate from the rest of Scotland.

On property valuation, I think that, if we assume that there is to be a local property tax of some kind, we need to get closer to the real valuations of people's homes. In that respect, I accept Bob Doris's point in the medium term. The current very broad council tax bands mean that people get incredibly upset if they slip into a higher band. In Glasgow, for example, a move from band D to band E means an extra £360 per year. Moreover, the fact that new properties, of which I have many in my constituency, are assessed at 1991 valuations strikes everyone, including me, as difficult to understand and unsustainable.

I also believe that we need to look at revaluation because no account has been taken of relative changes in property prices since 1991. When I asked one of my staff to look at relative property price changes in the east and west of Glasgow since 1991, I found the results pretty staggering. In 1991, the average price of a sandstone flat was £27,000 on Shettleston Road in the east end and £60,000 on Hyndland Road in the west end. The flat on Shettleston Road has gone up to roughly £63,000, or less than 2.5 times, while the flat on Hyndland Road has gone up from £60,000 to £326,000, or more than five times. That suggests to me that the poorer parts of Glasgow like the east end are paying more than their fair share of council tax, and having no revaluation will favour richer people in the richer areas and disadvantage the ordinary people in the poorer areas.

The commission's report mentions houses that are worth 15 times as much as other houses but whose council tax is only three times more. That will change to 3.7 times more under the proposed changes to bands E to H, but I wonder whether 3.7 is really fair enough.

I accept that a revaluation of properties has problems, such as the administrative cost and serious increases for some house owners, but it has been 25 years now, and the longer we wait, the worse it gets. If we are sticking with a variation of the council tax, we need to consider that. I accept that it will not be this year, but we need to consider it in the not-too-distant future. If we are moving to a different property tax, we need it to be closer to actual values from the word go.

15:10

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to make a contribution to a debate on a subject that has, over many years, generated much heat and exercised the minds of members of various commissions that have been set up to look into the matter, but which remains such a live issue.

For over 400 years, two things have largely been acknowledged as central to the acceptance of local taxation—first, that the usual method of tax collection has been through a tax on property, and secondly that tax that is raised locally is spent locally. I will return to that later in my speech, although I note with interest what the cabinet secretary said earlier.

Over the years, a number of attempts have been made to reform how money is raised to contribute towards the cost of local services. In 2006, the Burt commission's proposal to charge a percentage of the capital value of properties was dropped like a hot potato by the Government of the day. The first SNP Government was elected with plans to introduce a local income tax—another plan that was dropped when the many flaws of such a scheme were brought home. The commission on local tax reform was next to have an attempt at resolving the issue but, whilst calling for an end to the council tax, it did not propose a specific new system to replace it. Then, largely ignoring that commission's work, the SNP Government sought to move forward by supporting the recommendations of the commission for competitive and fair taxation, which was set up by the Scottish Conservatives.

My colleagues and I usually do not mind the SNP adopting sound Conservative ideas, but—and this is a big but—the SNP has certainly put a sting in the tail. While my party supports increasing the multiplier in only the top two bands, the Government intends to increase the tax burden on the 535,000 families who live in homes in bands E and F, thus penalising many hard-working people on middle incomes who might not benefit from any reduction scheme.

Andy Wightman: Will the member give way?

Alison Harris: I am sorry. I have too much to say.

Thanks to the SNP Government, some 535,000 households will be asked to pay more than they need to pay.

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

Alison Harris: I am sorry. I have too much to say.

Not content with asking people on middle incomes to pay more, the SNP Government also proposes to change something that has been central to acceptance of the system for hundreds of years: the principle that tax that is raised locally is spent locally. I believe that national taxation is the vehicle to iron out disparities between communities, not the sending of tax that has been raised in one area to other areas.

Derek Mackay: Will the member take an intervention?

Alison Harris: No. I am sorry.

Local taxation is to meet the specific needs of the community from which it is raised. On that, I am happy to agree with the Labour president of COSLA, David O'Neill, whose comments on the planned changes were mentioned by John Scott.

If the Scottish Government is determined to press ahead with the proposals and it forces middle Scotland to pay more, the least that many people will expect is that the extra money will contribute to the maintenance of local services in their community and not be siphoned off for a policy—no matter how worthy it is—that should be funded nationally.

Andy Wightman: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The member is not taking interventions.

Alison Harris: Council tax now accounts for the raising of only about 12 per cent of town hall expenditure, the percentage having fallen dramatically in recent decades from a split of approximately 50:50 between money that was raised locally and grants from central Government. That has meant that councils' discretion to raise money has been much reduced. Now, with the ending of the council tax freeze, the SNP again steps in with its centralising agenda—over the heads of elected local councillors—and attempts to take local money to fund a national policy, thus continuing the process of reducing councils' discretion to meet the aspirations of local residents.

I believe that we must take the opportunity to restore that discretion, not continue to remove it. The Government must abandon the constant centralising of power to itself at the expense of local councils. Councillors have a vital role to play in our democracy, but without giving them discretion, and indeed responsibility, interest in local councils and turnout at local elections will diminish.

I remind the chamber of part of the remit given by the Government when it established the commission for local tax reform—the requirement to consider the impact of alternative local tax systems

“on supporting local democracy, including on the financial accountability and autonomy of Local Government”.

I urge ministers to look again at their centralising and penalising proposals, to remove the increased tax burden from middle income families and to maintain the principle that taxes raised locally are spent locally.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that the time allowed is a tight five minutes, which means that they should err on the other side. I call George Adam.

15:15

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for hinting that I should make haste with my speech.

As a former local councillor, I understand how important local government is and how councillors can work to make a difference in their local communities. I am also aware that local taxation has always been a hot topic, because it is the one tax that a member of the public can actually tell someone how much they are paying to the exact amount. Unlike other forms of taxation, it does not come out of their salary at source; they pay it themselves directly and that is what makes it so controversial, because they look at the local authority and ask, “What am I getting for what I'm paying?” We can see from the Government's ideas, beliefs and proposals that it wants to give local government the opportunity to be more flexible and open about its finances, and that demonstrates that we are moving towards a position of showing that we can make local government accessible to members of the public.

Another thing that has been mentioned in the debate is that every one of us in this chamber believes that we have to do something to bridge the educational attainment gap. We all agree on that part of the debate, and the fact that the Government has said that the £100 million that will be raised will be used to close the educational attainment gap is part of something that we have all bought into, whether that is done by local authorities or by the Scottish Government itself. When members of other parties say that that is an issue, I feel uncomfortable with that.

Patrick Harvie: I ask the member to reflect on what he has just said. Of course we all support action to close the attainment gap and to improve educational outcomes for all young people, but it is untrue to suggest that the political parties across the chamber have bought into the idea of in effect hypothecating local revenues to pay for a national policy.

George Adam: It is about delivering in the real world so that the attainment gap is actually bridged. If we have to find a way to make that happen by working in tandem with local authorities, I see that as a way forward.

One of the most important aspects that we must consider is the fact that the Scottish Government's proposals are protecting household incomes in Scotland, and that 2.4 million households in Scotland will be protected from any undue rises in

council tax in 2017 by the capping of increases at 3 per cent. That ensures that our communities, families and friends will not return to the sky-high annual tax increases that they received in years gone by. Before this Government came into power, a lot of individuals in our communities were paying for rises of up to 60 per cent over a period, and it is important that the public are protected from that so that there is flexibility and so that people can see value in local government. I am a great believer in local government.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will Mr Adam take an intervention?

George Adam: Yes, I will, because the way you hold your hips just kind of made me stop there.

Liam Kerr: I know you like it, George.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, I do not think that you should read anything into that.

Liam Kerr: Given that point, George, how would you respond—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please use the member's full name.

Liam Kerr: How would George Adam respond to *The Press and Journal* talking about families in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire handing over £47 million that is to be pumped into educating youngsters in other parts of the country?

George Adam: My belief is that bridging the educational attainment gap is the responsibility of every single one of us in the chamber. We should desire that every child in Scotland, regardless of where they are born, should get the opportunity. If Mr Kerr wants to play politics and just keep certain things or look after his own wee patch, he can carry on. I want to look after the people of Scotland and ensure that they get that opportunity in future.

Many of us know what local government does but, as a former local councillor, I think that we have to make sure that local government is scrutinised so that it is open and transparent. I appreciate the fact that the Scottish Government and cabinet secretary see this as a starting point, because the commission itself saw what we are doing as only a starting point.

Andy Wightman: I have here an email that I received earlier:

"I stay in Paisley and have a house in Band E."

The house next door is

"worth approx. £50,000 more than my house yet is only Band C ... As an SNP member, I have emailed my local and regional parties to support a full review, but the reply they sent was fluff."

Is that a fair description of the Government's policies?

George Adam: I do not remember saying that to anybody. If anybody came to me with that case, I would take it very seriously. I do not believe I would say it was fluff in any shape or form. We have to deal with that issue.

I see where we are as being a start. Others have talked about land tax and other ideas, but we are delivering for the here and now and taking the opportunity to make sure that we can get the money so that local government can build and look to the future. Let us see what we can deliver further down the line.

15:21

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): The question of how we properly fund our local authorities is crucial to the public services that we all rely on, our schools, our local economies and particularly to the most vulnerable people in our communities.

It is those vulnerable families who are being hit the hardest by the Government's continued underfunding of local government. Those who are least able to cope with service cuts are bearing the brunt of the SNP's 11 per cent cut to our local authorities. As Kezia Dugdale said at First Minister's questions earlier today, that is more than double the rate of the Tories' cut to the block grant.

On this side of the chamber, as Jackie Baillie pointed out, we recognise the need for fundamental reform of local taxation. We are committed to abolishing the unfair council tax once and for all. We support the introduction of a fairer system that is based on the value of a property, so that nearly 2 million households will be better off. Our calculations are based on modelled evidence that was provided to the commission on local tax reform, and on which all four parties are now relying.

We would also broaden the tax base and empower local government by devolving new tax-raising powers such as a tourist tax and a land value tax. Such devolution of power to local authorities is long overdue and it would allow them to raise revenue from previously untapped streams. It would also allow our local authorities to ensure that everyone who benefits from local services contributes to them, with the richest paying their fair share. A number of local authorities have called for these powers, including Renfrewshire Council, which the cabinet secretary and I represent.

It is also important to note that Scottish Labour has said that we would raise additional revenue through income tax. By asking the richest in society to pay a 50p top rate of tax, we would

generate additional money that we would use to invest in public services such as education.

If we want first class public services, we have to pay for them. Actions have to match the rhetoric we hear so often in the chamber. We will not succeed in improving our education system and closing the attainment gap if we continue to slash the budgets of local authorities and limit their ability to invest in our young people's future.

The report of the commission on local tax reform states:

"The present Council Tax has therefore rightly become discredited in the eyes of the public ... it was made clear to us that people expect a change."

A decade on from their promise to scrap the council tax, the Scottish Government's proposals are still not nearly bold enough.

It is not just me saying that. As Andy Wightman said earlier, the SNP Government's own poverty adviser Naomi Eisenstadt is also calling for bold action. She said that

"local tax reform is a real opportunity to protect the incomes of both the working poor and those at risk of in work poverty. But it will require boldness and vision."

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I am from Aberdeenshire and I am interested to know what the member thinks about the situation of people in that area, where house prices are very high. If there was revaluation there, it would really impact on people who do not have high incomes, such as teachers and those who work in public services. I feel that there may be something missing—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can you just make it a short intervention? I think that you have made your point.

Neil Bibby: Our proposal will result in 80 per cent of people—2 million households—being better off and we are committed to ensuring the fairest possible new replacement tax.

The Scottish Parliament information centre has described the Government's proposals as falling

"short of making the Council Tax a 'proportionate' tax".

The commission says that

"the present Council Tax system must end"

and that local tax needs substantial reform. In his motion today, Mr Mackay talks about "the opportunity for change". I hope that that is exactly what his appointment as finance secretary will mean, for not just tax reform but his constituents in Renfrewshire and Inverclyde.

I hope that when Mr Mackay announces his budget, he ensures that Renfrewshire and Inverclyde will see much-needed increases in their funding. It is quite simple—a cut to the local

authority budget is a cut to councils such as Renfrewshire and Inverclyde and it will be his constituents and people across Scotland who will be the ones who continue to suffer the consequences.

Finally, the cabinet secretary faces a choice on local tax reform. He can work with Scottish Labour to abolish the council tax completely and replace it with a fairer property-based system, which would see 80 per cent of households pay less, or he can continue with what Professor Kenneth Gibb described to the Local Government and Communities Committee as a "political fudge" that does not resolve the underlying problems. The cabinet secretary's constituents and people across Scotland deserve a lot better than that.

15:26

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I welcome the report of the commission on local tax reform, as well as the opportunity to contribute to this debate on reforming taxation. It is probably fair to say that some will consider the new council tax to be less regressive as opposed to more progressive, and I recognise that much remains to be done as we work towards creating a fairer and more sustainable system of local taxation. However, what is proposed is an improvement.

As has been made clear, the changes that will come into force from April of next year represent an important first step. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government remains open to further change and discussion, although it is rightfully exercising necessary caution and gradualism and developing a fuller understanding of the potential impacts and implications of any changes before their implementation. An example of that goodwill in relation to further discussion and reform is the commitment to consult on enabling councils to levy a tax on development, and vacant and derelict, land to reduce land banking and increase the supply of homes.

Although the current reforms may not go far enough for some, they will undoubtedly leave us in a better place than we were before, and I welcome the variety of contributions that we have heard from across the chamber. As a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee, I can answer Kate Forbes's question to Andy Wightman. The information that we were given by SPICe was that a revaluation would cost between £5.5 million and £7 million and would take two to three years.

There is no such thing as a perfect tax and I do not think that anyone is claiming that these reforms will solve all the problems, but they are by no means the end of the road.

I will move on to talk about some of the good things that are coming from the reforms. The council tax changes will work towards the redistribution of wealth in our society from those who can most afford it to those who most need it.

Liam Kerr: Does Ruth Maguire not agree that those in bands E to H are not necessarily the rich or the wealthy? They are actually middle-income families in areas of high-value property, such as Aberdeen and the north-east.

Ruth Maguire: It is fair not to make assumptions about people who live in a particular type of property, but the cabinet secretary set out in detail what is being done to assist those families who would struggle to pay. Those in the four lowest bands, A to D, will experience no increase in council tax. That means that there will be no increase for three out of four households, and that the poorest households in particular, which are already suffering under Tory austerity, will not be hit by any increase in council tax.

The Government's plans to extend the council tax reduction scheme further will ensure that nobody is disproportionately affected by those increases. For example, those who live in high-banded houses but who have an income of less than £25,000 will be exempted from increases through the council tax reduction scheme. The child allowance within the scheme will also be increased by 25 per cent, which will be a further boost to low-income families across Scotland and will help nearly 140,000 children.

Figures that were released by Scotland's statistician in June 2016 showed that the council tax reduction scheme already supports half a million Scottish households and its extension will support tens of thousands more. More important still, the £100 million that will be raised from the increase in council tax on the four highest bands will be invested in our schools, thereby supporting our wider progressive aim in Government of closing the educational attainment gap between the most and least deprived children in Scotland. The cash that is raised for education will be spent by headteachers themselves, in a concrete example of the Government's commitment to empowering schools and giving headteachers greater autonomy.

Local government will also be empowered through this reform.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Does the member think that it is acceptable to increase the autonomy of headteachers while decreasing the autonomy of our local authorities?

Ruth Maguire: There is an argument to be made that headteachers and schools know how best to spend money on education and are best placed to help us to close the attainment gap.

We will make local government more financially accountable to its local communities and give local authorities greater responsibility for their own finances, leading to less dependency on grants from central Government.

As we go forward, I stress again that this is a first step, and I welcome the Government's openness to doing further work. I urge all parties, local government and wider society to focus on the real and positive changes within the reforms and to work constructively with us over the coming session of Parliament as we implement the first steps towards creating an even fairer and sustainable local taxation system.

15:31

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am very glad that we have had this debate. Derek Mackay also welcomed the debate and said that the timing was beneficial; I am sure that he is grateful to the Greens for pushing for the debate to happen in the first place.

We were clear that a debate on the report of the commission on local tax reform should happen before the Scottish Government asked Parliament to vote on its modest adjustments to council tax. It is important that we have had that opportunity.

Most members, in their contributions today, have placed the issues in historical context. A lot of members have brought up their favourite quotes and speeches from 2007. I will pick one totally at random—it is Bob Doris's speech from 2007. We all enjoy Bob Doris's passionate speeches. He said:

"The detestation that society felt for the poll tax in the late 1980s and early 1990s still exists for the council tax."

He also told us:

"I believed that there was a clear majority in Scotland in favour of scrapping the council tax. We must strive to find such a majority in this chamber too—a majority that cuts across traditional party lines".—[*Official Report*, 21 June 2007; c 984.]

That is still as true as it was when he said it.

I have here another speech from as far back as just a year or so after devolution began, from my party's first parliamentary incarnation, Robin Harper, setting out our position on land value tax. In fact, Andy Wightman reminded me a few minutes ago that even Lloyd George is due some credit in the debate.

The debate goes back a long time in history, and yet Derek Mackay tells us that this is not the end of the story but the beginning, and that the journey has only just begun. I am not sure that I can take that argument seriously.

Mr Mackay complains that the concept of progressivity is absent from Murdo Fraser's amendment. More to the point, it is absent from Government policy, and that is the issue that we are here to debate today. We are debating not only the marginal changes that will happen with the multiplier, but the context of rate capping being reintroduced by policy announcement instead of by statute, and the co-opting of resources from local taxes for national policies at the very time when we now have national tax powers to raise the revenue that we need for national priorities.

Murdo Fraser gave us his own unique take on the history of local taxation debates. Although he argued for the simplicity and ease of collection of the current system, he acknowledged its serious flaws. Critically, his amendment sets out the flaws in Scottish Government proposals for adjustment. Murdo Fraser contrasted the commission's conclusions with his party's proposals for adjustment, which bear some similarity with current SNP policy. There was a little history from Jackie Baillie, too. She co-opted some of Nicola Sturgeon's speeches, to attack today's SNP policy. She said that tinkering around the edges is not what the commission called for.

It is worth recalling that when the commission was proposed, it was explicitly expected that political parties would offer their proposals for serious change to the people at the election. Now we are told that today is just the beginning of the journey. If real reform is to be achieved during this parliamentary session, it will be without the opportunity for voters to have their say.

As my colleague Andy Wightman said, a central conclusion of the commission was that this parliamentary session offers an opportunity that should not be missed. Andy Wightman also set out some of the treaty obligations around local control of rates and resources. The Scottish Government's proposals fly in the face of those obligations.

Andy Wightman cited the injustice that is experienced by some of his constituents—injustice that will not be addressed by the Scottish Government proposals. Mr Adam said that we should deal with such cases. Yes, we should, but we will not deal with them by adopting the Scottish Government's current proposals.

Andy Wightman also gave the roll-call of opposition to the Scottish Government's minor, marginal adjustments at the edges of council tax, and he challenged the Parliament to rise to this opportunity. Greens have done so. Not only have we proposed an alternative statutory instrument, which the Scottish Government could adopt, but we have published "Fair funding for public services", which sets out a five-year transition to a better local taxation system, with more local

control. Under our proposals, there would be local economic decision making for our councils and most households would pay less; indeed, there would be a £10,000 tax-free allowance, as well as a system of reliefs for the people who needed them.

Session after session, this Parliament has failed to grasp the issue. The coalition parties did not agree. The minority Government did not have the votes to get its proposals through. The majority Government did not have the will to act. This session cannot fail again.

As for assigning income tax, Mr Mackay knows the problems that arise from a complex mechanism between one level of government and another. He is dealing with those problems right now, as he tries to construct his budget. Let us not impose something even more chaotic on our local councils.

I make one last appeal to the Government. At this very moment, with new tax powers coming to the Scottish Parliament, it is time that we stopped hoarding at national level what should be local decision-making powers. Let us empower local government and allow it to make the choices that it should be—and in most European countries would be—free to make.

15:38

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Ruth Maguire, speaking for the party of government, said that this is the first step. If that were true, we might be able to try to build on the proposals that the Government has brought forward. However, this is not the first step. Even at this stage, I ask the cabinet secretary and the minister to work with the other parties in this Parliament to look again at the proposals and bring forward an approach that will put local government on a sound financial footing.

Derek Mackay: Will Alex Rowley reflect on the fact that that is what my motion says? I want to work with parliamentary colleagues to take forward issues that we have debated today. That is the offer in the motion. The Conservative amendment calls on us to do that, too, but suggests that we should not worry about the progressive nature of taxation proposals; in contrast, our motion says that progressivity should be a foundation of our discussions.

Alex Rowley: The Government motion tries to reach out to the other parties but simply does not go far enough. If this was the first step, the proposed approach would be the way forward. However, as Murdo Fraser, Jackie Baillie and other members pointed out in this good debate, in 2007 the SNP came into government with a promise to replace the council tax. It said that a

council tax freeze would be introduced as a short to medium-term measure until it could bring forward an alternative.

At the time, Nicola Sturgeon said:

“Labour’s hated Council Tax is totally unfair, and any tinkering with bands would not make the system any fairer”.

If, in 2007, it was so unfair and any tinkering with the bands would not have made it fairer, why does the SNP seem to be suggesting today that tinkering with the bands will make it fairer?

Kate Forbes: I was not here in 2007 but, as I understand it, the Government did not get enough support to scrap the council tax at the time, and Labour was in opposition.

Alex Rowley: The Government has had two full terms of office, but we still have the council tax. In 2007, the SNP was absolutely clear on the issue. Nicola Sturgeon said:

“It’s time to scrap the Council Tax.”

Nine or 10 years later, we are back here tinkering with the council tax. That is nine years during which many local services have been buckling under financial pressure but, yet again, the SNP is bottling it when it comes to bringing forward a replacement. I suggest that it wants to tinker again.

Bob Doris said that the reforms are not the end but the start. However, the SNP has had 10 years and we should be much further forward. Local government cannot continue to take the cuts that it is taking or the impact on communities.

The SNP set up a commission, ignored what it said and brought forward yet again a sticking-plaster solution that will further damage local services while continuing to undermine democracy. Derek Mackay said that it is difficult. This morning, I reread the submission to the commission from Unison Scotland, of which I am a member, and found a comment that best describes where we are at. It says:

“We must find a solution. The problems are not technical they are political. It’s time for some ‘grown up’ decisions to be taken across all political parties.”

Sadly, it seems that, when it comes to funding local services, the only party in the chamber that cannot face up to making such decisions is the party of government: the SNP. Instead, it yet again proposes another fudge that simply fails to address the issues at hand.

Who will be the losers as a result of that failure? For starters, it will be the people who need to access public services. The report “Social Work in Scotland”, which was published this morning by the Accounts Commission for Scotland, shows that social care services cannot cope with the increasing levels of demand and that older people

who need those services are being denied them. The situation is predicted to get much worse unless something is done.

On the subject of social work, I suggest that we need an urgent review of children and families services, because the level of underfunding is putting massive pressure on staff and on their ability to meet the growing demands that are being placed on them.

Local communities up and down Scotland are seeing the impact of the SNP Government’s failure to properly fund local government. It affects the local environment. There are cuts to the local groups that are the backbone of community organisations and to youth services, which means that they deliver fewer services for young people in the community. Local libraries are becoming fewer and fewer. Even where local services survive, the increasing charges are a barrier to many people trying to access them. I cannot talk about cuts to local services without mentioning the state of our streets and roads right across the country—the next time you drive over a pothole, just remember: it was the SNP that done it.

Right across Scotland, we are seeing a complete lack of investment in public services, roads and infrastructure. Today, we have an opportunity, which I hope the Parliament will take, to once and for all put local government finance on a sound footing.

15:45

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):

This has been an important and interesting debate, and there have been interesting speeches, which started with Derek Mackay’s. He told us while keeping a straight face that the journey has only just begun but, as Jackie Baillie and Patrick Harvie pointed out, that is far from being the case. The journey started a long time ago and has been going round in circles ever since. I thank Murdo Fraser for giving us a unique historical perspective and spelling out some of the issues.

We come to the issue on the back of a report from a cross-party commission that was set up by the SNP but was largely ignored. The commission on local tax reform came up with some proposals that are definitely worthy of consideration, such as revaluation, which Bob Doris seems to agree with. The Conservatives see no merit in scrapping council tax, but reform is needed. We never agreed with Nicola Sturgeon when she described council tax as “hated”, and we welcome the SNP’s conversion, largely, to our way of thinking.

However, we are vehemently against the council tax double whammy that could be unleashed on more than half a million households. Part 1 of the

whammy is the automatic rise in tax for ordinary Scots, which councils will have no choice over, and I will concentrate my remarks on that. Part 2 is the potential additional 3 per cent rise in some bands that has not been announced anywhere other than in the SNP manifesto.

Let us deal with part 1. The Scottish Government's proposal to raise £100 million on the back of councils takes us into uncharted waters. It turns what should be a local tax that is set locally and spent locally into a national tax that is set and spent by the Scottish Government, although it is collected by someone else.

Derek Mackay: I think that Graham Simpson was in the chamber when I said that every penny that is raised through council tax will stay with local authorities. The adjustment that we make will be to the revenue support grant, in a similar fashion to what happens with business rates, which the Conservatives do not seem to object to. The Conservatives do not seem to understand local government funding. Council tax will stay with local councils—how much clearer can I be?

Graham Simpson: I thank Derek Mackay for setting that up for me. As he well knows, there is no mechanism for the Scottish Government to take council tax from councils. It will grab the money in another way, by cutting the grant, as he well knows.

When I challenged John Swinney last week to explain why the change should not be seen as more centralisation, he was unable—or unwilling—to answer the point. That is because it is more centralisation. It is a dangerous step towards goodness knows what form of local government reorganisation the Scottish Government has in mind.

The Scottish Government's proposals breach what has been a central tenet of our taxation system thus far: that the taxes that we pay are set by the politicians who are elected to spend them. If the tax is council tax, it should be set by councillors, which is a point that is apparently lost on George Adam. If national Government wants to raise money, it should use the levers that are available to it, such as income tax, and it should not get others to do its dirty work.

In the 1760s, the American politician James Otis said:

“taxation without representation is tyranny”.

Although I would not put what is being proposed quite as strongly as that, it is a very serious matter—in fact, it is unheard of. Money has been ring fenced in the past, but it has still been passed to local government to spend. What is proposed is entirely different. It could be called the robbing Peter to pay Paul tax, or, for the purposes of next

year's council elections, the nat tax. It is outrageous for the Scottish Government to get someone else to raise money for it.

People must be under no illusion that, when they receive their higher council tax bills next year, some or all of that increase, depending on where they live, will be down to Derek Mackay and John Swinney—two political highwaymen who are riding off with their swag bags and chortling to themselves that it will be councillors, and not them, who will get the blame. The Scottish Government's motion has a brass neck for mentioning local accountability, because that is precisely the opposite of what the SNP proposes, and that is why we lodged our amendment.

Let us look at some of the detail. A lot is missing so far. We know, for instance, that there are disparities in the increases that people across the country will pay. Someone who happens to live in a band E property in Aberdeen will pay an extra £113 a year. For someone who is in a band H home there, the figure will be £554.

Kevin Stewart: Will Graham Simpson give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Simpson is in the final minute of his speech.

Graham Simpson: That is sad, as I would have been glad to give way to Mr Stewart.

For those who live in the Western Isles, the increases will be £94 and £461 a year for band E and band H properties respectively.

Big questions are still to be answered. Mr Swinney has not yet told us how the money is to be divided up, under what criteria and by who, and nor do we know what the mechanism for taking the money from councils will be. We can guess at it, but it is not spelled out in the legislation, and that may even be illegal under European law, as Andy Wightman said. You could not make it up. Council tax needs reform, but the way to do that is not to turn it into a national tax.

15:51

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): It is fair to say that we have had an interesting debate. Before I address some of the points that have been made, I will reflect a little on the wider policy context. First and foremost, we have all been able to draw on the definitive work of the commission on local tax reform, which was chaired by not only Marco Biagi but David O'Neill—I say that to set the record straight for Jackie Baillie. I thank all the commissioners, who invested considerable time and effort to deliver a report that brings the issues alive and which set out the impacts of change and how they might be administered.

The commission talked not only of property taxes but of income and land taxes. As the cabinet secretary said, this is the beginning of a journey. We have put forward proposals to readjust council tax and we will consult on a vacant and derelict land tax and on the assignation of income tax, which will cover all three areas that the commission considered.

Willie Rennie: If the journey is just beginning, when on earth will it come to an end?

Kevin Stewart: With the co-operation of all parties, we can discuss the way forward, and then we can maybe see when we will come to an end. Mr Rennie earlier suggested a new land value tax, which was not mentioned in his party's manifesto. No one has indicated today how long their proposals would take to implement, and the Conservatives have not given us any proposals at all.

In developing the reforms that are before Parliament, the Scottish Government has maintained adherence to the Adam Smith principles of taxation: efficiency, convenience, certainty and being proportionate to the ability to pay. For all its flaws, the present council tax does in fact tick some of those boxes. It is efficient to administer. Administration costs only 1.9 per cent of the total that is collected in taxes. Payment is not administratively burdensome; rather, it is relatively convenient. Certainty for the taxpayer is crucial in these tough times, as people need to be able to plan and budget. Is the present council tax proportionate to the ability to pay? On its own, it is not. "Just Change" highlights that very issue, but there is a system of reliefs to council tax that take account of need and income.

Patrick Harvie: The minister tells us that people need to be able to plan for their financial futures—so do our local authorities. How on earth does assigning a proportion of income tax and, I assume, abolishing council tax and leaving councils reliant on unpredictable income sources give them the ability to plan for the future?

Kevin Stewart: As I said, we will consult local authorities to allow them to plan for the future.

The Resolution Foundation has said:

"The SNP's tax increase would raise revenue in a progressive manner, with the tax rise falling harder on higher income households".

Many people seem to have disagreed with that today, but the reality is that the policy is more progressive. Meanwhile, from their amendment, it seems that the Conservatives want to take progressivity right out of the equation. As the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution described, the council tax reduction scheme means that net council tax liabilities are progressive for the lowest-income households.

Our reforms to the council tax also reflect a pledge by the First Minister—the commitment was repeated in our manifesto—that the additional revenues that are raised will contribute towards raising standards in schools and closing the attainment gap, which will deliver opportunities for our young people, no matter what their family background is. However, anyone who listened to some of the speeches today would think that the Government was going to take the £100 million and keep it all for itself. The reality is that that money will go down to local levels to support children and raise attainment in this country. Surely all parties in the Parliament should welcome that ambition.

Graham Simpson: Can Mr Stewart tell me who will divide up the £100 million? Will it be councils or the Government?

Kevin Stewart: We will discuss those issues with local government—that has been made clear from the start. [*Laughter.*] I do not see what is funny about that. That is the way in which we normally conduct business: we consult local government and come to an agreement.

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister give way?

Kevin Stewart: No—I will not take an intervention.

Another thing that seemed to be lacking today was a basic understanding of how local government finance works with regard to distribution methodology. We have agreements with local government about needs-based distribution that have been on the go for years. That happened under previous Tory Administrations and under previous Labour and Liberal Democrat Administrations. I do not know what is different now.

I will address the issue of distribution. The approach is not about raising funds in one council area to distribute to another, even though the redistribution of public money on the basis of need is a long-established and fundamental principle of the funding that we provide to local government; rather, it is about raising educational attainment. Any council that chooses to increase council tax will keep all the additional revenues from that tax rise, so local financial accountability is preserved. Councils will still retain all council tax that is raised in their area. No council will be financially worse off, but an additional £100 million each year will be available to spend on schools and children and on getting to grips with the attainment gap.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is in his last minute.

Kevin Stewart: Other parties proposed changes to taxation in their manifestos of May this year, with receipts to go directly to schools. Our manifesto proposed that the additional funding that council tax reform raised would be allocated directly to schools, on the basis of eligibility for free school meals, from 2017-18. That is best for our kids. The proposal is not about centralising power; it is about empowering schools to create the best possible opportunities for our young children. Some folk in the chamber do not seem to want that to happen at all.

We heard from some members about revaluation. According to the Scottish Assessors Association, revaluation would cost some £7 million or £8 million and would take two to three years. Beyond that, it would hit places such as Aberdeen and Edinburgh, where the rate of house price inflation has been highest, the hardest—something that Mr Kerr missed out of his speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must wind up, minister. The next debate is waiting to start.

Kevin Stewart: The debate has seen the fulfilment of—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, minister, but you must conclude. The next debate is already squeezed.

Kevin Stewart: I urge all members to support the Government's motion.

Events

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-01581, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on securing Scotland's place as a perfect stage for events. I call Fiona Hyslop to speak to and move the motion.

16:01

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): As well as celebrating successes and acknowledging how far Scotland has come as an events destination, today's debate allows us to highlight the challenges that are faced in the ever more competitive global events marketplace. I stress the importance of the collaborative effort that is required across the industry and the public sector to support the ambition that is set out in the national events strategy, to ensure that

"Scotland's reputation as the perfect stage for events is recognised nationally and internationally".

Scotland is already widely recognised as a world-leading events destination. In 2015, our visitor spend reached almost £9 billion, with £4.9 billion of that total spend coming from our overnight visitors. We aim to grow that to at least £5.5 billion by 2020. Our continuing to offer a strong portfolio of events that attract visitors from outside Scotland is essential if we are to achieve that goal.

At a time when the importance of ensuring that we are viewed internationally as a welcoming nation is critical, our events play an important role in supporting communities and in sharing and celebrating cultural heritage. Our work with BEMIS to ensure that all Scotland's black and ethnic minority communities are encouraged to join in the themed year and winter festival celebrations is proving to be successful, with a growing number of events participating year on year.

The value of our events cannot be underestimated. Whether it is our reputation as the home of golf, which helps us to stage some of the world's greatest golfing events, or our capital's place as the world's leading festival city, attracting more than a million people every year, we simply cannot afford to rest on our laurels. Competition around the world is fierce. Events that presently call Scotland home, such as the mountain bike world cup and the world pipe band championships, could be staged elsewhere. To stave off challenges, we must continue to innovate, create authentic event experiences and ensure that attendances remain strong.

We have just had a fantastic summer of sports events in Scotland, and we have also witnessed

some amazing performances by Scots at events outside Scotland. I am sure that members across the chamber will wish to join me in paying tribute to all of team Great Britain who competed in Rio at the Olympics and the Paralympics over the past few weeks. The strength of our sporting events programme has already seen many Olympians from Rio—Scots and others—take part in events here. No fewer than eight medal winners from cycling at the Olympics took part in the tour of Britain, and seven Olympians competed in the Blair castle international horse trials. The European judo open championship, the UCI track cycling world cup and the Scottish open badminton grand prix, which are all being staged at the Emirates arena later this year, will see Scotland welcome yet more Olympians.

Our world-class sporting events are matched by our cultural events and festivals. The Edinburgh International Festival welcomed artists from 36 nations and audiences from 84 countries, and took in more than £4 million in ticket sales for the first time. Initial figures from the Edinburgh festival fringe show a 7.7 per cent rise in ticket sales.

It is strange that the Conservative amendment singles out the United Kingdom Government's support for the Edinburgh international culture summit. The event was a success, with 41 Government delegates taking part. The UK was meant to be an equal partner with the Scottish Government and others right from the start, but it provided no financial contribution to the 2012 or 2014 summits. It provided a very welcome £50,000 to this year's summit, but that amount is very small compared with the Scottish Government's contributions over the years. The contribution came late and only after a bit of persuasion and cajoling. I have to date exercised discretion in not making that public—unfortunately, the Conservative amendment requires a response. The Conservatives in this Parliament have to remember that they are here to stand up for Scotland, not merely to be cheerleaders-in-chief for the UK Government.

"Scotland the Perfect Stage: Scotland's Events Strategy 2015-2025", which was launched this time last year, reaffirms the shared commitment that exists across the public, private and third sector to delivery of a "one Scotland approach" to building a strong and dynamic industry, and to producing a portfolio of events and festivals that deliver a sustainable impact and an international profile. The strategy covers everyone who is involved in Scotland's diverse events portfolio. We, as a Government, are committed to doing our part, from promoting the importance of communities and partnerships to support the successful delivery of events of all sizes, to securing the major one-offs such as the 2018 European championships, the 2019 Solheim cup

and the Union of European Football Associations Euro 2020 championships.

Following the strategy's launch, I wrote to all public sector bodies inviting them to consider how they can play their part in the process. Some early examples of that include the alignment of organisational and local authority strategies, the commissioning of research to underpin a national drive to maximise economic growth through the hosting of business events, the targeting of major international brands to improve further the availability of quality accommodation stock, and continued use of Public Contracts Scotland as a vehicle for access to major event business opportunities.

The events industry's commitment to delivering the strategy is welcome, and I am delighted that the Scottish Tourism Alliance has supported the establishment of the events and festivals industry group. The group is determined to give the sector a stronger voice and to provide a forum for collaboration to support its further development.

Our programme of themed years has been successful in giving tourism an edge, in galvanising partners and in working across sectoral boundaries to create a strong collaborative platform to promote Scotland. During our current year of innovation, architecture and design, 30 funded events and 115 partner programme events have been delivered, and an estimated 650,000 people have already engaged in the centenary celebrations of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland's festival of architecture, which includes more than 400 additional events taking place across the country.

Planning for Scotland's 2017 year of history, heritage and archaeology is well under way, and links will be made with Festivals Edinburgh's developing plans to celebrate the Edinburgh International Festival's 70th anniversary in 2017. In addition, in 2018, Scotland will lead a global first by having a year-long celebration of the very best of Scotland and its young people.

This Scottish Government remains committed to the themed year programme, given their impact and profile and the enabling effect the years have had in supporting partnership working to the benefit of all Scotland's communities. However, the time is right to test support for the programme's continuation, so my thanks go to VisitScotland, which has been gathering industry views on whether the current model remains fit for purpose. That will help to ensure that future plans are informed by what industry and delivery partners feel best supports and builds on the economic, social, cultural and reputational benefits that the programme has helped to deliver. I look forward to confirming the outcome of that process in the coming months.

Events tourism is very much part and parcel of Scotland's offer. We have an international profile and we are reaching into communities; we are seeing the benefits of communities themselves taking on board the importance of events to help their local economies. I recognise the last part of the Conservatives' amendment in that regard, and the challenge that that might sometimes bring to communities.

I welcome the opportunity that today's debate provides to acknowledge the growth, ambition and innovation of our events industry and the benefits that are being achieved through securing Scotland's reputation as the perfect stage for events. We cannot rest on our laurels; we must drive forward and, in doing so, make sure that we use the many and varied talents of everyone in all the sectors to deliver that.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the strength of Scotland's annual portfolio of events and its positive impact on the economy, tourism and in communities across Scotland; celebrates the recent successes of the summer sporting and cultural events and festivals; supports the continued ambition, as set out in the 2015 national events strategy, that Scotland's reputation as the perfect stage for events is recognised nationally and internationally; notes the importance of effective partnerships and collaboration by the industry, the Scottish Government, its relevant agencies and non-departmental public bodies and local authorities in delivering the strategy and planning for shared initiatives such as the themed years; welcomes the establishment of the Events and Festivals Industry Group, which has been brought together by the Scottish Tourism Alliance to facilitate a collective industry response to the strategy, and recognises the future opportunities for Scotland following the successful securing of major sporting events, including the 2018 European Championships, the 2019 Solheim Cup and the 2020 UEFA European Football Championships.

16:09

Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con): I whole-heartedly acknowledge the strength of Scotland's annual portfolio of events and believe that its positive and growing contribution to the Scottish economy will generate further room for growth in the Scottish tourism sector. The economic impact of visitor spend spreads out from the traditional parts of the tourism industry into other sectors including arts and crafts, food and drink, cultural events, sports events and business and retail. As part of a collaboration between the Scottish Government and the public, private and third sectors, a 10-year national events strategy, aptly entitled "Scotland: The Perfect Stage", was published last year.

Members should not expect me to hold back on selling Scotland's unique offering—its rich and ancient history, its strikingly beautiful scenery, particularly in the south of Scotland, of course, and

delicious food and drink that are lovingly produced from our rolling fields and our plentiful shores. As demonstrated by that long list, the events sector is incredibly diverse. It covers trade fairs, conferences, outdoor and indoor entertainment events and business tourism.

Other Scottish regions could learn from Perthshire businesses. With support from VisitScotland and Perth and Kinross Council, Perthshire business tourism group created the Perthshire agency challenge—the first of its kind—which put a group of seven UK buyers through their paces in a series of challenges to encourage more business visitors to the area. In a unique move, which differs from the usual familiarisation trip that buyers experience, they not only learned first hand from each venue of the possibilities for corporate conferences, events and incentives, but were pitted against each other in a series of mental and physical challenges at BlueSky Experiences, which culminated in a mini Highland games and a visit to Perth racecourse.

Our rural partners in vibrant towns and villages set the stage and provide the scenery for over 16 million visitors to Scotland every year. Undoubtedly, Scotland's reputation as the perfect stage for events is recognised nationally and internationally. The Scottish Conservatives support Fiona Hyslop's motion and hope that she will support our amendment, which sets out the importance of good infrastructure and transport systems—particularly in rural and semi-rural areas—for improving access to large events for people throughout Scotland. I will touch on that later.

It is important that the Scottish Government continue to support events outside Edinburgh and Glasgow to grow Scotland's wider economic benefit. It is well known that international visitors tend to concentrate their activities on larger cities due to access to transport and good road networks. It is important to nurture events that are not headline grabbers. Rural communities can offer a different experience: communities with personality that attract customers who are looking for a destination with unique character.

As a former Roxburghe curler, I am delighted that the 2016 Le Gruyère European curling championships will be held at the Braehead ice rink in November. Scotland will welcome more than 25 nations to one of the biggest sporting events this year, which will form the pathway to Olympic qualification for the 2018 winter Olympics in South Korea. It is only right that we bring the roaring game to Scotland. After all, it is recognised that curling clubs were formed in Scotland; during the 19th century, the game was exported wherever Scots settled around the world in cold

climates—most notably Canada, the USA, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and New Zealand.

A speech on events could not fail to mention golf, as Fiona Hyslop did. The modern game of golf is generally considered to have been invented in Scotland. I will give members a little bit of political trivia: the first documented mention of it in Scotland appears in a 1457 act of the Parliament of Scotland, which was an edict issued by King James II prohibiting the playing of golf and football because they were a distraction from archery practice for military purposes. In 2020, Scotland will be honoured to host the women's British open championship. The venue is still to be announced: I hope that it will be Muirfield, for obvious reasons.

I will use East Lothian as an example to explain the Scottish Conservative amendment. The region, which is otherwise known as the golf coast, attracts golfers from around the world because it provides high-quality links courses. There was a will for the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews to take the Scottish open championship throughout Scotland and it was the intention that rural communities would benefit. Gullane fitted the criteria. Independent research confirmed that the championship delivered £17.6 million benefit to East Lothian, plus considerable marketing benefits derived from promotional exposure across 104 television channels with a global audience reach of 500 million households. However, a local golfer told me that public transport was not fit to support such events and that road access to accommodate extra visitors required investment. That raises the question whether a lack of infrastructure is a barrier to attracting international events, particularly in rural areas. It will come as no surprise to the cabinet secretary to hear that infrastructure investment must be taken seriously if destinations are to fit the criteria for event selection. I would like to offer a solution to the Scottish Government: it should fast-track the reinstatement of East Linton and Reston stations to ease overcrowding and promote accessibility. Those investments should be part of a long-term strategy to deal with 10,000 new homes and an increase in population.

The Scottish Government and the tourism industry's 10-year strategy is welcome, but it is mainly aspirational and there are a number of actions that the Scottish Government could be taking to make Scotland more attractive, including investment in infrastructure and roads. I would be delighted if the cabinet secretary would support my amendment to acknowledge the vital investment that is required in our road network, especially for rural communities throughout Scotland. We believe that the Government should maintain the share of the budget that goes to road investment. Upgrading rural roads would provide a huge boost to residents, visitors and businesses in

those areas. To put the issue into context, the SNP must be careful not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg by choking it to death.

I move amendment S5M-01581.1, to leave out from "establishment" to end and insert:

"support for events such as the Edinburgh International Culture Summit given by the UK Government; further welcomes the establishment of the Events and Festivals Industry Group, which has been brought together by the Scottish Tourism Alliance to facilitate a collective industry response to the strategy; recognises the future opportunities for Scotland following the successful securing of major sporting events, including the 2018 European Championships, the 2019 Solheim Cup and the 2020 UEFA European Football Championships, and notes the importance of good infrastructure and transport systems, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas, to improving access to large events for people across Scotland."

16:16

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): We welcome the debate, and we wholly endorse the proposition that Scotland's major events strategy should be based on a collaborative partnership approach.

The first such strategy post devolution was launched by the Labour-led Scottish Executive in 2002. It set out a vision for making Scotland

"one of the world's foremost events destinations by 2015."

That strategy was about

"Competing on an international stage",

and the tagline of providing a stage for events was continued in the most recent strategy, which was published by the current Government in 2015. Then, as now, the strategy was developed in consultation with the Scottish Government's agencies for culture, sport and tourism, and with local government. That broad alliance is mirrored in the current strategy's emphasis on the "one Scotland approach". EventScotland was set up to implement the original strategy in 2003.

Therefore, the principles that underlie the Government's motion are ones that command broad support, and the strategy builds on an approach that was first laid out by Labour ministers. So far, so good—but, of course, any successful strategy requires not only a plan and a dedicated agency working with partners, but the necessary resources to make it happen. That is where legitimate concerns exist.

Scotland's events strategy is not just about the major international sporting events that are mentioned in the cabinet secretary's motion; it must also be about events of all sizes in a wide range of fields of human activity, from the book festival in Wigtown to the boat festival in Portsoy. Many of those events depend on local councils for support, and local government faces the reality of

funding cuts that have already been made and others that are still to come. Given the overall cut in funding of 11 per cent that the Accounts Commission has reported, which has already been mentioned, it perhaps comes as no surprise to learn that the best figures that are available to the Scottish Parliament information centre suggest that net revenue expenditure on cultural and related services by Scottish local councils together fell by nearly 10 per cent in real terms between 2009-10 and 2014-15.

Local government finance has already been debated. We will continue to call on ministers to use the powers that they have to secure the resources that we need to achieve our ambitions as a country, whether in schools, in healthcare or in delivering the major events strategy that we are debating. We will also continue to make the case for local authorities to have the power to raise local finance in order to deliver local priorities, and to have real choices about what revenues they raise and how.

Councils that want to maintain and strengthen their events offer should be able to raise money by way of a tourism tax, as is done in leading European destinations such as Paris and Barcelona. Of course, a tourism tax would not work everywhere. In some places, it might be counterproductive, but the parts of the country that have the strongest offer for visitors are also often the ones that are the most open to the idea of a tourism tax to enable them to get the investment that they need.

Julia Amour, who is the head of Festivals Edinburgh, said in February that

“There needs to be a very realistic public debate”

on how to fund future events. Only this week, Rita Marcella, who is the dean of Aberdeen business school at the Robert Gordon University, wrote:

“There is general consensus that Aberdeen and the north-east more widely need to diversify and grow our sources of revenue across a range of sectors”.

She also highlighted the potential for a tourism tax to support Aberdeen’s

“growing and vibrant festival programme.”

We want Scotland’s major events strategy to succeed, but that needs ambition, partnership and investment, which must include investment by local authorities empowered by ministers to raise local revenues, set local priorities and fund local investment. That way, everyone has a stake in success, and Scotland’s ability to compete on the world stage can go from strength to strength.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): We move to the open debate. I have to tell everyone that we are going to have to be very strict with time, because we cannot compromise

the adjourned section of general questions, which we will have before decision time.

16:20

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I am very pleased that we are having this debate. I just wish that it had been a bit longer, because this is a very important area for the Scottish economy.

I compliment the cabinet secretary Fiona Hyslop on the development of “Scotland the Perfect Stage: Scotland’s Events Strategy 2015-2025”. The strategy’s ingredients—our people, our cultural identity and heritage, our natural and built environments and our signature events—are exactly the right ones, and I am glad that the strategy itself is aligned with the Scottish Tourism Alliance’s strategy for growing Scotland’s tourism product up to 2020. It is no wonder that this area is so important; after all, it attracts about £3.5 billion in spending in events alone. The impact on tourism is therefore significant, and I want to concentrate on that impact in my short contribution this afternoon.

Looking back quickly to 2014, which was the year of homecoming and the year in which we had the Commonwealth games and the remarkable Ryder cup at Gleneagles, I know that the Stirling economy benefited significantly from those events. However, Stirling itself did not stand still with them; it had a fantastically successful Bannockburn day, which was supported by the Scottish Government, and the national armed forces day.

I mention those events because, having spoken to hoteliers and restaurateurs, I know that, as Murdo Fraser said in a debate earlier this week, the feel-good factor is certainly out there, given the number of people who appear to be attending events in Scotland just now and who are filling up our hotels and restaurants. The evidence might be anecdotal at this stage, and I hope that the figures will come through to show that that is the case, but I have begun to wonder how much of the activity that is taking place in my constituency is a legacy of the investment that was made during the 2014 year of homecoming. That will be difficult to prove, but I suspect that there is truth in there.

As the Tories have recognised in their amendment, all good events need infrastructure and, if I have time—I doubt that I will—I will come back to that issue. However, I make no apology for talking about the built environment, which is one of the strategy’s key themes. Stirling city is on the verge of submitting a bid for a new city deal to the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments, and I have been very impressed by the highly professional documentation that has been put forward in the bid. The deal will transform the city; we already have the background of the fantastic

Wallace monument, the castle and Bannockburn, but the transformation process will give a much more modern feel. I hope that the bid is successful, because it will in its own way help to draw in more events in the future.

On the issue of cultural identity and heritage, I do not think that everything is down to the Scottish Government. I do not think that the Government has put any money into, for example, Bloody Scotland, the international crime writing festival in Stirling; it might have—and, if so, well done. That festival has grown year in, year out, with not a great deal of support from the public purse; a lot of the support for what is now a hugely successful international conference in Stirling comes from private industry.

Wrapped around the local product on the ground, we also have a remarkable number of Highland games. Again, they do not always attract much money from the public purse, but they continue to be successful and attract tourists wherever they are. After all, that is what tourists want when they come to Scotland.

I applaud the cabinet secretary on her strategy.

16:24

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): The events that Scotland has attracted have been a real coup and they show the high regard in which Scotland is held in the world today. The list of events that we are going to host in the next few years is remarkable in both its size and its scope. Some examples are the 2016 European curling championships, which will be held at Braehead in my region of West Scotland in November, and which Rachael Hamilton mentioned; the women's British open, which will be held at Kingsbarns next year; and the Euros at Hampden in 2020. Of course, the last will be even better if Scotland can qualify. In addition, several sailing events are held annually on the Firth of Clyde and attract both national and international participants from all age groups.

Another benefit of Scotland hosting large international events, and particularly sporting events, is that they not only provide economic benefits for the areas in which they are held but are great for our young people as they give them the opportunity to see world-class athletes competing here in Scotland, which we hope inspires them to get out there and try new sports.

The same goes for other sorts of events. For example, when Edinburgh hosts the festival, we have people performing here who are the very best at what they do. Actors, musicians and comedians who are among the best in the world visit and perform in Scotland. The Edinburgh festival is certainly rich in talent.

Another example is the tattoo that is held at Edinburgh castle every year, which gives our armed forces a chance to show their work to the Scottish people and people from abroad. As members know, the tattoo is now exported to other countries overseas, so successful has it been. Every year, people who go up to the castle to watch it see the services at their best, showing the professionalism, tradition, dedication and determination that make them the very best in the world. That is why, every year, thousands travel from all over the world to watch.

The reason why we are having success in bringing events to Scotland is that people are working together in organisations such as the events and festivals industry group, which was set up by the Scottish Tourism Alliance. It was also right for my colleague Rachael Hamilton to mention in her amendment to the Scottish Government's motion the support that the UK Government can provide and has provided in Scotland.

Infrastructure is also vital to such events, and Rachael Hamilton was again correct to emphasise its particular importance in her amendment. We need it not just to get people to events, but to get them around to other parts of Scotland. While people are here in Edinburgh or in Glasgow, they can travel to the west of Scotland and enjoy the many fine attractions that we have in our part of the world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for your brevity, Mr Corry. It is very much appreciated.

16:27

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I declare an interest as a councillor in Dumfries and Galloway Council, where I have the privilege of carrying out a voluntary role as events champion for the region, which has a rich tapestry of events and festivals.

Dumfries and Galloway's reputation as the rural location of choice for many international-quality events is in no small part thanks to the unique major festivals and events strategies that the council has adopted over the past decade, the most recent being agreed in 2014. It recognises that events are real business, cultural and sporting assets that bring thousands of people to the area every year. When Dumfries hosted the world curling seniors and mixed doubles championships in 2014, more than 70 nations participated and the net economic value was more than £650,000.

What does the strategy mean in practice? It very much aligns with the national perfect stage strategy. It promotes collaboration between the events sector, bringing together events organisers, the local authority, VisitScotland, EventScotland

and local organisations such as the Hollywood Trust. The excellent relationship between those stakeholders is vital in helping to support and fund events, with EventScotland investing £500,000 since the start of the strategies—something that I congratulate it on. The strategy also engages local communities, building the region's volunteer base and developing young talent across sport, the arts and culture.

This weekend, I will have the pleasure of attending the fantastic Lockerbie jazz festival, which will include a performance by the new Lockerbie youth jazz choir, which has come together as a result of the festival.

The strategy adds value to the outstanding range of events and festivals that take place across Dumfries and Galloway, such as last year's women's world ice hockey championship, which led to Dumfries becoming the only town in Scotland to have a women's ice hockey team. In case members are wondering, I add that it plays teams in England.

The work between the council and the Scottish rally, which is held in Dumfries and Galloway, has helped it to become one of the rounds of the newly re-established British rally championship. In addition, earlier this month, I had the privilege of presenting the first stage winning trophy when the tour of Britain cycle race held its only Scottish stage finish in Castle Douglas—its eighth visit to Dumfries and Galloway.

There are also successful cultural events in the region, such as spring fling, which has helped Dumfries and Galloway, it is widely believed, to become the region of Scotland with the most artists and craft makers per head of population. Dumfries and Galloway has also become Scotland's outdoor music festivals destination with the Wickerman festival, which we hope will return in 2017, and other festivals such as Electric Fields, the Eden festival and the Knockengoroch festival, to name just a few.

I would like to raise with the cabinet secretary a concern that organisers have: the spiralling cost of policing events. I will give members just two examples. In 2015, the policing bill for the Eden festival was £12,000 for a licensed audience of 8,000. This year it is £38,000, an increase of more than 300 per cent. The Electric Fields festival had a bill of £1,600 for 2,000 people last year; this year it is £19,000 for an audience of 5,000, albeit over two days. Notwithstanding the perception of overpolicing, the charges by Police Scotland are well above those in England, undermining and risking events in rural areas and putting Scotland at a competitive disadvantage with our near neighbours. There are also challenges when it comes to accommodation, limited venues, transport links and, of course, cuts to local council

budgets. However, I am happy to endorse the motion and amendment. There is no doubt that Dumfries and Galloway—like Scotland as a whole—is the perfect stage for events and they make an outstanding contribution to the cultural, social and economic life of our communities.

In 1999, this Parliament awarded Wigtown the status of Scotland's book town. This weekend the Wigtown book festival will kick off, with two weeks of fantastic events. I will be going along, and I am sure that all members will be made most welcome.

16:31

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am only too pleased to speak in a debate such as this, because I am aware of the cultural impact of events throughout Scotland, and particularly in my own home town of Paisley. I know that many members will be surprised to hear that all roads lead to Paisley, but on this occasion it is quite apt, as Paisley is trying to achieve United Kingdom city of culture status in 2021. We must consider the ambition of that bid. A lot of it stems from a time when I was on the local authority and Derek Mackay, my friend and colleague and now cabinet secretary, was leader of the council, when we brought events back into the town centre and ensured that, whether it was fireworks events or switching on the Christmas lights, there would be a major crowd there for our retailers and for the nighttime economy.

We know that that was a good starting point, and when we talk about cultural planning and regeneration, I think of events such as the Renfrewshire witch hunt, which the cabinet secretary will be aware of, as the participants all came here dressed in their clothing from 1697. Many people might not know that Paisley was the last town in the whole of Scotland to try someone for witchcraft and kill them for it, and they might ask why we should celebrate something like that. If we talk about our past, the good and the bad, we can make sure that we know where we are. It was good to have local groups getting involved in that event. It ensured that young people learned more about their culture and their future in Paisley, and such events can make a difference in showing that we can be confident. Yes, Paisley is a post-industrial town that has the same challenges as other post-industrial towns, but we have the ambition in Paisley to go for UK city of culture in 2021.

I have heard some people say that Paisley is a large town, not a city, but with 77,000 members of the public it has a large enough populace to be a city in its own right. We are led in Paisley by Jean Cameron, who is pushing those events forward for us, and we hope next year to gain that status as UK city of culture. Why would we not want that?

After all, Paisley is the town that gave us Doctor Who, both the actor David Tennant and the executive producer and showrunner Steven Moffat, as well as Gerard Butler, Gerry Rafferty, Paulo Nutini, Robert Tannahill the poet and John Byrne the playwright. Why would a town with such a cultural background not want to tell the world exactly what we have got and what we have given the world?

That is why Paisley's bold, innovative bid for UK city of culture can, in my view, be successful. It shows that we can go forward and can use culture and events as a way of regenerating our town and our town centre, so much so that my dearly beloved fan-owned Paisley St Mirren's home has now been called the Paisley 2021 stadium. That shows how important the bid is to the great town of Paisley.

We have historic buildings and we are the birthplace of the Stewart dynasty and the final resting place of Marjory Bruce. Who would not want to come to the great town of Paisley to see everything that we have to offer?

We also have the PACE Theatre Company, which does events and offers young people access to drama and the arts. James McAvoy was one young person from Glasgow who turned up one day to tread the boards; he is now a world-famous actor, and it all began in Paisley.

We have to look at the way that Jean Cameron and her team are taking the bid forward. We are being bold and ambitious and, to paraphrase someone else, in the next year or so, as we count down to the bid, keep your eye on Paisley.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that we can all take it that you quite like Paisley, Mr Adam.

We move to the closing speeches.

16:35

Lewis Macdonald: It has been useful to focus on Scotland's events strategy, however briefly we have been obliged to do so, and to consider the challenges that lie ahead.

Colin Smyth's point about the cost of policing emphasised the important point about securing the resources to deliver the investments that a successful events strategy will need. Whether at local or at national level, money that has been invested well in cultural and sporting events will come back several times over as extra visitor spend and increased economic activity. Councils and public agencies need to be confident that they will have the resources they need and they need to command the public's confidence.

Next year has been designated as the year of history, heritage and archaeology, so the spotlight

will be turned firmly on all the agencies that are engaged in the field, whether national, local or in the third sector. Questions were raised this week about Historic Environment Scotland, and access to Maeshowe. I know that the cabinet secretary is alert to that issue. Confidence in HES's stewardship of our historic and prehistoric sites will be essential next year and beyond.

Our museums will also have an important role to play in enhancing the historic and heritage events that will happen up and down the country in 2017. In December, the Museums Association surveyed its members across the UK, including those in Scotland. One museum professional raised concern about prospective cuts to funding of between 25 and 40 per cent, while another talked of the local museums service having to review its estate and its opening hours in order to "focus on priorities." Councils must be able to set and focus on priorities and to secure the resources that they need to meet those priorities. That is why we argue for much greater flexibility and choice in the future funding of local government.

As far as today's motion and amendment are concerned, there is little of substance with which to disagree. Rachael Hamilton is right to highlight the importance of good infrastructure and transport systems to allow people to access major events, although that is true for our towns and cities as well as for more rural areas.

I was able to attend part of the Edinburgh international culture summit this summer, and a very good event it was too, although of course the British Council, the Edinburgh International Festival and the Parliament are partners in that, alongside the Scottish and UK Governments.

The motion in the cabinet secretary's name notes the importance of cross-agency working and welcomes the establishment of the events and festivals industry group by the Scottish Tourism Alliance. I am happy to endorse those points.

A number of members have highlighted just how important events are to their local economies and communities. Colin Smyth has his own words of wisdom quoted on page 29 of "Scotland the Perfect Stage", and he has again today highlighted the contribution of festivals and events to the cultural and sporting life of his part of Scotland. In my region of North East Scotland, such events are equally important, whether it be True North, Aberdeen's festival of music and song, which starts today, or the 20,000 people who will gather at Pittodrie on Sunday for the visit of Rangers FC.

Sport or culture, old or new, large or small, north or south, Scotland's events calendar is jammed full of great occasions for people to come together and enjoy themselves, and some of the memories will last a lifetime. We should of course engage in

realistic debate about what and how, but we should also celebrate 14 years of strategic vision and growth, and look to the future.

16:39

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests as a serving councillor on Perth and Kinross Council.

Securing Scotland's position as the perfect stage for events is right because a perfect stage and Scotland are synonymous. We have the people and we have the ambition, and I pay tribute to everybody who is actively involved in all the events that we have heard about today. VisitScotland and the Scottish Tourism Alliance also have a major part to play. I commend and congratulate team GB for their efforts at the Olympics and the Paralympics; they are real heroes for us and we look forward to welcoming them back soon.

Bruce Crawford made some very good points about the contribution that is made to the tourism product and I very much agree with him on that. Lewis Macdonald said so far, so good, and we can acknowledge that that is the way that we are going.

The title of the debate sums up my feelings on the issue—Scotland really is the perfect stage for events and that is recognised throughout the world. We have the people, we have the places and we have the perfect opportunity to extend a warm welcome to visitors from across the world and the United Kingdom.

Colin Smyth made a valid point when he talked about the policing of events, because that has a massive impact on some local areas and what they can achieve.

There is no doubt that our stunning landscapes and historic buildings are an integral part of what we can have within our sectors here in Scotland and there is no doubt about the contribution that tourism makes to the economy when tourists spend around £12 billion—about 5 per cent of Scottish gross domestic product. That is very important as we move forward.

In my region of Mid Scotland and Fife, we are renowned for our hospitality and for the location that I represent. The famous T in the Park festival, despite some concerns about policing and public safety since its relocation to Strathallan castle, attracts tens of thousands of revellers and Perthshire and Kinross-shire have both benefited immensely from that festival—it really is the jewel in the crown for Perth and Kinross and also for Scotland.

Recently, Perth had the privilege of displaying, at the Black Watch museum, the poppies that are part of the weeping window tour. That has generated in excess of 100,000 visitors to that event, which is fantastic. If anyone gets the opportunity to see it before it disappears, I would recommend it.

Other events, such as Rewind in Scone, the royal military tattoo and all the other festivals that we have heard about today, make a massive contribution. Events that will take place over the next four years are also fantastic. Later this year, the cycling world cup is coming to Glasgow. In 2017, we have the European rugby championships in Edinburgh. In 2018, we have the world junior curling championships in Aberdeen and in 2019 the Solheim cup is coming to Gleneagles. Those events will give us a huge opportunity to promote Scotland worldwide and to show what we do best. They are a great opportunity for us.

We cannot talk about events without talking about St Andrews and golf, because they are synonymous. St Andrews is the home of golf and represents the history of golf. We have had some fantastic events there down the years and I am sure that we will continue to see many in the future. There is also Gleneagles—who can forget the Ryder cup? When we had that fantastic event there two years ago, the weather was perfect, the location was perfect, and of course we won.

It is important that the 10-year strategy is welcomed. We welcome it, but we also have to be very aware that things do not always tally up in this Administration. We must acknowledge that there has been a cut in spending on culture of 11 per cent in one single year. Spending on culture is not the sole indicator of success for international events, but we must take on board that it has an impact and it is important to acknowledge that.

Fiona Hyslop: The member must be aware that a great deal of the reduction in the culture budget was because we had already spent capital funding that delivered the completed Theatre Royal, for example, and other buildings. We cannot spend that money twice, hence that level of reduction.

Alexander Stewart: The cabinet secretary must acknowledge that there was a funding reduction in Creative Scotland of £1.2 million and that is planned for this year as well. We have seen things happen, but at the same time we have to acknowledge where we are.

We must all play our part and do the best that we can to ensure that Scotland gets all that it wants. Infrastructure is essential and the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party believes that the Government should maintain the present share of budget that goes into road investment. That is

crucial, but it is also crucial that we look at infrastructure and connectivity. We cannot have events taking place without individuals being able to switch on their broadband and move forward.

Scotland is proud of its location, we are proud of our brand, and we are proud of our welcome and our reputation. However, we have to maintain that and I look forward to working with everyone across the chamber to ensure that that happens.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Aileen Campbell. I will cut your time down to around seven minutes if I may, minister.

16:44

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): It is my pleasure to close this lively and celebratory debate on Scotland being the perfect stage for events. As many members have noted, the debate comes after a stunning display of sporting success from our 86 Scottish Olympians and Paralympians who were part of team GB competing in Rio.

I look forward to celebrating that success along with the First Minister at the Oriam, our national sports performance centre at Heriot-Watt University. The celebration will include schoolchildren, members of community sport hubs, young ambassadors, the young people's sport panel and members of the public. It will be a further opportunity for our athletes to inspire the next generation of Scottish Olympians.

In my closing remarks, I will discuss the wider societal and economic benefits that our successes can bring to our nation. Legacy is crucial to our flourishing events industry, and it requires work, effort and dedication to ensure that that legacy is delivered on an on-going basis.

The Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth games and the 2014 Ryder cup brought societal, cultural and economic benefits to the whole of Scotland. Those benefits have been mentioned by many members in the debate—not least Bruce Crawford, who mentioned his constituency of Stirling. Between 2003 and September 2014, Scotland invested £10.9 million in golf events as part of the Ryder cup event legacy programme. A further £3.3 million has been invested since 2014, and over the next three years an additional £6.1 million will go into the programme.

As part of the Commonwealth games legacy, we set out to achieve 150 operational community sport hubs by 2016. We have not only achieved but surpassed that target, with 155 hubs now up and running. More than 180 projects have been awarded funding through the £10 million legacy 2014 active places fund, which aims to help communities to be more physically active.

Looking forward, we have an equally strong programme of national and international events taking place. Those include the European rugby champions cup, the European challenge cup and the world badminton championship in 2017; the 147th open championship in 2018; the world wheelchair curling championship and European indoor athletics in 2019; and in 2020 the world men's curling championship, which Rachael Hamilton mentioned.

Our dependability as a world leader in the events industry has directly influenced the decisions that will lead to new and exciting multisports European championships in 2018 and the Solheim cup in 2019; and to UEFA Euro 2020 coming to Scotland.

Our programme for government sets out the detail of the substantial investment that the Scottish Government will provide to support delivery of those events during the current session of Parliament. Issues were raised by members during the debate in that respect. While we ensure that the economic benefits are fully realised, it will be critical to ensure that every effort is made by those involved in the planning and delivery of our major events programme to maximise the social and reputational benefits that each event has to offer.

The vision for the European championships is not only to let Scots see world-class athletes in action but to showcase Scotland and drive greater participation in sport. The event will be supported by a cultural programme that will have clear links to the exciting year of young people in 2018. Staging the Solheim cup not only offers us the opportunity to promote and celebrate our values, demonstrate our experience and innovation in hosting events and highlight our commitment to promoting the equality agenda, but it will help to cement Scotland's reputation as the home of golf and to inspire a new generation of children—girls in particular—to take up the game that was invented in their home country and to get involved in sport more generally.

On the theme of encouraging more girls into sport, I am delighted to announce today that the Scottish Football Association intends to bid to host the women's under-19 and under-17 European football championship in 2019. That tournament will help not only to promote the women's game—which is in great shape, particularly after our national team qualified for the 2017 European championships—and our commitment to equality for all in Scotland, but to build momentum towards Glasgow's hosting both group games and a round of 16 matches as part of the anniversary edition of the main tournament in 2020.

The outcome of the bid should be known in December. Although UEFA will fund the

tournament, we will work to ensure that a one-Scotland approach is taken to both support and promote the event. Let us hope that the fantastic media coverage of women and sport that we saw during the Olympics and the Paralympics does not fall off a cliff edge, especially after our women have broken the near 20-year drought of our country's involvement in football championships.

I turn to some of the excellent speeches that were made during the debate. Rachael Hamilton and Colin Smyth beautifully articulated the splendour of the south of Scotland, and given that my constituency is in that region, I have no trouble agreeing with those sentiments. However, as a Perthshire lass, I am glad that Rachael Hamilton mentioned the innovative work of Perth and Kinross Council, which has grabbed the thistle to maximise economic activity.

During 2015 and 2016, more than 77 per cent of the events that EventScotland supported were held outside Glasgow and Edinburgh. I hope that that reassures Rachael Hamilton that the events programme is not just about Glasgow, Edinburgh and the central belt.

Lewis Macdonald talked about the need for collaborative working. I agree on that. Much of what we have discussed today would not have happened had there not been a one-Scotland approach. However, we experienced difficulty with the homeless world cup, when visa hurdles for people from participating countries were not quickly addressed by the UK Government, which jeopardised the attendance of some of the competing countries. We need everyone to play their role in enabling things to be done timeously so that events can happen and be successful.

Colin Smyth made interesting points about police charging. He was right to raise the issue, on which we are working with Police Scotland.

George Adam did a sterling job of promoting Paisley, as he always does. I know that the Paisley 2021 stadium is a crucial part of the girls football bid—although I am sure that Alexander Stewart has views of his own about the competition to be the city of culture.

We have a lot to be proud of and to celebrate. Regardless of the party-political divide, members are united in our belief that Scotland is and always will be the perfect stage on which to hold major events.

General Question Time

16:51

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We move to general questions, which were interrupted earlier today. We pick up at question 5.

Railways (Performance)

5. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve performance on Scotland's railways. (S5O-00175)

The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government has written to the ScotRail alliance to request an improvement plan. Frankly, performance has not been to the level that I—and we—expect it to be. The plan will provide evidence on how the ScotRail alliance intends to return performance to contracted target levels.

Neil Bibby: Official ScotRail statistics show that in the run-up to 20 August, 24 out of 75 services were late more often than they were on time. Only 38.7 per cent of trains to Paisley Canal, 29 per cent of trains to Dalmeir and 25 per cent of trains to Milngavie arrived on time, and only one in 10 trains to Arbroath, Ardrossan Harbour and High Street Glasgow stations arrived on time.

This Government signed a contract with Abellio that gives the company millions of pounds of taxpayers' money every week. It is not good enough for the minister just to blame ScotRail and Network Rail. Will he say what percentage of trains arriving on time he thinks is acceptable? What guarantees will he give passengers today that services will be significantly improved? If there are to be improvements, will he say by when?

Humza Yousaf: Let me try to reassure the member, where I can. As I said, I do not think that public performance measures are at the standard that we expect them to be. That is why I have given instructions that an improvement plan come to me and changes be made.

Let me try to give some perspective on what the member said. The public performance measure target that ScotRail Abellio has is 91.3 per cent; performance was just 1.6 per cent behind that, at 89.7 per cent—[*Interruption.*] I say, just to give some perspective, because I know that the member needs it, that when Labour had the franchise in 2005, performance was at 84 per cent—6 per cent lower than it currently is.

On the Glasgow south line, the PPM is 97 per cent. On the Gourock to Wemyss Bay line, which is the service that the member uses, it is 99 per cent. There are improvements to be made, which

is why an improvement plan is being put in place, but we must put the issue in perspective. The railways are not collapsing. There is not chaos, as the member suggests. I know that Neil Bibby is usually a ray of eternal sunshine and positivity, and I ask him to think positively about the issue.

The improvement plan has been requested, and I am sure that improvements will be made and there will be action in that regard. Let us get some perspective. Yes, the PPM target has been missed by 1.6 per cent. I will certainly push ScotRail further. Let us see what the improvement plan has to offer.

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I intend to write to the minister about this, but I would like to place on record some of the terrible travelling experiences that I am getting reports of from people travelling on the East Kilbride to Glasgow line. Will the minister ensure that, when I send him a letter detailing some of the experiences that have been relayed to me over the past few weeks, he will quickly have a look at it and raise those issues with ScotRail, along with other issues?

Humza Yousaf: Yes, of course I will. It is important to say that anybody can pick out a week or a month of statistics but, as I said, over the year, although the performance has not been what I expect it to be, in terms of punctuality and performance, a PPM of 89.7 per cent is the right trajectory. However, we need to get to the targets that are set in the contract. The improvement plan is in place and, I hope, that will make a difference for constituents in East Kilbride.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): What measures is the Scottish Government taking to expand passenger capacity on Scotland's railways?

Humza Yousaf: The member raises an important point. Of course, the good-news story on the railways is that their popularity has grown by 27 per cent since 2007. More people want to use our railways, but the other side of that coin is that we have capacity issues in the network. To try to address that, a number of things are in the franchise contract. In April 2015, when the ScotRail franchise was taken on by Abellio, there were 287 trains in the fleet; that will increase to 336 by 2019. There will be 70 new Hitachi trains, with more than 40 per cent extra seating planned by the end of 2018-19. We are taking a host of other measures to improve capacity, because it is a big issue. I am active on social media, and a lot of people tweet me about capacity issues. Improvements are being made, and a new fleet of trains are coming in, which will help with that. I can perhaps provide more detail to the member in written correspondence.

Broadband Speeds (Grangemouth)

6. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the reported views of businesses regarding slow broadband speeds in the Grangemouth area. (S5O-00176)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity (Fergus Ewing): The majority of homes and businesses in Grangemouth are served by commercial broadband services. We will continue to press commercial providers to deliver the best possible service to as many homes and businesses as possible. The Scottish Government's investment in the digital Scotland superfast broadband programme has seen two new cabinets installed recently to serve areas of Grangemouth that would not have been reached commercially. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring superfast broadband access for 100 per cent of premises by 2021. We intend to deliver new public investment via new procurements from next year, which will further improve broadband availability and speeds across Scotland.

Alison Harris: Does the minister agree that it is incredible that, in 2016, businesses in the industrial hub of Scotland are reporting that they have been told that the best option is radio-based broadband beamed across the Forth all the way from Clackmannanshire?

Fergus Ewing: As the member will know if she listened, I referred in my earlier answer to commercial services. Commercial services have provided broadband in cities throughout Britain and, unless I have missed something, I have not heard the United Kingdom Government stating that it is a public obligation of the taxpayer to supplant the commercial activities of companies. That is not really a proposition that one expects to hear from the Conservative Party. However, despite that fact, I can inform the member that, under the digital Scotland superfast broadband programme, 7,000 homes and businesses are being connected every week, and an investment of £410 million is being made to make up for the fact that the UK's ambition is far less than that of the Scottish Government.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): Just last Friday, I had discussions on that very subject with a senior official from Falkirk Council, who advised me that the council is actively pursuing wireless broadband options for my constituency. What can the Scottish Government do to assist Falkirk Council in its efforts to improve broadband provision in Grangemouth and the wider Falkirk district and to source alternative technology to allow better broadband speeds for local businesses?

Fergus Ewing: We work with Falkirk Council and other bodies to help to extend digital connectivity in the area. A range of technologies will be required to deliver our shared broadband ambitions. Community broadband Scotland is already supporting a number of communities to procure wireless broadband solutions and the Scottish Government is supporting trials of innovative TV white space technology in Orkney, which could support wireless broadband delivery in the future. I will ensure that the good points that my colleague Angus MacDonald raises are followed up with Falkirk Council in the coming days when its plans are discussed in more detail.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Is the cabinet secretary as tired as I am of hearing the Tories complain about the Scottish Government's approach to digital connectivity, when the Tory Government at Westminster does not have as ambitious a target for roll-out as the target that we have in Scotland?

Fergus Ewing: Tory fatigue is just one of the malaises that we must thole here in the Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Government has made it clear that we intend to go far further than the UK Government on digital connectivity. The UK's ambition is lesser and its universal service obligation will deliver speeds of just 10 megabits per second, which is far below the superfast target in Scotland. Although we have a long way to go, what we are doing in Scotland will be far more ambitious than what our counterparts seek to deliver down south.

The Presiding Officer: That ends general questions.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Today, in an answer to an inspired parliamentary question from Gil Paterson, the cabinet secretary Michael Matheson announced a review of undercover policing in Scotland since the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 came into force.

I have been raising the issues of unethical and illegal undercover policing for the past few years and have called for a full and independent public inquiry—the same as what is happening in England and Wales. What has been announced today is not a public inquiry. The review that has been announced today fails to address the concerns of victims prior to the year 2000, whereas the Pitchford inquiry in England and Wales will look back to 1968. The review fails to provide an avenue for victims to present their evidence or an avenue to hear from witnesses, and it will not look at the activities of undercover officers during events such as the campaign against the poll tax, the miners' strike and the

peak period when thousands of construction workers were blacklisted.

Presiding officer, will you use your good office to ensure that the cabinet secretary comes to Parliament next week to make a statement on the review, so that MSPs can ask questions on behalf of their constituents. Sneaking the announcement out at the tail end of the week in an answer to an inspired PQ, with no opportunity for questions, will simply not do.

The Presiding Officer: I thank Neil Findlay for his point of order. He asked a number of questions about a Government announcement today. Those are clearly questions that need to be put to the Government, and I ask the Government and business managers to take cognisance of them, as they would of any other request. Mr Findlay can make use of his own resources and submit written questions, as he would on any other matter. He can make full utilisation of parliamentary facilities in doing so. His point has been noted; however, it is not a point of order.

Decision Time

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S5M-01580.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S5M-01580, in the name of Derek Mackay, on reforming local taxation, 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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S5M-01580.2, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S5M-01580, in the name of Derek Mackay, on reforming local taxation, as amended, 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)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)

Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 34, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S5M-01580.3, in the name of Andy Wightman, which seeks to amend motion S5M-01580, in the name of Derek Mackay, on reforming local taxation, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 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)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 6, Against 121, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S5M-01580, in the name of Derek Mackay, on reforming local taxation, as amended, 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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)

Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Evans, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

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

As the vote is tied and Parliament has been unable to reach a view on the motion as amended, I have to exercise my casting vote. In line with the approach that was taken by my predecessors and as outlined to members in my recent letter, I cast my vote against the amended motion.

Motion, as amended, disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-01581.1, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S5M-01581, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on securing Scotland's place as a perfect stage for events, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-01581, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, on securing Scotland's place as a perfect stage for events, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the strength of Scotland's annual portfolio of events and its positive impact on the economy, tourism and in communities across Scotland; celebrates the recent successes of the summer sporting and cultural events and festivals; supports the continued ambition, as set out in the 2015 national events strategy, that Scotland's reputation as the perfect stage for events is recognised nationally and internationally; notes the importance of effective partnerships and collaboration

by the industry, the Scottish Government, its relevant agencies and non-departmental public bodies and local authorities in delivering the strategy and planning for shared initiatives such as the themed years; welcomes the support for events such as the Edinburgh International Culture Summit given by the UK Government; further welcomes the establishment of the Events and Festivals Industry Group, which has been brought together by the Scottish Tourism Alliance to facilitate a collective industry response to the strategy; recognises the future opportunities for Scotland following the successful securing of major sporting events, including the 2018 European Championships, the 2019 Solheim Cup and the 2020 UEFA European Football Championships, and notes the importance of good infrastructure and transport systems, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas, to improving access to large events for people across Scotland.

Meeting closed at 17:09.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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