



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Tuesday 25 October 2016**

**Session 5**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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## Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 25 October 2016*

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

### Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Good afternoon. Our first item of business is time for reflection, and our leader today is Emeritus Professor Alan Spence, who is professor of creative writing at the University of Aberdeen, an author and a member of the Sri Chinmoy centre in Edinburgh.

**Professor Alan Spence:** Presiding Officer, members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the invitation to speak to you on such a glorious autumn day. The theme of my brief talk is living in hope.

Last year, I wrote a play about two great Glaswegians: the poet Edwin Morgan and the trade unionist and parliamentarian Jimmy Reid, who died in the same week back in 2010. My play imagines the pair of them waking up in a kind of afterlife, not quite sure where they are, and they blether and banter, and engage in a fair bit of flyting about life, the universe and post-referendum Scotland: where we have been, where we are, and maybe where we are going.

Towards the end of the play, they are looking at the state of the wider world—the four horsemen of the apocalypse under starter's orders—but still they hold to something positive as they look back at their lives:

"We did what we could. We did what we did. You live in hope. We lived in hope."

If this building and your work here are about anything, they are about hope: a sense of possibility and a belief that we can work towards a better world.

Twenty years ago, almost to the day, the wisest man I have ever known visited Scotland. He was my teacher, Sri Chinmoy, who was a poet and philosopher, an artist and musician, an athlete, and, most of all, a man of peace. He was here to give a peace concert and during his visit he composed a song called "My Scotland", in which he praised the qualities that he saw manifest here: invention, action and discovery. Invention, action, discovery—an entirely positive take on our dynamic possibilities.

Sri Chinmoy passed away in 2007, and the night before he left the earth he spoke very movingly about the power of hope. He looked at life with a clear eye and saw the madness and the folly but

also the fact that hope still breathes in us. He wrote:

"Every day must come to you as a new promise, a new aspiration, a new energy ... Hope is our inner effort. It inspires us to see something new, to feel something new, to do something new, and finally to become something new. Let us not underestimate the power of hope. No matter how fleeting its life, it offers to us the most convincing and fulfilling power."

We live in hope.

## Business Motion

14:04

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-02108, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for this week.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 25 October 2016—

after

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Building a Fairer Scotland - It takes all of us

insert

*followed by* Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee: Standing Orders Rule Changes - First Minister's Question Time

(b) Wednesday 26 October 2016—

delete

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Delivering Future Enterprise and Skills Support in Scotland – Phase One Outputs from the Enterprise and Skills Review

and insert

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Update on actions following the outcome of the EU Referendum

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Delivering Future Enterprise and Skills Support in Scotland – Phase One Outputs from the Enterprise and Skills Review

*followed by* Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee: Report on the Memorandum of Understanding of Ofcom

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill – UK Legislation—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Topical Question Time

14:04

### Referendum Bill

1. **Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it made of the reported level of support for independence ahead of the decision to bring forward the draft referendum bill before article 50 has been invoked. (S5T-00125)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay):** Our starting point remains protecting Scotland's national interests, as set out by the First Minister. We are considering all possible options to ensure Scotland's continuing relationship with and place in Europe. Scotland delivered a strong, unequivocal vote to remain, and our focus is on ensuring that Scotland's interests are protected, particularly as it appears that the United Kingdom Government now favours a hard Brexit. The consultation on the draft bill, which was launched last week, is about the mechanics of the referendum should we conclude that independence is the best or the only way to protect Scotland's interests.

**Oliver Mundell:** I take it from that answer that the real answer is none.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that pushing ahead with the bill, as the Government plans to do as its number 1 priority—before even listening to his party's listening exercise—exposes the Scottish National Party's true colours and its true intention of independence at any cost?

**Derek Mackay:** The Government is listening, engaging and consulting, but it is also acting in Scotland's national interest, and we will do that each and every day. That is our day job: standing up for Scotland against a hard-right Tory Brexit that will impact on this country's economy. We will do what is best for Scotland.

If the member wants to talk about opinion poll ratings, that is fine. I welcomed the most recent opinion poll, which showed that 51 per cent of people in Scotland would support the SNP in a Scottish Parliament constituency election. That is more support than that for all the other political parties in Scotland put together. No wonder the people of Scotland trust the SNP.

**Oliver Mundell:** If we want to talk about public opinion, why is the cabinet secretary's Government so keen to ignore the 2 million no voters who made their intentions crystal clear, and why is the SNP so keen to airbrush out of history the 1 million leave voters in this country—more

than the number of those who put their cross next to Nicola Sturgeon for First Minister? If the cabinet secretary is saying that the legislation might not be needed, which I think he is saying, how much taxpayers' money has been spent on the publication and preparation of the bill, and under what legal authority has that money been spent?

**Derek Mackay:** It is clear that the Scottish Government has a mandate to consider the matter. It was clearly outlined in the election and in the manifesto on which the SNP secured victory in that election to form the Scottish Government.

Oliver Mundell wants to talk about the cost of policies. Does he realise what the cost of Brexit is to the whole of the United Kingdom as well as to Scotland?

On the subject of respecting this nation—and Scotland is not just a constituency; it is a nation—every part of this nation, including every local authority area, voted to remain in Europe. The UK Government should respect that. The ball is in the UK Government's court to respect Scotland and how the people voted. If it does that, maybe we can find a solution that works for every part of the UK.

The Scottish Government is not just standing up for Scotland; it is trying to help the whole of the UK. The UK Prime Minister could react positively and constructively, first and foremost by respecting Scotland's interest and the democracy of this country.

### Alcohol (Minimum Pricing)

**2. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will take forward plans for the minimum pricing of alcohol following the decision by the Court of Session. (S5T-00126)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison):** The Scottish Government intends to implement minimum unit pricing as soon as possible. The order to bring in minimum pricing must first be laid in draft before the Scottish Parliament for approval before it can be made by the Scottish ministers.

Although we respect the right of the Scotch Whisky Association to seek permission to appeal the judgment, I hope that it will accept it and enable us to get on with implementing a life-saving policy. The member will be aware that I am limited in discussing the case due to the Parliament's guidance on sub judice.

**James Dornan:** I am aware of the restrictions placed on the cabinet secretary, but will she tell me what research into the public health benefits of the policy the Scottish Government has reviewed?

**Shona Robison:** Minimum unit pricing is underpinned by a wealth of international evidence on the public health benefit, which has been before this Parliament on a number of occasions and, indeed, before the court. Today, we have seen the publication of alcohol-related hospital statistics that show that the rate of admission remains four times higher than it was in the early 1980s, adding further to the need for this life-saving policy. As I said, I hope that we can introduce it as soon as possible.

**James Dornan:** Those facts show the importance of the legislation. I look forward to the drinks industry now respecting the will of Parliament and allowing these life-saving measures to be introduced without further delay. Will the minister outline what other measures the Scottish Government is taking in conjunction with minimum unit pricing to address Scotland's relationship with alcohol?

**Shona Robison:** We have a comprehensive strategy to tackle alcohol-related harm in Scotland. It contains 41 measures, including minimum unit pricing. Other measures include the multi-buy discount ban, which has seen a 2.6 per cent reduction in consumption, and a nationwide programme of alcohol brief interventions, which has delivered more than 667,000 interventions since its introduction back in 2008. We have also improved substance misuse education, legislated to ban irresponsible promotions and, more recently, introduced a lower drink-drive limit. A lot has been done, but we are certainly not going to be complacent. We are working on a refresh of the alcohol framework, which we will introduce soon.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Does the cabinet secretary accept that a crucial part of the inner house's judgment was its approval of the provisional or trial nature of the legislation and that the sunset clause argued for by the Scottish Conservatives is integral to that?

**Shona Robison:** I respect all the judgment that has been made. I welcome the cross-party support that we have seen for this important public health measure. I hope that Donald Cameron will join me in hoping that we will now get the opportunity to implement this life-saving legislation. As I have said, I hope that the Scotch Whisky Association will accept the judgment, enabling us to get on with the job of introducing this public health policy, and that all of us get behind it in making sure that it works for the people of Scotland.

### Sexual Offences (Pardons)

**3. Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will quash the convictions and cautions issued to people for now-abolished gay sexual offences and issue pardons. (S5T-00119)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson):** I thank Kezia Dugdale for raising this important issue. It is sadly the case that Scotland has only relatively recently modernised how our criminal laws operate so that they no longer discriminate against same-sex sexual activity. It is shocking to consider that consensual sex between men was decriminalised only in 1980 and that the age of consent for same-sex sexual activity was not equalised with that for sexual activity between men and women until 2001. Thankfully, we can look back with a sense of pride, knowing that those discriminatory laws no longer operate. Such laws clearly have no place in a modern and inclusive Scotland.

However, there are people in Scotland who have criminal convictions for same-sex sexual activity, which is now lawful, and we must right that wrong. Over the summer, I instructed officials to look at the steps that would need to be taken to correct that injustice. I advise Parliament that we will introduce an automatic pardon so that people who have been convicted know that they are absolved fully. We want to address the injustice that people experienced—simply because of their sexual orientation—in circumstances that are now legal, and the granting of an automatic pardon is one way of achieving that.

Separately, it is the case that information on such convictions is held in records that Police Scotland maintains. We engaged with Police Scotland over the summer, to seek views on steps that could be taken to right these historic wrongs. I have instructed my officials, working in partnership with Police Scotland, to determine the practical steps that are required to establish a scheme that will allow men who were convicted as a result of actions that are now legal to have those convictions disregarded. The scheme will ensure that convictions for activity that is now lawful are removed from central conviction records. Where an offence is disregarded, a person will be treated as not having been convicted of that offence, so the offence will not appear on, for example, disclosure checks.

I know that members of this Parliament will want to work together to resolve these important issues.

**Kezia Dugdale:** That is a hugely welcome announcement. It is nothing short of a historic moment for Scotland as a more equal and respectful country. The cabinet secretary will be aware that across the United Kingdom there are many men who have been prosecuted, convicted and in some cases imprisoned for being who they are and loving who they love. A pardon is therefore the very least that the Government of the day can do.

Given the significance of the announcement, I hope that the Presiding Officer will forgive me for

asking three very quick questions. First, can the cabinet secretary confirm that there will be a blanket pardon for any gay or bisexual man who has been convicted of a crime that is no longer a crime? Secondly, will he confirm that no legislation is required for such a pardon and that those affected need not apply to be pardoned, as has been argued elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

Finally, the Scottish Government was not responsible for the laws and for the prosecutions, convictions and sentences that gay men faced, but it could issue a formal apology, which for many people would go a long way in recognising that they should never have accepted liability in the first place. For many men, an apology is as important as a pardon, because an apology will demonstrate that they should never have been convicted of a crime in the first place.

**Michael Matheson:** I will try to deal with each issue in turn. The member asked about a blanket pardon. There will be an automatic pardon for individuals who were convicted of offences that relate to activity that is now lawful. It is important that we have a system in place that also recognises that there are individuals who were convicted under the old criminal law for activities that remain criminal offences. We will create a system that allows that to happen. The approach will be automatic for people who were convicted of crimes in relation to activity that is now lawful.

The provision of an automatic pardon will require legislation. We will seek to introduce legislation at an early date in this session—over the course of the next year, at the very least—to ensure that we make progress on the matter swiftly.

The disregard is an issue that we can take forward as a practical policy measure, the implementation of which might not require legislation. We will seek to make progress on that as quickly as possible.

I fully acknowledge the issue to do with righting the wrongs faced by those who were convicted, some of whom were imprisoned, as a result of activity that is now lawful. An apology is an appropriate measure for the Government to give consideration to. My view is that that would be best dealt with collectively when we bring forward legislation on a pardon during this parliamentary session. I will certainly give the matter serious consideration as part of the package of measures that we will take forward.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I welcome the question from Kezia Dugdale and I very much welcome the answer from the cabinet secretary.

Let me reinforce the final point on the importance of an apology. Does the cabinet secretary appreciate that although many people



will welcome a pardon, others will take from it an implication that they are being forgiven for having done something wrong? Does he agree that that is not the message that should be sent out and that the Government has a responsibility to acknowledge that the state is the body that acted wrongly, in enacting laws that were based on values that we now regard as completely immoral? I reinforce the importance for many people in this situation of the apology coming alongside a pardon, to ensure that the pardon is not misinterpreted.

**Michael Matheson:** I recognise the point that the member makes. The state was responsible for creating the situation in the first place. However, I believe that the most appropriate way in which to take forward any apology would be to consider it alongside the legislation that we intend to bring forward to introduce an automatic pardon. I recognise the sentiments that the member expresses and the points that he makes, and they will be part of our thinking in bringing forward the legislation in the coming months.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I associate the Scottish Conservatives with the remarks that have been made. The cabinet secretary will be aware that there is cross-party support for what is being proposed throughout the United Kingdom and in this Parliament. However, he will also be aware of the developments down south last week in relation to the case that was put forward by one of his party's members. The issue of the blanket apology is difficult because, down south, there are concerns that it would cover offences that are still illegal. The cabinet secretary mentioned in his second answer to Ms Dugdale the creation of a system to ensure that that does not happen. Can he provide the Parliament with more information on how he envisages taking that element forward?

**Michael Matheson:** I welcome the fact that, as the member has recognised, there is cross-party support. I am sure that he will also recognise that there was provision in my colleague John Nicolson's bill to deal with the offences that were committed previously and remain criminal offences. I regret the approach that the UK Government has taken on the issue. It could have worked harder to ensure that cross-party agreement was achieved on the matter.

Setting that aside, however, I note that there clearly remain offences that individuals were convicted of under the old criminal law in the area. We need to ensure that the pardon arrangements that we put in place make provision so that those individuals continue to have those offences on their record and do not receive a pardon. Parliament will be given an opportunity to consider how the legislation seeks to achieve that while

delivering the automatic pardon to those who are entitled to it.

## Point of Order

14:22

**Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Rule 9.3.1 states:

“A Bill shall on introduction be accompanied by a written statement signed by the Presiding Officer which shall ... indicate whether or not in the Presiding Officer’s view the provisions of the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Parliament”.

We are all aware that, during the recess, the Scottish Government published its draft bill on another referendum aimed at the break-up of the United Kingdom. The draft bill, if it were introduced as a bill, is universally recognised as being outwith the competence of the Scottish Parliament.

In such an unprecedented case, the standing orders are silent as to the effect of the Presiding Officer’s written confirmation that the bill would lie outside the competence of the Scottish Parliament. I am sure that it would be immensely helpful to all members of the Scottish Parliament to be aware of the effect—I stress that word—of such a ruling by the Presiding Officer. For instance, would the effect be that such a bill could proceed through its stages to a vote or would it be referred immediately to the Supreme Court for a ruling? Your guidance on this matter would be extremely helpful.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** I thank the member for advance notice of the point of order.

Rule 9.3.1 states that

“A Bill shall on introduction be accompanied by a written statement”

that indicates whether or not in my view

“the provisions of the Bill would be within the legislative competence of the Parliament”.

Where I consider any of the provisions to be outwith our competence, I must provide reasons for that view. If I am of the view that a bill is outwith competence, it can still be introduced, and parliamentary scrutiny would proceed on that basis.

Let me make it clear that I provide this advice to help members and the public understand the process, but I am not expressing and will not express a view on any specific bill before it is introduced. The competence of any bill that is passed by the Parliament can be challenged by the law officers in the four-week period before the bill is submitted for royal assent. Ultimately, any challenge that is taken after that period would be for the courts to determine.

## Building a Fairer Scotland

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-02077, in the name of Angela Constance, on building a fairer Scotland—it takes all of us.

14:24

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance):** I am delighted to open this debate on building a fairer Scotland and the action plan that was published earlier this month. I am sure that the whole Parliament supports the central contention in today’s motion, which is that it genuinely takes all of us to build a fairer Scotland, so I look forward very much to debating with colleagues across the chamber how we can work together to achieve that.

With regard to where we are and what we have already delivered, there is much to be upbeat and optimistic about. For example, Scotland outperforms the United Kingdom on youth employment and women’s employment; more than 25,000 people have started modern apprenticeships in each of the past five years; we have, at 80.5 per cent, the second-highest proportion after the south-east—where the figure is 81.6 per cent—of employees being paid the living wage or more; and finally, the number of Scotland-based accredited living-wage employers is now 595.

Of course, there is still much more to do. Around one in six people in this country still lives in poverty. In-work poverty has been increasing and more than half—58 per cent—of the working-age adult population in poverty live in households in which someone is in work. I have to say that I am somewhat disappointed that the Conservative amendment overlooks that key aspect of poverty, which has been made worse by cuts to working welfare over the past six years.

That is why the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan” is so important. It features 50 concrete actions that the Government will take in this parliamentary session to alleviate poverty and tackle inequality. It also makes clear our ambition to have by 2030 a fair, smart and inclusive Scotland where everyone can feel at home, where poverty rates are among the lowest in Europe and where there is genuine equality of opportunity for everyone.

As we know, the Government cannot deliver that ambition on its own. Indeed, as the plan says, “It takes all of us to build a fairer Scotland”,

which is why we place such emphasis on working closely with people and communities, with businesses and employers, with the third sector

and with public bodies in order that we can learn from best practice and drive change. All of us in Parliament will need to play our part, too, so I will very much welcome the ideas, innovation and challenge that Parliament will no doubt offer during the course of this and other debates that we will have in the months and years ahead.

I am pleased that the plan has been warmly welcomed by stakeholders. Alastair Pringle, who is the director of the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Scotland, has called the plan

“a bold vision for a fairer Scotland”

and has made it clear that the EHRC will play its full part in making the plan’s ambition a reality.

Sarah Jackson, who is the chief executive of Working Families, has described it as

“a great step forward for fair work in Scotland”,

and Dr Sally Witcher OBE, who is the chief executive of Inclusion Scotland, has said:

“there is much to be welcomed in the Plan that could have a positive impact on”

disabled people’s

“lives.”

However, she added that

“The challenge now is to transform paper commitments into reality, in order to achieve the reduction in inequality and poverty all of us want to see.”

Although the action plan is important in itself, what counts is delivering on the actions themselves, which is why we have committed to publishing a progress report in 2019 to set out where we are doing well and where we could do better. That said, I recognise that the Labour amendment has asked for annual reporting, so I am, in reflecting the importance of the action plan, willing to accept that.

We know that delivering on our ambition will not be easy, but if we succeed we will all benefit because a fairer country is good for everyone. The international evidence is clear that income inequality undermines educational opportunity, restricts skills development and reduces social mobility. It also limits growth. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, rising income inequality between 1990 and 2010 reduced UK economic growth by 9 percentage points.

We know that poverty has massive costs for all Governments. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that the cost of poverty to the UK public purse is £78 billion each year, which implies that the cost to Scotland is between £6 billion and £7 billion a year. There are many different ways to consider the cost of poverty; that estimate does not include some of the wider costs to society, but

it is clear from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s research that we spend a significant amount of money making up for the damage that poverty does to people’s lives.

Although the UK Government might think that it is smart to cut £12 billion from its welfare budget, in the long run that decision is likely to backfire. There will be increasing costs resulting from higher levels of poverty and there will be weaker economic growth because of widening inequality. In contrast, we in Scotland have a specific ambition to reduce poverty and, through our inclusive growth policies, to share the proceeds of growth more widely. If we can do that, Scotland will have not only a stronger economy but a stronger society.

The “Fairer Scotland Action Plan” contains 50 actions that are ambitious, affordable and achievable. It is based on what we heard from 7,000 people who took part in 200 fairer Scotland conversations, from Dumfries to Stornoway. The action plan does not include actions that we would like to take but cannot because the power to do so is reserved, and it is not an exhaustive list of actions that covers everything that the Scottish Government is already doing.

I note that the Conservatives have suggested in their amendment that there is not enough about racial discrimination in the action plan. I reassure Adam Tomkins that this Government is absolutely determined to advance race equality in Scotland. Our race equality framework has been developed specifically to address the barriers that prevent people from minority ethnic communities from realising their potential, and I am pleased to say that implementing the framework is a key element of the action plan.

The “Fairer Scotland Action Plan” sets out the key actions that we will take in the current parliamentary session, but it also sets out our commitment to take long-term action to change our society and make it a fairer and more equal place to live in. As politicians, we know that it takes courage not just to go for the quick wins but to focus on the long term. Building a fairer Scotland will inevitably be a long-term effort, and all of us across the political parties will need to work together to achieve it.

I want to focus on one theme in the action plan: ending child poverty. Although that is absolutely a long-term challenge, it is one that we are committed to doing everything within our power to meeting. Our eyes are firmly on the ambition of eradicating child poverty.

For anyone—whether they have children or whether they are young or old—being in poverty means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty and impossible decisions about

money. It means facing marginalisation and even discrimination simply because of their financial situation, and it can have long-term impacts on their prospects and the places where they live. For children, poverty can have effects that last a lifetime. That is why it is so important to act now. The plan contains a range of actions to do just that, including increasing childcare provision, tackling the poverty premium, provision of the baby box of essential basic supplies and addressing the attainment gap.

The child poverty bill that I will introduce in the current parliamentary year will set out our ambition. We have already consulted on new 2030 targets to make significant reductions in child poverty, and we will provide more detail about our plans in the coming months.

I note that the Conservative amendment says that

“any poverty indicator must include some measurement of household costs”.

I absolutely agree, which is why our child poverty targets and our other poverty measurements take housing costs into account; they are one of the major costs that low-income households face. Our targets are, precisely because they do that, actually more ambitious than the 2020 targets that were scrapped by the UK Government.

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** Do I understand correctly that the Scottish Government agrees with the Scottish Conservatives that poverty cannot meaningfully be measured by reference to income alone and that costs must be taken into account?

**Angela Constance:** I am somewhat disappointed that Mr Tomkins does not appreciate that we already include housing costs in our current child poverty strategy and our current measurements of poverty. We lay that out in our consultation on the proposed child poverty bill. Although poverty indicators and measurements that do not include housing costs can be useful as international comparators, we agree that we must include household costs, and we have put that into practice. One of the reasons why the level of child poverty in Scotland is—although it is still too high—lower than the level in the UK as a whole is our investment in affordable housing.

I am glad that the Conservatives have caught up with the Scottish Government’s position, but it is somewhat sad that the UK Tory Government does not recognise that affordability of housing must be part of the measurement of poverty. Fundamentally, it does not recognise that lack of income drives poverty more than anything else does. That is where we have a fundamental disagreement with the UK Government. In scrapping the statutory income targets, which

were less ambitious than the ones that we propose, the UK Government has tried to sweep child poverty under the carpet. I am disappointed—and, at times, quite disgusted—by the way in which the UK Government characterises poverty by ignoring income and tending to focus on other aspects of poverty, thereby trying to imply that there is something about poverty that is a lifestyle choice. We must stand firm in recognising that we cannot have an anti-poverty strategy that does not recognise the importance of income.

Before I close, I will focus briefly on three key actions to tackle poverty more generally. The first action in the action plan is to introduce a new socioeconomic duty on public authorities in 2017. Scotland will be the first, and only, part of the UK to have such a duty. The socioeconomic duty was a dormant part of the UK Equality Act 2010 that Theresa May refused to introduce but which will be introduced in Scotland now that we have the powers to do so. It will ensure that public bodies take serious account of, and place the utmost priority on, tackling socioeconomic disadvantage in all major strategic decisions and decisions about resources. We believe that that is fundamental, so I will shortly consult on the detail of how we will go about doing that. I assure Parliament that the Scottish Government itself will be bound by the duty and intends to be a model of best practice.

Secondly, we will introduce a new £29 million innovation fund that will include £12.5 million from the European social fund. We know that many of the best ideas come from communities and the third sector: over the next three years, the new programme will enable them to design tests and deliver innovative approaches to reducing poverty and tackling inequality.

Thirdly, we will provide start-up funding for three new organisations across Scotland that will be modelled on the poverty truth commission. The commission has been successful in getting into the national debate the voices of people who have lived experience of poverty; we now need to help that to continue at local level, so we have already agreed to fund the Dundee partnership to take one commission forward locally.

I invite everyone in the chamber to help Scotland to become a fairer, more prosperous and more cohesive country. We know that a fairer Scotland builds on the assets of its people and communities and gives everyone a chance to achieve their potential and to live long, healthy and fulfilling lives. Above all, Scotland is a country that we are all proud to call home. It takes all of us to build a fairer Scotland—I pledge to play my part, and I look forward to working with colleagues on all sides of the chamber in doing so.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to reduce poverty and inequalities and to achieve a fairer Scotland; recognises the challenges in this aim and that it will take all sectors of society to work together to build a stronger, more inclusive country; notes the launch of the Fairer Scotland Action Plan with 50 fairness actions for the current parliamentary session, including tackling the attainment gap, improving mental health care and ensuring that housing is affordable and warm; recognises that this was developed in response to extensive consultation with the people of Scotland, stakeholders and the recommendations of the independent advisor on poverty and inequality, alongside the Scottish Government's ambition to legislate to eradicate child poverty, underpinned by statutory income targets and a robust delivery plan, and welcomes the planned introduction of a socio-economic duty on public bodies in Scotland to place poverty and disadvantage at the heart of decision-making in local communities across Scotland.

14:40

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con):** We support the Government's motion: we agree that poverty must be reduced, and that that will require Government to work with business and the third sector and with Opposition parties. We agree that the attainment gap must be tackled, that mental health care must be improved and that housing should be affordable and warm. Our amendment seeks not to remove one word from the Government's motion but to add to it. We on the Conservative side of the chamber consider that the Government, for all its efforts, will not achieve a fairer Scotland unless it is willing to take on challenges that it has thus far rather shied away from.

I draw attention in particular to three areas about which too little is said in the "Fairer Scotland Action Plan": employment; racial and religious intolerance—to which the cabinet secretary referred in her remarks a moment ago; and decentralisation and local empowerment.

First, we should consider that, in a fairer Scotland, the employment growth rate would not lag badly behind that of every other nation and region in the United Kingdom. Likewise, in a fairer Scotland, the employment rate would be going up as it is in the rest of the United Kingdom, and not down as it is here under the Scottish National Party.

The figures are alarming. The employment growth rate in Scotland is lower than the rates in the north-east and north-west of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. London's employment growth rate dwarves that of Scotland, and the growth rate in the east midlands of England—hardly the most affluent part of the country—is three times that in Scotland.

The growth in jobs for women in Scotland is also poor. Since 2007, female employment has grown by only 5 per cent in Scotland in comparison with

more than 10 per cent in the UK as a whole, and the gender pay gap is wider in Scotland than it is elsewhere in the UK. Is that a fairer and more inclusive Scotland?

We can compare that with the Conservatives' record in Government. Since 2010, unemployment in the United Kingdom has fallen by 30 per cent and long-term unemployment by 35 per cent. The number of people claiming unemployment benefits has fallen to its lowest level since 1975, and there are now more than 31.8 million people in work in Britain—more than ever before, and up by nearly 3 million since 2010.

There are more disabled people in work today, and 360,000 people with a disability who were not previously in employment have found work in Britain in the past two years. There are now more women in work in Britain than ever before, and fully three quarters of the growth in employment in Britain since 2010 has been in full-time work, with 95 per cent of growth in full-time work or self-employment.

**Angela Constance:** Does Mr Tomkins recognise that the rate for women's employment in Scotland is consistently among the top five in Europe? Does he recognise that the pay gap, while it is persistent and we still have much work to do to tackle it, is falling in Scotland and is lower here than across the UK? The pay gap is approximately 9.4 per cent in the UK and 7.4 per cent in Scotland.

Does the member recognise that the most recent labour market statistics show the biggest quarterly increase in employment on record? Does he recognise that, across the piece, employment now stands at more than 50,000 above the pre-recession figures?

**Adam Tomkins:** I am happy to recognise all those facts, but this is hardly the first time that we on the Conservative side of the chamber have highlighted the problem—I am sure that the cabinet secretary would agree that it is a problem—of the employment growth rate in Scotland being woefully poor in comparison with that in every other region and nation of the United Kingdom. We never hear from the Scottish Government what it proposes to do to tackle the poor employment growth rate from which Scotland suffers.

It is not just about fairness but about tackling poverty itself. As the Joseph Rowntree Foundation so clearly said in the same document from which the cabinet secretary quoted earlier,

"For those who can, work represents the best route out of poverty".

That is exactly what we on the Conservative side of the chamber believe—

**The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Adam Tomkins:** I will finish the point about unemployment and then give way.

Why are things so much worse in Scotland than they are in the rest of the UK? Has it perhaps got something to do with the fog of uncertainty hanging over the Scottish economy as a result of the SNP's endless campaigning on separation? Has it perhaps got something to do with Skills Development Scotland, the Scottish Government quango, having its budget cut by more than £25 million since 2011? Has it perhaps got something to do with the low number of apprenticeships in the Scottish economy? There are twice as many per head of population in England as there are here in Scotland. Has it perhaps got something to do with the 152,000 college places that the SNP has cut, thereby deskilling the Scottish workforce at a time when employers are crying out for precisely the opposite?

Just last week, Scottish Chambers of Commerce talked about the urgent need to grow Scotland's productivity and reported that businesses are saying that there are significant opportunities to grow employment in Scotland, not least in the digital sector.

I am happy to give way to the minister.

**Jeane Freeman:** Does Mr Tomkins recognise that, in pointing to the importance of work, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation pointed to the importance of well-paid and properly rewarded fair work, which is part of our fair work framework? Mr Tomkins and I have had this conversation before.

Does he also recognise that any fog of uncertainty that might exist is caused by Brexit and, in particular, by his Government at Westminster's utter failure to point to any route that we might collectively take out of it?

Does he also recognise that we have the gold standard in apprenticeship programmes because our apprenticeships are linked to employment, unlike those that the Westminster Government runs?

**Adam Tomkins:** The idea that the problems in the Scottish economy that are not shared by the economy in the rest of the United Kingdom have been caused by the decision of 17.5 million British people to leave the European Union and not by the SNP's endless banging on about independence is, frankly, for the birds. I thought that the minister was capable of better than that.

If we consider that the SNP needs to be doing more to address work and worklessness in Scotland, so too do we consider—and the cabinet secretary was good enough to recognise it in her remarks—that more should be said in the “Fairer

Scotland Action Plan” about race and religion. We all know that the First Minister, the cabinet secretary and the Minister for Social Security have made gender equality a high priority, and they are right to have done so, but not at the expense of race and religion, which, in comparison with gender, are all too often brushed under the carpet in Scotland.

In July, it was reported that a study funded by the Scottish Government found that the Jewish community in Scotland feels increasingly isolated and fearful. It is becoming more common for Scotland's Jews to keep their Jewishness secret. I declare an interest because my wife and our four children are Jewish. Many of the hundreds of Israelis in Scotland hide their nationality and do not speak Hebrew in public. Numerous respondents told the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities that they had stopped attending synagogue because of their fear of anti-Semitism, that they had been the victim of anti-Semitic jokes or social media posts or that they had felt victimised for being Jewish.

At the time the report was published, Angela Constance said that she would give it full consideration, and I welcome that, but where in the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan” is there any reference to it? Although the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights is supportive of the fairer Scotland agenda, it wrote to me last week to record its concerns that, of the 50 actions outlined in the plan, only one is centred on race equality and that even it—the commitment to implement the race equality framework for Scotland—is simply a reheating or repetition of a commitment that was made last March.

The third area in which we think much more needs to be done to create a genuinely fairer Scotland is decentralisation. As the leader of Glasgow City Council urged in *The Times* on Friday, Scotland's cities are crying out for greater devolution to allow them to grow their local economies. It is happening in England, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Canada and Australia, but it is not happening here in Scotland.

The cabinet secretary is the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities. Since the election and her appointment to that position, we have had several important debates in the chamber on Government motions about the social security and equalities aspects of her brief, but we have had no Government time on communities, which, I fear, speaks volumes for just how little the SNP cares about localism, communities and devolution within Scotland. A fairer Scotland would be a radically more decentralised country.

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** Will the member give way?

**Adam Tomkins:** I am afraid that I am running out of time because of the length of the interventions that I have already taken.

In a fairer Scotland, our cities would not be failing to play catch-up with Manchester or Birmingham; instead they would be leading the way and blazing a fresh trail of local empowerment. The leaders of our cities recognise that potential. They are straining at the leash to foster growth, to create employment and to make Scotland's cities more attractive places to do business from the bottom up. They want to take decisions and to set the strategy at a local level to help their communities to prosper. However, they also recognise that, as drivers of the national economy, our cities risk falling behind their UK equivalents, which have benefited from a targeted programme of devolution and decentralisation since 2010. Where there is clarity and consensus on the decentralisation agenda in England, there is only uncertainty in Scotland, which council leaders argue

“threatens to exacerbate the emerging gap between Scotland's cities and UK counterparts.”

I have talked about three things that the SNP Government is not doing and that it would need to do in order to create a fairer Scotland. There are also some things that the Scottish Government is doing that it should stop: it should abandon its plans to make Scotland the highest taxed part of the UK; it should repeal its hated and illegal named persons legislation and replace it with a crisis family fund to provide tailored support to those with the most complex needs; it should reverse the dismal slide in standards in our schools; and it should address the shameful fact that a lower proportion of students from our most deprived communities go to university than is the case in England. In England, one child in five from the most deprived communities goes to university, but in Scotland the figure is one child in 10. Fresh statistics announced today show that bursary support for students in Scotland has been nearly halved. How does that contribute to a fairer Scotland?

The SNP Government should reverse the 20 per cent cut in last year's budget for drug and alcohol funding, which it implemented despite the fact that the highest ever number of drugs-related deaths in Scotland was recorded in 2015—more than double the figure for 2005.

More than anything else, the SNP Government must, as a matter of urgency, address the fact that growth in the Scottish economy persistently lags behind that in the UK as a whole. In the past year,

the UK economy grew by more than 2 per cent, but Scotland's economy grew by only 0.7 per cent.

If only the SNP would focus on those tasks, rather than sabre-rattling about an unwanted, divisive and unnecessary second independence referendum, Scotland really would have a chance of being a fairer country.

I move amendment S5M-02077.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises however that a fairer Scotland will not be achieved without addressing Scotland's poor employment growth rate, poor employment rate and high inactivity rate; believes that a fairer Scotland would be one that takes racial and religious prejudice more seriously and gives these matters a higher profile than is the case in the Scottish Government's action plan; considers that a fairer Scotland means a more decentralised country with greater devolution to its cities, towns and communities; believes that any poverty indicator must include some measurement of household costs as well as income, and considers that poverty will not be reduced in Scotland unless its underlying causes, which include addiction, family breakdown and worklessness, are confronted.”

14:52

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Before moving the Scottish Labour amendment today, I first welcome the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”. Although we have concerns about omissions from the plan and we have questions about the way in which it is to be delivered and funded, we will support the general direction. Our amendment aims to be supportive, and I hope that it demonstrates Scottish Labour's wish to work with the Government and to do all that we can within the powers of this Parliament to tackle the unacceptable levels of low income and deep-rooted deprivation and inequality that exist in 21st century Scotland.

The 50-point action plan will not be able to eradicate poverty on its own but, if delivered, it will make a big difference for tens of thousands—if not hundreds of thousands—of individuals and Scottish families. That is why we believe that this Parliament should take ownership of the plan, should receive regular feedback on progress being made and should be able to scrutinise and debate that progress.

I listened carefully to what Adam Tomkins said this afternoon and I conclude not only that the Scottish Tories have a rather simplistic view of the causes of poverty but that they are in complete denial about their role in increasing the levels of poverty in Scotland over the past six years. The inhumane bedroom tax, the flawed welfare reforms, the sanctions regime and the failure to invest in the economy are all contributors to the rising levels of poverty since 2010.

Today, the Scottish Tories could join the consensus in this Parliament and condemn the Westminster Tory Government's decision to scrap the child poverty targets introduced by the previous UK Labour Government—but they will not. Let us also be clear that austerity is a key driver of economic failure and deepening inequality in our country. If the Scottish Tories are serious about addressing the big issues, I suggest that they oppose any further welfare reforms that will drive more and more people into poverty, and campaign for an end to the failed austerity policies of their Government in Westminster, which have increased debt and driven down living standards for millions of working people.

To the SNP Edinburgh Government, I say that we must stand up against austerity, not just in words but in actions. Let us have an honest discussion about how we fund public services. The failure to scrap the council tax is just one example of a failure of our Government in Edinburgh to find a fairer way of funding public services. That failure is costing tens of thousands of jobs while vital community services buckle under the pressure of sustained cuts to our communities.

The first big test of the Government's intention to implement the plan will be its budget, which is to be published later this year. If, as has been widely reported, the biggest losers from that budget will be local communities, through austerity cuts to local public services, believe me, inequality will continue to grow in Scotland. Even at this stage, I appeal to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution to get round the table with other parties in the Parliament to have an open discussion about how we can stop the most severe cuts to public services and how we can build a new public service reform partnership so that all levels of Government are joined up together in addressing the major challenges that our communities face in 21st century Scotland. Actions speak louder than words, and we need action to invest in and regenerate our economies at local, regional and national levels.

The action plan states:

"It takes all of us to build a fairer Scotland",

which is a point that the cabinet secretary has made and that is true. However, it also takes strong political leadership and a willingness to be bold. In Scotland, we spend billions of pounds in the private sector on the procurement of goods and services. Let us use the procurement of goods and services to build a new social and economic partnership in every region of Scotland that will deliver local labour agreements, local skills programmes and an apprenticeship programme in every local authority area. Let us have a national house building programme with local delivery plans to address the unacceptable housing crisis

in our country while delivering local jobs, skills and apprenticeships.

We are making progress on the living wage, but not at the pace that is needed if we are to increase incomes by the levels that we must to tackle poverty in Scotland. We must use procurement as a tool and we must commit to ending zero-hours contracts and the growing use of employment agency practices up and down the country. Let us commit to ending the scourge of fuel poverty, not just with words but with a clear national plan that sets out measurable targets year on year and that links to regional economic strategies with a clear target for jobs, skills and apprenticeships.

We need joined-up government, bold leadership and the knowledge that we must build new partnerships and have a new understanding with all levels of government—as equals—with business and industry and with the dynamic Scottish third sector through community-based action plans the length and breadth of our country.

I look forward to reading the responses to the social security consultation that is under way. As the Poverty Alliance has said, we must open up the processes to the experience of those who live in poverty. We should build a national consensus against poverty and for action to eradicate it. One of the responses is from the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, which has called for a top-up of child benefit by £5 a week, which is projected to reduce child poverty in Scotland by 12 per cent, meaning that there would be 30,000 fewer children in poverty than would otherwise be the case. The office of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland has stated that child hunger is linked with depression and suicidal thoughts in late adolescence and early adulthood. Is it not a national disgrace that, in 2016 in Scotland, children regularly go hungry?

We have the opportunity to bring together all aspects of government, business and industry with civic society to galvanise people into action against poverty through an action plan. Let us show the leadership that is required, build consensus and build the task force that is required to beat poverty in Scotland once and for all.

I move amendment S5M-02077.2, to insert after "delivery plan":

“; agrees that the Parliament will receive an annual report detailing the progress made towards the delivery of the plan and necessary revisions to build on its ambition, for instance with regard to fuel poverty”.

15:00

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I very much welcome the Government motion's commitment to achieving a fairer Scotland, which I am sure that we all share. The motion welcomes



the publication of the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”, which proposes a number of welcome actions. The proposed return of the socioeconomic duty, the restoration of housing benefit for young people who are aged 18 to 21 and the proposed new poverty and inequality commission are all important steps, but I cannot help but feel that the omission of tax is glaring. Unless we use the new powers over tax to achieve some redistribution of income, wealth and life chances, the 50 measures in the action plan—worthy and welcome though they are—will not lead to the fairer Scotland to which the Scottish Government aspires.

Of course, tax changes alone will not fix poverty and inequality, but the fact that progressive change in tax rates does not make the Scottish Government’s top 50 actions is a new kind of tax dodging from the Government. The only two of the top 50 fairness actions that relate to tax refer to changes to council tax rebates. Those are welcome, but Naomi Eisenstadt told Nicola Sturgeon to be bold on tax reform and the commission on local tax reform told us:

“The present Council Tax system must end.”

The Scottish Green Party’s tax plans in the election were clear and credible. They suggested ending the regressive and outdated council tax and replacing it with a modern property tax that is in local control, which would mean that the majority of households paid less. That plan would make housing more affordable and raise more money for public services. Our income tax plans would have reduced Scotland’s inequality four times more than the Scottish Government’s changes last year and raised more money for public services while leaving everyone who earned below the median income paying less in tax.

Taken together, those tax changes would shift tax from income to wealth. The Scottish Government’s figures show that wealth inequality is dramatically more skewed than the distribution of income, so it is time for progressive tax changes to be part of the plan for a fairer Scotland. That is why I seek to amend the motion to call for progressive taxation of income and wealth.

I will now discuss social security. Two decades of UK welfare reform have warped our social security system. In some cases, welfare reform has fostered insecurity and actively undermined people’s welfare. Too often, the system is not a springboard into social and economic inclusion. It looks less like a safety net and often looks like a system for bullying people into low-paid, insecure employment. The Scottish Greens were the only party to stand on a manifesto that promised to stop sanctions operating through devolved employment programmes. Thousands of people agreed with that and I am pleased that the SNP Government has listened and is taking action.

Ending sanctions is part of a broader direction of travel towards the Scottish Green Party’s preferred approach to social security: a universal basic income. That is a transformational idea whereby all citizens would be paid a basic, unconditional income that would be enough to meet everyone’s basic needs. Because everyone would receive the citizens income, it would remove the stigma of benefits and promote solidarity. Women in particular would benefit from it. The late Scottish economist Professor Ailsa McKay was a lifelong advocate of the policy. She made it clear that a citizens income would recognise the diverse roles of women as wives, mothers, carers and workers.

The Scotland Act 2016 does not devolve sufficient powers to deliver a universal basic income. To make it a reality would perhaps require independence or at least a sea change in the UK benefits system. However, we can make some movement towards it in the way that people apply for the new benefits. I welcome the pledge

“to undertake targeted benefit uptake work to help people claim the benefits they are entitled to”

and better understand the barriers that prevent them from claiming benefits, but more radical action is needed to ensure that the people who need benefits get them.

Universal basic income would not require a traditional benefits application and would be paid automatically to all citizens. We can mirror that in the new Scottish social security system. Whenever someone applied for an individual benefit, they could be automatically considered for all other benefits for which they might be eligible. Given the inherent complexity of the benefits system, the onus to make a benefit claim should not necessarily be on the individual, particularly when they might be stressed, vulnerable, unwell or out of work. The Scottish Government should consider that approach if it is serious about doing more to ensure that people claim the benefits that they are entitled to, which was one of the independent poverty adviser’s challenges.

Effective measures to raise awareness of benefit entitlement and to help people to apply for benefits already exist, chief among which is the healthier, wealthier children initiative. I was glad to have the Scottish Government’s commitment to rolling out that project in response to my call to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport. That is a poverty reduction strategy that is proven to work. It puts money in the pockets of pregnant women and new families when they need it most.

Trusted front-line national health service workers such as midwives and health visitors are ideally placed to refer vulnerable women and families to high-quality local money advice services and, of course, they need the resources

and the capacity to enable them to do so. That is why I seek to amend the motion to recognise the importance of projects such as the healthier, wealthier children initiative as we work towards the fairer Scotland that we all want.

I welcome the Scottish Government's aim to achieve a fairer Scotland and its 50 fairness actions, but that is only a start. Devolution has entered a new phase. The Scottish Parliament has more powers than ever before—it has greater powers over income tax and the power to start building a new Scottish social security system that we can be proud of. Having argued for those powers, the Parliament will not be credible unless we have serious and open-minded discussions about how we use them. It is now time for the Parliament to seriously discuss a more progressive system of income and wealth taxation in order to achieve a fairer Scotland.

I will be pleased to support the Government's motion and the Labour amendment. Although I agree with parts of the Conservative amendment—particularly its acknowledgement that a fairer Scotland has to consider issues that have perhaps not received the attention that they deserve and its statement that we need to create a more decentralised country, with greater devolution to its cities—I am somewhat astonished to read Adam Tomkins's assertion that addiction, family breakdown and worklessness are underlying causes of poverty. I suggest to him—perhaps he will agree with me—that addiction, family breakdown and even worklessness are sometimes the effects of poverty.

I move amendment S5M-02077.3, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to the roll-out of the Healthier, Wealthier Children project, as well as broader commitments by NHS Health Scotland on financial inclusion services for patients; believes that poverty reduction should form part of NHS targets, and further believes that the task of building a fairer Scotland must include a more progressive system of taxation for both income and wealth.”

15:08

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I am pleased to speak in the debate because it gives me another opportunity to come at an issue from a personal and local perspective. First, however, it might come as no surprise that I will address some of the things that Mr Tomkins said in relation to people with disabilities and work. He was in the Social Security Committee when Bill Scott from Inclusion Scotland stated:

“48 per cent of all those living in poverty are ... disabled people.”—[*Official Report, Social Security Committee, 22 September 2016; c 3-4.*]

That is on the back of six years of Tory welfare reform and a Tory Government in Westminster. I will therefore take no lessons on the way forward from any Conservative members.

During my time as Paisley's MSP, I have discussed the fact that my constituency can be used as a template for the rest of Scotland. On the one hand, there are people getting on with their lives who are able to achieve many of their life dreams and goals. However, as in many other communities in Scotland, there are people who are struggling with the on-going challenges of poverty. As the cabinet secretary said, one in six people in Scotland live in poverty.

We all know that the Scottish index of multiple deprivation figures indicate that parts of Ferguslie Park are among the most deprived areas in Scotland. However, that is not the complete story of that community or Paisley.

For the past 20 years, Stacey and I have lived on Seedhill Road, which is in the east end of our town. According to the recent Scottish index of multiple deprivation figures, the very street that we live on is an area of deprivation. David McCartney, my constituency office manager, is two streets away and is regarded as living in poverty. We have stayed in the area for about the same number of years and that is not the Seedhill that we recognise. The same figures state that parts of Ferguslie Park are the worst areas of deprivation in Scotland. My family are originally from Ferguslie and I am proud of my roots.

I am trying to show that, although the indicators and statistics are useful and help us to target resource, they do not define the people in those communities. What we do and what we strive to achieve are what make a community and create an opportunity to change it for the better. That is why I welcome the Scottish Government's "Fairer Scotland Action Plan". It is the Government's first response to the fairer Scotland conversation and it backs the Government's ambition for a fair, smart and inclusive Scotland that offers equality of opportunity for everyone. Equality of opportunity is a good starting point for us all.

The Government alone cannot achieve that, though. It needs to involve all of us, nationally and locally, and regardless of political stance. Communities need to embrace that approach. As I mentioned, poverty is not inevitable, regardless of who someone is and where they live. However, too many of our people are still being left behind. It is our job to ensure that they receive the support that they require and are not lost to us.

We need to tackle what is known as the poverty premium—the fact that many lower-income households often pay higher prices for basic necessities such as gas, electricity and banking.

Finding a bank or a post office on a local street is becoming more and more difficult. The individuals who we are talking about need a bank or a building society in their street.

A study by Citizens Advice Scotland found that utility companies are breeding poverty by charging poorer people more for their services. More than a quarter—27 per cent—of poor people use costly prepayment energy meters, which often cost them more than £100 a month. In comparison, only 12 per cent of middle-income earners and 1 per cent of high earners use those meters, while 47 per cent of people who are on low incomes use more expensive pay-as-you-go mobile phones, compared with 31 per cent of middle-income earners and 9 per cent of high earners.

Although the Scottish Government is committed to tackling the poverty premium, many of the powers to address it fully—such as powers over the cost of utilities, including energy and telecoms—are held by the UK Government. Once again, this Parliament needs further powers to address those issues fully.

As always, though—even with that added challenge—the Scottish Government is trying to find ways to address such issues. The Government is already protecting our communities by ensuring that £100 million is spent on mitigating the worst excesses of the Tory Westminster Government. That is helpful, but every pound that is spent on mitigation measures ensures that we have a pound less to spend on boosting the economy, encouraging job creation and, most important, getting people out of poverty.

The Scottish Government is doing all that it can to reduce the poverty premium. Some of the actions are set out in the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”. One of the Government’s goals is to work towards making Scotland a good food nation in which people have access to affordable, healthy and nutritious food in a dignified way.

I recently attended an event by the Poverty Alliance where there was much concern about how we could ensure that our populace did not get themselves into an uncontrollable spiral of debt. The Scottish Government’s financial health-check service for people who are on low incomes is welcome. It helps those on low incomes to make the most of their money and secure the best energy tariffs, and it offers access to bank accounts. Importantly, the Scottish Government is working with partners to ensure that Scotland’s people get the advice that they need, when they need it.

The Scottish Government wants to change deep-seated, multigenerational deprivation, poverty and inequalities. Is that challenging? Yes.

Is it ambitious? Yes. It is a long-term goal that we must all buy into, but it is the right thing to do.

At the beginning of my speech, I talked about areas such as Seedhill and Ferguslie in Paisley. The problems there are deep seated and have been like that for generations. We must use the opportunity to draw a line in the sand and say, “No more—it is not acceptable that there are people in the same street as us who are living in poverty and are unable to access the support they need or get the opportunity to achieve their dreams and aspirations.”

We all come into this world the same way and, no matter who we are or where we live, we are all heading towards the same inevitable end. Let us work together to ensure that the bit in the middle—life itself—can be an opportunity for all Scots to achieve their dreams and aspirations.

15:14

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** After reading through the Scottish Government’s extensive dossier, we can all agree that behind the buzz words and bluster there is a genuine desire to tackle poverty, inequality and social deprivation in Scotland. No one questions that, but I question the Scottish Government’s focus on and commitment to the task. How on earth can it fix the problems that it routinely highlights when it so routinely points the finger at the UK Government and distracts us all from the new welfare and employment service powers that it now holds? Repeatedly saying that Scotland is getting only 15 per cent of the benefits budget is absolute nonsense when the Scottish Government has the ability to top up any reserved benefits as it sees fit.

How can the Scottish Government instigate any kind of economic growth—inclusive or not—in the midst of the uncertainty that it has created through its draft referendum bill? It seems rather odd that, in her foreword to the action plan, the cabinet secretary notes the uncertainty caused by Scotland coming out of the EU as a barrier to economic growth but not that of Scotland leaving the UK—a union that is worth four times as much to Scotland’s export market and three times as much to Scotland’s public finances as our membership of the EU is.

Of course I want to see a fairer Scotland—I represent Glasgow, which is one of the most deprived parts of Scotland—but let us get real about what is genuinely going to benefit the people of Scotland. Let us look at the areas that create greater equality of opportunity, as laid out by the Scottish Government, which are early years and childcare policy, education, health, affordable housing and improving wages and working conditions. Has the Scottish Government excelled

in any of those areas so far? No. It changed its mind on childcare at the last minute, after finally listening to our calls for a flexible system that allows parents to choose their own childminders and nurseries. That was a welcome policy change, but it took far too long. If the Scottish Government truly wants to tackle childhood poverty, it should mimic another of our policies, which is to extend childcare provision to a higher percentage of two-year-olds—only 27 per cent will be covered under its current plans—and introduce it for a number of disadvantaged one-year-olds.

In education, the SNP has failed to decrease the attainment gap and to raise standards in schools. The Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy report that was released this year gave a shocking assessment of falling numeracy standards and showed that the proportion of primary 4 pupils who meet most of the expected standards in maths fell by 10 per cent between 2011 and 2015. Scotland's most disadvantaged children are now four times less likely to go to university than those from wealthy areas, which is nearly double the figure in England, and the number of college places has been slashed by more than 152,000 since 2007.

The SNP has overseen health services since 2007, yet there has been a reduction in national health service funding by 1 per cent in real terms, despite a 6 per cent increase in such funding in England between 2010-11 and 2014-15.

Let us look at affordable housing. Although housing policy has been devolved since 1999 and the SNP has held office since 2007, the SNP-led Government has failed to meet its own 2011 manifesto target of building more than 6,000 new socially rented houses a year. By 2015-16, the figure had dropped to fewer than 3,500. Housing conditions are not up to standard—about 74,000 households in Scotland suffer from overcrowding and 11 per cent are affected by dampness or condensation.

**Alex Rowley:** Does the Scottish Tory party accept any responsibility whatsoever for the failed austerity policy that it has been supporting for the past six years?

**Annie Wells:** We are looking at the welfare and employment powers that are coming to the Scottish Government. We as a party have had to manage what the Labour Government in Westminster left us to deal with, but we are talking at the moment about the welfare powers that are coming to Scotland.

Thirty-five per cent of households live in fuel poverty.

As the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on poverty highlighted and my colleague Adam Tomkins pointed out, the best route out of poverty

is work. Scotland is the worst-performing part of the UK on job creation; in fact, its level is 8.5 per cent behind that of the rest of the UK. In Scotland, the number of young women aged 18 to 24 who are working has fallen by more than 4 per cent, whereas across the UK that number has increased by nearly 3 per cent.

We talk about fairness in wages. I ask the Scottish Government why the gender pay gap in Scotland—at nearly £11,000—is the highest in the whole UK. In comparison, the UK average is just under £9,000.

We can sit here blaming the UK Government for all of Scotland's woes and painting a new utopian future in an SNP-led Scotland, but let us be frank: the SNP's record in government on tackling poverty, inequality and social deprivation is less than great. Education, health, housing and the economy fall short of the standards that we should expect, while the SNP becomes distracted again by independence.

Scottish people do not want to see 100 pages of spin, bluster and empty promises. They want to see a Scottish Government that can deliver.

15:21

**Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP):** Wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity are the four founding principles of the Parliament. A thread of fairness interlinks each. However, Scotland is not always a fair country. A couple of weeks ago, my head of office was arranging a meeting with a local business on my behalf. On hearing my name, the site manager remarked to her, "Oh, it's a she. Does she know she'll have to wear safety boots and a high-viz jacket?" Sexism is alive and well in 2016.

Fairness was important to me as a child, because I am the eldest of three girls. Everything had to be fair in our house—or at least seen to be, if my sisters are asked. At school, I was taught—indeed, I went on to teach—about fairness in modern studies. I was taught about inequality, injustice and how societal structures do not always allow people—those from ethnic minority communities, those with disabilities, those from the poorest households, and women—to get on.

I remember a newspaper article that was handed out in our class. It was about a group of Conservative MPs in the late 1990s, just after Blair and his so-called "babes" had swept to power. Despite the historical increase in female representation under Labour, only 18 per cent of all MPs were women at the time. The article spoke of the behaviour of some Conservative MPs, who would hiss when the newly elected Labour women rose to speak. They would make noises and use their hands to pretend that they had female body

parts. I can see it now as clear as day. The boys in my class were in hysterics, but none of the girls laughed.

The first point in the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan” commits the Government, councils and public bodies to a socioeconomic duty that will require public bodies to assess the impact of policy and service changes on tackling poverty. It will make our councils more accountable.

We need local authorities to be fully cognisant of just how crucial fairness is. It cuts across the Government’s agenda in education, for example. If we look across the water to Fife, we find that there are 19 secondary schools and three women as headteachers in a secondary teaching population that is 60 per cent female. My school in St Andrews has never had a female headteacher. This is 2016. I am therefore delighted that the Government will look to make the most of the connection between that duty and those on equality and human rights, and will place a similar duty on education authorities to deliver.

The action plan further commits the Government to a new mental health strategy, which is to be published later this year, and to an investment of £150 million over the next five years. I know that the appointment of the Minister for Mental Health has been broadly welcomed and that that evidences a serious commitment to mental health provision.

In its response to the mental health strategy consultation, the Scottish Association for Mental Health called for the standard for headship for new headteachers to include a specific commitment to a whole-school approach to improving health and wellbeing. I very much support SAMH in that request. Indeed, members will know that I have previously raised mental health education in the chamber as the subject of a members’ business debate.

We know that poor mental health is linked to deprivation. Figures that ISD Scotland published last year showed that those from Scotland’s poorest areas are more than three times as likely as their richer counterparts to be treated for mental health illness. The Government must therefore ensure that the dots are joined when it comes to mental health education.

The mental health strategy is vital to the fairness agenda, but it would be totally remiss if it failed to mention curriculum content. The cabinet secretary will be familiar with the big green curriculum for excellence folder, so I strongly encourage her to seek assurances from the new Minister for Mental Health that the strategy works to join curriculum content in the health and wellbeing curriculum area to the new national mental health strategy.

Action 25 in the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan” is the introduction of a bill to establish domestic abuse as a specific offence. The bill is part of the equally safe strategy, which will be introduced by the end of this year.

I recently met Fife Women’s Aid in my constituency. It works tirelessly to support women and families who suffer from the direct effects of domestic abuse. Its children and young people’s service runs a school holiday programme; its befriending service matches up service users to volunteers, giving them support at doctors’ appointments, for example; and it provides an in-house independent advocacy service. In the past 12 months alone, 129 women and 120 children have accessed refuge in Fife. In the same period, Fife Women’s Aid received 374 requests for refuge.

Despite the vital service that is delivered by Fife Women’s Aid, it finds itself in the unenviable position of having to compete with other organisations for funding, because Fife Council has established a homeless sector public social partnership. The manager and one of the trustees shared with me their serious concerns that they will now be at risk of missing out on crucial funding. I implore the cabinet secretary to look at how the Government can work with local authorities to guarantee funding for women’s aid organisations.

The establishment of an advisory council on women and girls will allow the Government to tackle workplace inequality. The council will celebrate the advances that have already been made, such as the positive progress around women’s representation in public life.

Look at this Parliament. Look at our First Minister. Look at my predecessor in this place who formerly sat in your seat, Presiding Officer. There are reasons to be cheerful for Scotland’s girls. In education, we aspire to get it right for every child. The Government’s fairness agenda is the next step on that journey to rectify inequality in our local communities, to empower individuals to be part of that change and to ensure that all local authorities are democratic, accountable and fair to all the people whom they serve.

15:27

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** If the Parliament is to achieve anything in this five-year session, it must make progress in challenging poverty and inequality, and I suggest that that must be generational change.

The Scottish Government’s appointment of Naomi Eisenstadt must be commended. That was a game changer, because she continues to point out the important relationship between poverty and

inequality. In a round-table discussion that I chaired last week, Naomi Eisenstadt emphasised that poverty and inequality are not necessarily the same thing and that we need to be careful that reducing one does not have a negative effect on the other. She drove home the point that capital inequality is the biggest inequality. The obvious example of that is parents who own property and pass it on to their children, which gives their children the ability to take higher risks in life, whether that is going into business or knowing that at some point in their life they will inherit something that many people, such as those whose parents rent their homes, will not.

Naomi Eisenstadt talks about the no wrong door principle. I confess that I have not read through all the document, but I like to think that that principle is contained within it. She is right about that—wherever the system applies itself, whether a person is trying to change their career or do better in their life, there should be no door that they knock that should be the wrong one. We should try to create such a system.

I, too, welcome the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”. There are obvious omissions, which have been addressed by Adam Tomkins and others, about the black minority ethnic community in particular. I am pleased that the Government will accept the Labour amendment because, as we progress the matter, there needs to be specific and ambitious action, particularly on job progression. At some stage, I would like to see reference to an exit plan for food banks.

I turn to the section in the plan on young people and decent work. Naomi Eisenstadt talks about the 16 to 24 age group; I accept that Annie Wells is right about the importance of the early years, but Naomi Eisenstadt says that that age group merits more attention than it currently gets, because that is the stage in people’s lives at which they begin to become adults and to make decisions about their lives. Therefore, action 38 is the one that I read in the most depth. It talks about young people having an “equal chance” in life, and rightly so.

I want to throw a few issues into the debate, the first of which is private tuition. I have put some questions to the education minister on that. In a report that was published last month, the Sutton Trust called private tuition

“the hidden secret of British education.”

I admit that the trust did not make a great deal of reference to Scotland in its report.

Given that pupils who receive private tuition are more likely to come from better-off families, we need to ensure that private tuition does not make inequality worse. The Sutton Trust report set out some facts. For example, privately educated

students are twice as likely as state-educated pupils to receive private tuition, according to estimates, and poorer students are less likely to receive private tuition, as members would expect. The point, if members believe that it is important, is that all students sit the same exams, and if the Government is concentrating on closing the attainment gap it will need to address the issue.

I commend the many schools across Scotland, in particular Castlemilk high school and John Paul academy, which have put quite a bit of resource into out-of-school support and weekend schools, to provide the additional support that children need if they are to get through their exams, and to provide for a level of equality.

I accept that we need to do more to get people from poorer backgrounds into university. I think that it is also accepted that when we consider what young people should do in their lives the focus should not just be on universities and should be broader.

Members talked about the gender gap. Apprenticeships are an important aspect of the strategy, but they should not increase or reinforce inequality. There is evidence that the gap is increasing and that negative elements of the system continue, in that the Scottish modern apprenticeship programme—the flagship training programme for school leavers, which relies on public funds—can be the beginning of occupational segregation, as young people focus on traditional gender roles.

What is happening will have a long-term effect in the workforce if we do not start to turn things round. Engineering is a perfect example; it is quite shocking how few women are in engineering. Men in Scotland can expect a wage increase of more than 20 per cent after a modern apprenticeship qualification; women in Scotland can expect less than half that.

Action 37 is about industry experience. That is an important concept, which I whole-heartedly support, but I think that 1,000 industry places in Scotland is quite a woeful number, and I ask the Government to report on that in its annual progress report.

In my closing 30 seconds, I want to talk about fairness in travel arrangements for young people aged between 16 and 25. Under national minimum wage rates, an apprentice earns £3.40 an hour and someone under 18 will get £4, yet 16-year-olds pay the full adult fare on public transport. Many 16-year-olds are still at school and hardly any will be working. The Government needs to look at the area, because having the independence to be able to get out of the house, whether to go to school or college or to meet their friends, has a big impact on young people’s lives. I

want the Government to address that point in relation to 16 to 24-year-olds.

15:33

**Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** I commend the Government for bringing the debate to the chamber and I welcome the publication of the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”. The document’s scope is impressive and reflects the breadth and depth of the views of the thousands of people who participated in the fairer Scotland conversation.

The wide-ranging nature of the action plan reflects the scale of the Government’s ambition and the challenges that we face in building a fairer Scotland. In the ministerial foreword, the cabinet secretary said:

“We don’t expect to ‘fix’ things within the five years of a parliamentary term; we are not looking for quick wins, but genuine cultural and societal change.”

That is absolutely the correct approach. No nation can effect the transformational change to which we aspire in the course of one parliamentary session. If we are to succeed—and we must succeed—it will require all of us, in this place and beyond, to work constructively in a manner that is worthy of the objective of creating a fairer Scotland.

Each of us in the chamber could have prepared remarks on how any one of the proposed 50 fairness actions for the parliamentary session would benefit each and every one of our constituents. I need mention only a few of those measures to give a sense of the work that is proposed and indeed already under way, such as the delivery of 50,000 warm and affordable homes, the Scottish baby box, a bill to establish domestic abuse as a specific offence and delivery of 100 per cent superfast broadband access by 2021.

There is to be support for disabled people to stand in next year’s council elections through the access to elected office fund, and a huge expansion in early learning and childcare entitlement. The review and reform of gender recognition law for people who identify as transgender or intersex builds on equal marriage in making Scotland one of the best places in the world for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex to live in.

The full implementation of the recommendations from the commission on widening access is one of the many steps that are being taken to ensure that there is equity in education, and the new support to help older people to claim the financial support that they are entitled to is to be welcomed.

Along with the other measures that are outlined in the action plan, that programme demonstrates

that this Government is getting on with the job of building a fairer Scotland. My only regret is that, rather than our having the powers in this Parliament to go further, we have to divert resources to mitigate the effects of UK Government cuts, and now we must also contend with the uncertainty and disruption inflicted upon us by the Brexit debacle.

It is right and proper that the Scottish Government does all that it can practically do within the existing constitutional arrangements. Further, in setting out a vision of a fairer Scotland, it has begun the process of establishing the values that will inform the use of the current and any future powers that are held by this Parliament. It is that fundamental subject of values to which I now turn. In doing so, I will consider the values that underpin the new social security powers, because nothing shows the measure of society as well as how it treats its most vulnerable.

In “A New Future for Social Security in Scotland”, which was published shortly before the previous election, the then Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners’ Rights, Alex Neil, wrote that the principles set out in that document

“would apply equally to a future where the Scottish Parliament has full control over social security.”

I regard two of the principles as particularly significant in the setting of values—that

“Social security is an investment in the people of Scotland”

and that

“Respect for the dignity of individuals is at the heart of everything we do”.

I raise those two principles in particular because they capture an important aspect of what we mean when we speak of a fairer Scotland.

However, in articulating our vision of a fairer Scotland, it is also important to state what is not part of that vision. For too long, we have been subjected to an agenda from a UK Government that has sought to stigmatise and—to be frank—dehumanise those who have needed support. Be it through the bedroom tax or the assessment regimes that claimants have been subjected to, the message from the UK Government has been, “If you need help, you are a burden.” Egregious as those measures are, however, the proposal to limit tax credits to the first two children, along with the rape clause, demonstrates that the UK Government’s conception of fairness is not one that would be recognised by any civilized or progressive person. The big society has been abandoned in favour of a return to the view that there is no such thing as society.

The UK Government’s bleak and draconian approach underscores the need for our Scottish

Government and this Parliament to continue to take a radically different approach. We have the opportunity to define what sort of society we seek for current and future generations.

In public discourse, the term “fairness” has often been used interchangeably with other familiar terms such as “social justice”, “equality”, “equality of opportunity” and “equity”. To me, all those terms capture different nuances and aspects of the ancient and universal concept that, whatever the variance in our attributes and genetic predispositions, we are all endowed with a sense of dignity and a need to be valued and to belong.

When we recognise and embody that principle, it serves as a check on the all-too-prevalent propensity for politicians and decision makers to regard problems in abstract and technocratic terms whereby human beings are reduced to inputs in an economic calculation. Martin Luther King perhaps put it best when he spoke of the need to move from being a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. Systems and processes are vital, but values are fundamental. It takes more than a veil of ignorance to prevent a vale of tears.

As we set out to create a fairer Scotland, let us build it together upon a foundation that recognises our shared humanity, recognises that we all deserve to be treated with dignity and recognises that, through mutual support and solidarity, we will all benefit and prosper.

15:39

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Government offices throughout the world are stuffed with weighty reports outlining the strategies for this or that. We have another one now—the 100-page epic “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”. It might have been fairer on all of us to call it the “SNP Failures on Poverty Dossier”.

The SNP has been in government for nearly 10 years but does not want to accept that anything that is wrong—anything that has not been fixed—is its fault. With its constant obsession with independence, it has dragged Scotland down. *[Interruption.]* It has held us back and let down—let down, Mr Stevenson—the very people that the report suggests will now have to wait until 2030 before their lives are anything approaching “fair”.

Debates such as this remind me why I am in politics. Politicians have been debating fairness and equality all my lifetime and long before, and I am much older than I would like to be. Here we are again, after decades and decades of failure from parties in Scotland that have just taken the votes of the poor for granted—first Labour and now the SNP. Alex Rowley was quite wrong to suggest that poverty only began in 2010.

What is fairness? Some argue that only by achieving equality can we achieve fairness, but that is both simplistic and wrong. We could all be more equal, but be worse off on average. What we should be trying to achieve is not a more equal society but a society where the lives of those who are worst-off are constantly improving.

I will focus on two areas that were ably covered by Annie Wells: housing and education. Why do we still have sink estates in our major cities? Why, in a so-called progressive country, do we put up with that? There has been a wholesale failure to kick-start housebuilding and make it a national infrastructure priority. That represents a massive social and economic cost. Housebuilding is down 40 per cent since the SNP came to power in 2007. Private sector housebuilding is down 44 per cent and public sector housebuilding is down 18 per cent.

The SNP is failing on housing conditions. Around 74,000 households in Scotland suffer from overcrowding and 11 per cent are affected by dampness or condensation. Compliance with the Scottish housing quality standard remains poor—45 per cent fail to achieve the standard and 30 per cent fail to hit the energy efficiency criterion. Those are shaming statistics and yet, according to Shelter Scotland, there are 27,000 empty homes in Scotland—what a waste.

The SNP is letting Scotland down on fuel poverty, with 35 per cent of households currently in fuel poverty, up from the 2007 level of 25 per cent. That compares with 15 per cent of households being in fuel poverty across the UK as a whole. Also, 9.5 per cent of households are currently in extreme fuel poverty conditions.

The SNP is failing Scotland on energy efficiency and has cut the fuel poverty and energy efficiency budget by 13.2 per cent. However, I welcome a commitment to tackle the fuel poverty premium, which was mentioned by George Adam. It remains the case that only one energy company is offering gas and electricity to consumers with no standing charge, which is quite incredible. That cannot be right.

In education, there has been a failure to decrease the attainment gap and raise standards in schools. That risks a lost generation.

Standards in schools are declining, as Annie Wells said. From 2007 to 2015, the percentage of primary 4 pupils performing well or very well in numeracy dropped from 77 to 66 per cent. The percentage of P7 pupils performing well or very well in numeracy fell from 72 to 66 per cent.

Scotland’s poorest children are missing out on university. In Scotland, students from the most advantaged areas are four times more likely to go to university than those from the least advantaged



areas, whereas in Wales and Northern Ireland students from the most advantaged areas are three times more likely to go to university, and in England they are two point four times more likely to do so. In addition, the SNP has slashed the number of college places by more than 152,000 since 2007.

I will make one final point. If we want to do any of the things that are necessary to help the disadvantaged, we need a successful economy. We do not get that by making Scotland the highest taxed part of the UK, and we do not get it by continuing to hold the threat of another independence referendum over the heads of ordinary citizens and the very businesses that could create the wealth that we need. *[Interruption.]* If we want fairness, we must start by admitting the failures. Blaming others simply will not do.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** We have a wee bit of time in hand. It is typical that, when we have no time in hand, members' speeches all run over time. Today, everyone is being very punctilious, so there is a little time in hand if members would like to intervene rather than shout at one another from their seats.

15:46

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** I warmly welcome the Scottish Government's action plan, which has a broad agenda of changing the law, allocating and distributing resources, shifting consciousness and social attitudes, and effecting social change in order to build a fairer Scotland. The action plan contains bold proposals across a range of areas of our society and our economy. It seeks to create a fairer Scotland for all, to end child poverty, to give young people a strong start and to promote fairer working lives.

The 50 actions give meaning to sometimes nebulous phrases and values such as fairness, social justice and equality. As a democracy and a society, we should all aim for those values, but if we want to deliver them, we need firm plans for action. That is exactly what the action plan provides in areas such as democracy and participation, equality of opportunity, rights and protection, and equal recognition and appreciation of what individuals do for our society and our economy; I will come back to that if I have time. The action plan also provides firm plans in the area of support and provision for those in need. We must use the new social security powers that are coming to the Scottish Parliament to create a system that is better based on dignity and respect so that we can support those who require help in times of need.

What has been apparent in the debate so far is that there is a sense of unity of purpose and a sense that a fairer Scotland is desired. The 50 recommendations have been welcomed. Some members would like more recommendations to have been made; some would like further action to be proposed. Even among Conservative members, individual aspects of the 50-point plan have not been criticised. What has been disappointing is the staggering lack of context regarding the position that Scotland is in as regards social and economic change and how that is a result of the policies of those who have managed the Scottish economy in the majority of recent decades.

However, I do not want to blame others; I want to focus on the 50 excellent proposals in the action plan. I also want to recognise the spirit of the plan. Today's debate is about not just the content of the plan but the spirit that it takes all of us—business, industry, the public sector, the third sector and people, individually and collectively—to build a fairer Scotland. I would like to touch on some of the action points and how they relate to that spirit and to my constituency, and the wider messages that we can take from that.

In relation to action 5, the action plan talks about tackling the poverty premium, making affordable credit more easily available and working across Government to create greater financial inclusion in 2017. I want to highlight Castle Community Bank as an example of the community and business using initiative and working together to have a positive impact on the common good and on financial inclusion.

Castle Community Bank is a merger of credit unions that aims to give financial accessibility to everyone. It is a social enterprise created by the Rev Iain May, who used to work in the commercial banking sector. He has used his expertise to create a community bank to enhance the availability of credit unions, which is a perfect example of how the action plan relates to real impacts and people taking the initiative on the ground. The Castle Community Bank is a fantastic example of that—in the coming days, I will write to the cabinet secretary with more detail on it.

Commitment 7 is about targeting 1 per cent of council budgets for participatory budgeting. The Leith decides process is now in its seventh year, and people in my constituency are voting on the merits of community projects. It is allowing community interaction to decide where public funds are allocated, and it is an example of how the action plan is relevant.

**Alex Rowley:** I agree that we need to see much more empowerment, and community budgeting is one part of that. However, that 1 per cent of council budgets is going down and down. Does

Ben Macpherson not agree that we need to work together in the Parliament to stop the cuts to local community services and public services?

**Ben Macpherson:** Within the plan, there is a commitment by the Scottish Government around local taxation and there is a manifesto commitment to increase the taxation of those who are in the top council tax bands. That will gather extra funding for local government. The 3 per cent variation that was in the SNP manifesto will create greater funds for local government, and the increase in the charge for the higher council tax bands will mean that there will be more funds available for education.

Moving on from the Leith decides participatory budgeting process, there is the commitment to make Scotland a good food nation and to create opportunities for communities to have access to affordable, healthy and nutritious food in a dignified way. I welcome the fair food fund, which is making a difference in my constituency. There has already been investment from the Scottish Government in projects such as Leith community crops in pots, which does great work on Leith links, and Granton community gardeners, who are taking bits of unused local authority land and creating great community gardens in which local communities come together to share not only food at the end of the process but a sense of community beyond that. That is an example of how clear actions in the plan are making a difference right now, and they can continue to make a difference as we take the plan forward.

Lastly—I am aware of the time—I will touch on action 42, which is on the living wage. We do not have control over the minimum wage in Scotland, but next week—living wage week—there will be another opportunity for us all, in the spirit of action 42, to raise awareness of the living wage and encourage employers in our communities to pay the living wage. Greater payment for all, recognising the commitment of all to the economy, will be of mutual benefit and I am delighted to see the Government supporting it enthusiastically in the plan.

15:53

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the Scottish Government's debate. There can be no doubt that inequality, poverty and deprivation are the causes of many problems in our communities. In my opinion, tackling those issues is the most important thing that we can do as parliamentarians.

In particular, the existence of child poverty in a country as well off as Scotland is simply shocking. Many children who are living in poverty are in households in which at least one parent is

working. Many of those families are suffering fuel poverty and rely on food banks, and many do not even have a house: 5,000 children in Scotland woke up this morning without a home of their own. That affects their mental health, wellbeing and attainment.

In government, the Labour Party recognised the importance of ending child poverty by setting targets, which were later scrapped by the Tories. I note that the Scottish Government wants to take forward the legacy of those targets in a more ambitious way, as it puts it. Of course, any and all attempts to alleviate child poverty should be supported and Labour members will no doubt support that aim. Nevertheless, more clarity on the detail of that, as soon as possible, would be welcome.

Overall, the "Fairer Scotland Action Plan" recognises the problems that our society faces—the Government having consulted with and listened to people and communities—and attempts to provide solutions. On a positive note, therefore, I commend the Government for its work.

I will come back shortly to the bigger picture, but first I have some specific questions and comments on some of the action points in the plan. Action point 12 refers to an accessible travel framework to help disabled travellers to enjoy the same rights as everyone else. With regard to rail travel, I hope that the Government will consider fully the need for a safety-trained guard on all our trains to help to meet that aim.

Action point 17 commits the Government to "make social security fairer where we can."

I would like to know whether that involves using the powers newly devolved by the Scotland Act 2016 to top up reserved benefits and create new benefits. In summing up, the cabinet secretary or the minister could perhaps explain in more detail how universal credit will be made fairer.

Action point 23 commits to concentrating over the next 12 months

"on promoting, sustaining and protecting breastfeeding".

That is very welcome, particularly given that breastfeeding rates in more deprived areas are lower, but again some more detail would be welcome. It always strikes me as astonishing that our society seems to accept formula rather than mother's milk as the norm—it is an amazing feat by big business to boost its profits by selling women a product that is inferior in so many ways to the one that they have freely available. The Scottish Government needs to find ways to get the message out, in particular to young women in deprived areas, that their milk is a designer food for their baby and that no substitute can convey the many health and nutritional benefits that they

can give their child. Breastfeeding as the norm would be a massive boost to future health and wellbeing.

Overall, while I appreciate the good intentions behind the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”, I feel that the action that it proposes is a bit thin on the ground, with many promises for further publications and legislation. Where specific funding is promised, that is welcome—for example, the increase in the carers allowance—but the ambitions that the plan outlines are unlikely to be met by such promises alone. That is why we need annual progress reports, and I am pleased that the Government has indicated that it will support Labour’s amendment in that respect.

The new socioeconomic duty on public bodies to take into account poverty and disadvantage when key decisions are being made will be very welcome. There is an argument that every single policy should be poverty proofed, but implementing policies takes funding and we need to consider where that comes from. In local government, a decade of the council tax freeze has left councils struggling to deliver the services that many would want to deliver in order to tackle poverty. The plan to increase the charge in the higher council tax bands is welcome, but it involves only a small tweak and is not the complete overhaul that is needed. It is not bold on local tax reform, and without a revaluation the changes will not be viewed as fair to all. Furthermore, on the point that Ben Macpherson made, although it is difficult to argue against increased funding for attainment, councils have a legitimate concern about the centralisation of local decision making.

From the responses to the Government’s consultation, it seems that our communities want a fairer, more equal Scotland. The minister is keen to point out that it takes all of us to build that fairer Scotland. However, as Alison Johnstone noted, it seems that, in order to achieve those goals, the Government will need to utilise Scotland’s new tax powers.

One barrier to that is the impression in society that tax is somehow a bad thing. The reality is that progressive taxation is a good thing. Our collective taxes pay for a civilised society: caring for the elderly, educating children, providing a free health service for all, ensuring the rule of law and justice, funding the armed forces, protecting the environment and so on. If all that was left up to individuals instead of Government, the kind of society that we would have does not bear thinking about.

Interestingly, when I was considering what I wanted to say today, I thought about the fact that most people make charity donations—including donations to food banks—and pay their dues to

clubs and so on, and many happily contribute to local churches specifically to help the poor. Why is it, therefore, that tax is seen as some kind of affliction to be suffered rather than a means of paying one’s dues to society?

It is undoubtedly because Governments have encouraged that kind of thinking, refused to ask the rich to pay a fair share for a better society or simply failed to present tax in a good light. Such approaches to taxation might be expected from the Tories, but they are more surprising from this Government, which likes to present itself as centre left. There is a responsibility on a good Government to make people think about what their taxes are for, to present progressive taxation positively and to help to change attitudes to paying tax.

The SNP used to take that approach when it was in opposition with, for example, the penny for Scotland proposal. A target of 2030 to implement the fairer Scotland plan in full is not very ambitious for a Government that is a decade into office. To have a fairer and more equal society, we really need redistribution and we need to use our tax powers, which would accelerate the ability to seriously tackle poverty once and for all. If the Government is serious about making choices that are different from Tory austerity, we should get on with using the powers that we have to do that. It is a political choice.

There should be no more excuses. We have had the conversation. We have the powers. Now we need to take the action.

16:00

**Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP):** This afternoon we have spoken a lot about fairness and—to be fair—fairness is an idea that is challenging to pin down. We all know roughly what it means when we use the word in the everyday context, but it can mean everything or nothing. For most of us, our first idea of fairness came in the school playground, as Jenny Gilruth said in her speech, or at home with our brothers and sisters. Nothing was ever fair in my house, I have to say. That was a childish and naive idea of fairness, but it is absolutely at the nub of the matter because fairness does not discriminate between people on the basis of their gender, religion, age, ability, disability, race or social background.

We know that fairness is not the same as treating everyone exactly the same, so what does it mean in governance and the make-up of social policy? How can we ensure that what we plan for Scotland in the proposed social security bill, poverty bill and all the other legislation that flows through the Parliament is fair?

We can learn from current situations. Last week I had the opportunity to see Ken Loach's new film "I, Daniel Blake". I watched it with my son and it devastated us both. It devastated the entire audience in the cinema and is, I believe, devastating audiences across the UK. It is hard, it is brutal and it is cruel. The unfairness of the UK benefits system is all too familiar to me and to many of my constituents—the Daniel and Danielle Blakes who come through my surgery door. We see the real meaning of social deprivation every day. Loach did not make some kind of objective documentary. The film is based on interviews with real people in real situations. There is the portrayal of the demeaning, unhelpful and unfair treatment of a middle-aged widower who has just had a near-fatal heart attack. His doctor tells him to rest and he is not fit for work. The jobcentre tells him to find a job. That is what I call unfair.

In the film, Daniel Blake asks simply to be recognised as a citizen—nothing more and nothing less. If we filter every piece of legislation that the Scottish Parliament does through the prism of human rights, we should be treating every citizen as nothing more and nothing less. That is what I call fairness.

A lot of members in this Parliament, if not every member, will have seen the impact of Westminster austerity on the lives of people in our communities and in our families. I do not have to think for too long. There is the lady who suffers from extreme agoraphobia and has not been able to get out of her 10th-floor flat for a year, but the jobcentre has told her that she is physically perfectly fit to work and to find a job. There is the elderly gentleman who has a case file showing a series of difficult medical problems but who has been told that he is fit for work. There is the single mother with two young children, one of whom is very disabled and needs a lot of complex medical kit at home, and because she used a small extra bedroom to keep that kit in she was hit by the bedroom tax—which has, thankfully, been mitigated by the Scottish Government and is, I hope, soon to be abolished.

It is not all misery, doom and gloom. Scotland's Government will have the power really to change the punitive and outdated welfare system and to put in its place something innovative and effective, through its action plan for a fairer Scotland. We hear a lot about action plans and what they should do. We have the opportunity to work together to achieve that fairer Scotland through action that we take. This really is about action. As Alison Johnstone said earlier, it is great to have an action plan, but we must actually take action. I am proud to see that 50 concrete actions are set out in the consultation and that 15 or so stakeholder groups and organisations are involved.

**Graham Simpson:** I am grateful to Christina McKelvie for giving way. She has complained a lot in the chamber. She is complaining again today about parts of the benefit system that she does not like and she is very good at highlighting cases. Now that the Scottish Parliament is getting new powers, what would Christina McKelvie do to change the benefit system?

**Christina McKelvie:** I will be delighted to move on to that in a few moments.

It will take time for the effect to filter through, for long-held assumptions to be changed and for the tide of cynicism that has increased dramatically with the Tory Government at Westminster to be cut through. It is not going to be easy.

There are some areas in which the Scottish Government could take action; regarding the impact of poverty, there are three things that I would like the Scottish Government to consider. The impact of poverty on carers is important and I have raised with the minister issues that I have heard from carers during the consultation on social security. She has taken those issues on board, so I hope that we can move them forward.

We need to change the rhetoric and the record of the Tory Government on child poverty—we have heard a lot about that today. The young people are not shirkers or spongers; they are young people who deserve support and nurture from a Government that cares about them and their future. That is one action that we could take.

I hope that the Scottish Government will address the challenges that are faced by people who are diagnosed with motor neurone disease. I have been speaking about the effects of motor neurone disease for a long time in this chamber—and not just in the chamber; it has been a lifelong campaign for me. I ask the Scottish Government to use the courage that the cabinet secretary spoke about in her opening remarks—I believe that she has that courage—when it is drafting the new social security bill. I ask the cabinet secretary to think about fast-tracking motor neurone disease sufferers through the system, about giving them automatic entitlement to the personal independence payment and attendance allowance, and about stopping continual reassessments for them.

Imagine being diagnosed with motor neurone disease, being told that the average life expectancy is 14 months from diagnosis, and then spending 10 of those months fighting the system to get a couple of extra quid a week. We can change that and make a huge difference. We are talking about 340 people a year in Scotland, which is not a huge number. Working together, we can go with the campaign that MND Scotland launched today—"Let's get benefits right for people with

MND". If we get it right for people with MND, we can start getting it right for other people who depend on social security.

The Scottish Government has not shirked its responsibilities. We know and understand why we need to get this right and because we talk to the people on the front line, we know how they feel. The consultation on social security in Scotland closes this weekend; it is providing us with a vast amount of input from individuals who are trying to work in the system, as well as from the larger charities and lobbying bodies that want to see change in the system.

We can do that with the support of our partners and our colleagues in Parliament. With everyone's commitment, we will have a fairer Scotland not just for people who have motor neurone disease, but for everyone who depends on the state to support them in times of extremity.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** It is good to have time in hand for the late speakers, rather than the other way around. I can give Alison Harris an extra couple of minutes, if she wishes.

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** That is fine, thank you.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** They are yours for the taking, so do take them.

16:08

**Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con):** I welcome the opportunity to speak about this issue and the "Fairer Scotland Action Plan", which has a very worthwhile aim. Everyone wants to see a reduction in poverty and in the impact of poverty.

There are many ways in which that laudable aim can be worked towards; some are in the document, although others are given no—or very little—emphasis. That is a pity, because although there is no magic bullet that will achieve reduction of poverty, there are some ways that can have a massive impact, which I hope the Government will take on board.

With the general acknowledgement that the most effective way out of poverty is steady paid employment, there is much that the SNP can do—specifically, it can abandon policies that stifle businesses and economic growth, and that seek to increase taxes for working families. Promoting growth, boosting well-paid employment and reducing poverty are not done by making Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK, by raising the prospect of another divisive and destabilising referendum, by taking money out of the pockets of small business owners or families living in houses in bands E and F, or by failing to close the largest gender pay gap in the UK.

**Angela Constance:** Will Alison Harris give way?

**Alison Harris:** I will continue.

Those things are not done by failing to provide businesses and households with the superfast broadband rates that are enjoyed in other parts of the UK; some areas have connections a full 10 per cent slower than the UK average. It is a disgrace that some businesses in Grangemouth, which is the industrial hub of Scotland, need to have broadband beamed across the Forth from Clackmannanshire to give them anything like efficient speeds with which to grow their businesses. All those shortcomings, and others, of the SNP Government are damaging businesses, stifling growth and costing the jobs that would do so much to lift people out of poverty.

Another way in which people can be helped out of poverty is education, but what is the SNP's record on it? For many families, having their child gain a place at college is the ideal start for that child's career.

But wait. What has the Government chosen to do? It has cut by 152,000 the number of college places that are available to Scotland's youngsters, so there are 152,000 fewer chances for youngsters to get into further education.

Statistics that have been released today further emphasise the SNP's failures. Bursary support for students in Scotland has almost halved over the past five years, to £66.1 million for 2015-16. So much for the strong start for all young people. The SNP has failed to close the attainment gap or to provide flexible childcare to allow parents back into work.

The action plan document has obvious shortcomings and it raises many questions. A national poverty and inequality commission is to be established, but what will be its role and remit? The document says that

"details of what the commission will do are still being firmed up"—

which is hardly inspiring and does not give confidence that the Government has a clue about the commission's purpose, other than that it is to provide a nice-sounding title that gives the impression of action.

The action plan mentions a £29 million programme to tackle poverty but gives no criteria for how communities can access the money. I would have welcomed more detail on plans to address the problems of poverty and physical and mental ill-health that are caused by addiction to gambling, drugs and alcohol. We must not forget the effect that those addictions can have on the health of partners and children as well as on relationships. Assistance to enable people to

maintain jobs and a roof over their head while they seek treatment for addiction is another important aspect of preventing people from sinking into the poverty that is often the consequence of addiction.

Much more needs to be done to assist the people who have served our country. The rates of homelessness and poverty among ex-servicemen and ex-servicewomen need special attention.

There is, however, much of value in the document. The contributions from individuals, businesses and the third sector have improved it greatly—although I hope that the plan in its next form will recognise the shortcomings of the current one that my colleagues and I have highlighted today.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** James Dornan will be the last speaker in the open debate, after which we will move to closing speeches. That is fair warning.

Mr Dornan, you can have extra minutes if you wish to say more, or you can speak more slowly if you do not.

16:13

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. As you know, I am not a big fan of speaking too much, but I will do my best.

The fairer Scotland conversation has been a perfect example of the approach of a Government that wants to create a fairer Scotland. The priorities have been set by the people of Scotland, structured by the Government and delivered in partnership by a range of professionals and dedicated people drawn from the public, private and third sectors. The conversation was driven by the people and delivered by all sections of Scottish society. More than 17,500 people contributed through social media, and many others attended public meetings from the Borders to the islands. The approach demonstrated the Government's willingness to be more inclusive.

Before I speak about the issues that I want to raise, I will go back to a couple of points that have come up. This morning, I had a meeting during which it was highlighted to me that we already have a fairer Scotland, when we compare it to certain other parts of these islands. We talked about the refugee crisis and things that are happening in the Mediterranean, and Calais came up. We talked about refugees, mainly those from Syria, who have come here. A person who works for a charity said that there is a stark difference between the refugees' treatment in Scotland and their treatment in other areas. In Scotland, they have been welcomed with open arms. The local authorities, the Government and other

organisations, as well as people in the community, have offered overwhelming support. Unfortunately, that has not been replicated throughout these islands.

I have heard the old story about college places again. If the Tories are serious about trying to help people into work and about making life better and fairer for people, they should consider not the numbers of college places but their quality. We committed ourselves to a certain amount of hours and have kept to that commitment. Those college places will lead to jobs for many people, which would not have been the case with the previous college places.

**Alex Rowley:** Does James Dornan accept that we have a skills shortage in some sections of Scottish industry, including the building trade and the care sector, and that we need therefore to do more to put in place regional strategies that will provide skills and opportunities? Far too many young people are being left behind.

**James Dornan:** I accept that there are gaps that have to be filled: of course there are, and it would be foolish not to acknowledge that, but there are two separate things. Mr Rowley seems to be suggesting that the college places as they were would have done what he asks for, but I do not believe that to be the case. The gaps are much more likely to be filled with the college places that the Government has put in place. Should there be more places? "Show me the money", as they say in the movies.

In a very good speech, Christina McKelvie talked about the film "I, Daniel Blake", which I have not seen yet—I am scared to go unless I take my hankies with me. She talked about being unemployed and the difficulties that that creates. I was unemployed in the 1980s and I have to tell you that I did not enjoy it for one second. I would absolutely hate to be unemployed today and for any of my family to be unemployed.

My son works in the building trade. He was made redundant a while ago and was not working for a short period, but is working now and has been doing so pretty much steadily since that point. If he was to be made unemployed now with the Tory Government in control, I would be worried every night because they seem to give no thought for the impact of their decisions on the individual. The Tories ought to think much more about that than about an amendment that plays political games with a motion with which they agree. Graham Simpson talked about that.

I listened to all the Tory speakers. Sometimes, I wonder. I joined the Scottish National Party for two reasons: one was that I want to create a better Scotland and the other was that I believe in independence. The only party in the Parliament

that has talked about independence is the Tories. It is all that they do. Every single Tory speaker has said it. Honestly—when their last speaker stood up we went, “Bingo!” because every one of them had mentioned independence. Let me tell you for the record that I am with you: independence is coming. You may be worried about it, but I am really looking forward to it and it will make for a much fairer Scotland.

**Graham Simpson:** Will James Dornan give way?

**James Dornan:** Oh, happily. [*Laughter.*]

**Graham Simpson:** I am so grateful.

Is James Dornan unaware that a draft referendum bill has just been published? The people who are banging on about independence are your side.

**James Dornan:** I love that because they say it like we are meant to say, “No! Seriously?” Of course we support independence. It is our core belief, but while we believe in independence, we are still getting on with the day job. You? You are fixated on the cause of independence.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could you use the expression “the members opposite” not “you”, because nobody knows to whom you are referring?

**James Dornan:** Presiding Officer, the last time I was in trouble for calling them a “mob”. Now you are giving me trouble for calling them “you”.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I know that you are capable of polishing your act.

**James Dornan:** I apologise, Presiding Officer. [*Interruption.*] In Glasgow, “youse” is a term of endearment.

I wanted to concentrate on two areas, but the Tories have given me so much ammunition that I have not got round to them. They are early years education and LGBT issues, both of which we have to take seriously.

I am delighted with the role that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament have played in making Scotland a much fairer and more inclusive place. We have put in place groundbreaking legislation and are leading the way on the matter. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice’s statement today—in the week of the disgraceful show in Westminster—demonstrates that Scotland is already a fair place, although it can be fairer still. I am really delighted with what has happened on that.

We have to ensure that teachers are trained appropriately with regard to LGBT issues and that they understand the differences that are involved. This is a much more fluid world than it used to be.

I am an old man, and I struggle to get to grips with terminology sometimes, but I know that everyone has the right to live their life as they want to, so we have to ensure that education professionals are aware of changes that have taken place and are ready to deal with them.

As the convener of the Education and Skills Committee, I am delighted with the commitment that the cabinet secretary has shown to closing the attainment gap, which has been mentioned by a few speakers. We accept that an attainment gap exists, and that is why we made the issue a priority. Nothing will happen overnight, and none of the things that we are discussing take place in isolation. Earlier, Ben Macpherson talked about the lack of context that was provided by the Tory amendment and by each Tory member who spoke. Not one of them seems to recognise the damage that their party has done to the people of Scotland, and that it is doing to Scotland’s future.

**Adam Tomkins:** Will James Dornan give way?

**James Dornan:** May I accept the intervention, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes; this is quite lively.

**Adam Tomkins:** You are very generous, Presiding Officer.

I am puzzled. I wonder whether Mr Dornan could explain why, given that education has been devolved in its entirety since 1999, it is somehow the United Kingdom Government’s responsibility that there is a growing and problematic attainment gap in education specifically in Scotland. That is the responsibility of the Scottish Government, not the UK Government, surely.

**James Dornan:** That is a good question, and the answer is quite simple. Since I became convener of the Education and Skills Committee, I have found out something that I never quite picked up on before: attainment is not all about what is learned in the classroom; it is also about what people can bring with them to the classroom when they are living in poverty and have parents who might be third-generation unemployed and who do not recognise the benefits of education because their parents and their parents’ parents never benefited from it. The problem did not start in 1999 and it certainly did not start in 2007. It has been going on for a long time and I have to tell Adam Tomkins—he might not be surprised by this—that Westminster is at the core of all the problems. We have had to spend £300 million mitigating the problems that Westminster policies are causing in Scotland. We could have spent that money elsewhere.

Why do we have an attainment gap? It is because not all children are going to school on

anything like a level playing field. Until such time as we get all the necessary powers—not just over the 15 per cent of the benefits budget, which Professor Tomkins seems to think is adequate—we will not be able to address that. Education does not stand on its own. If it did, there would be a different situation entirely. Can I ask Professor Tomkins—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No. I ask you to wind up. You have had a fair whack.

**James Dornan:** Thank you, Presiding Officer; I have enjoyed every minute of it.

School does not stand on its own: school is part of society. The society that people live in determines the sort of pupil that they are in the early years of school. Professor Tomkins should not pretend that just because education has been in the remit of the Scottish Government since 1999 all the results of education are down to the Scottish Government. The issue is about the society that we live in, and many of the problems in that regard are on the shoulders of the Conservative Party, not ours.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Dornan; you enlivened the debate.

I have a list of reprobates—Jenny Gilruth, Tom Arthur and Pauline McNeill—all of whom were in the open debate but are not in the chamber for closing speeches. I have no doubt that they will send the Presiding Officer suitable explanations.

**James Dornan:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer, is “reprobates” okay, but “mob” not okay?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes. If I say it, anything is okay.

I call Alison Johnstone to wind up for the Green Party.

16:23

**Alison Johnstone:** In my closing speech, I will address some of the points that have been raised during the debate. I also want to discuss measures to tackle child poverty, the importance of the role that the NHS can play in reducing poverty and, if I have time, a fairer carers allowance system.

It is clear that there has been consensus across the chamber on the need for more action to create a fairer Scotland. There has not been quite as much agreement on who is discussing independence the most, but I feel fairly certain that, if one checks the *Official Report* tomorrow, the evidence will suggest that the Conservatives win that prize.

I very much welcome the Scottish Government's proposed child poverty bill and the pledge to

reinstate income targets. If those targets are met, we will have made major strides towards a fairer Scotland. Of course, however, that will require change far beyond the changes that are envisaged in the Government's 50 fairness actions.

Christina McKelvie spoke of the importance of ensuring that human rights are at the centre of Scottish life. I could not agree more. I welcome, too, George Adam's comments on a good food nation. I also welcome Ben Macpherson's comments about a fair food fund. He spoke about the excellent work occurring in this very city, with crops in pots and the Granton community garden. Elaine Smith has long been an advocate of breastfeeding, and we need to heed her calls for a greater focus on breastfeeding.

Tackling child poverty and food insecurity sit at the heart of a fairer Scottish nation. A third of the people who depend on food banks in this country are children. Nourish Scotland's report, “Living is more important than just surviving”, found that we do not have good data on the number of children in Scotland who live with food insecurity—children who either do not have enough to eat or do not know whether they will have enough to eat. The report shows that children as young as five have an understanding of food insecurity. I am sure that we would all agree that it is undisputed that inadequate nutrition and anxiety about hunger have a profound effect on children's development and ability to learn, and that we will not achieve our aims regarding attainment and closing the attainment gap without ensuring that children in our schools are not hungry. We need to be really clear that people have a right to nutritious food, and we must embed that principle in our legislation. The fair food fund has an important role to play, but we need to ensure that families who are at risk of poverty are always able to access good food, and to do that we must improve their incomes.

In June, the Scottish Government's independent working group on food poverty urged the Government to build income maximisation support into mainstream services at key points of financial pressure on households and to roll out models such as the healthier, wealthier children project. I very much welcome that approach, but one of the quickest and most effective ways of taking children out of poverty is to use our new powers to top up benefits by increasing child benefit by £5 a week—Alex Rowley referred to that in his speech—which could lift 30,000 children out of poverty. The Child Poverty Action Group and the Scottish Greens have called for that measure, as has the Government's independent working group on child poverty. We need to do that urgently, because it is predicted that, by 2020, child benefit will have lost 28 per cent of its value compared with 2010.



The Scottish Green Party has advocated a young carers allowance for young people with significant caring responsibilities. I am very glad that the Scottish Government is consulting on that in the consultation on social security, which, as Christina McKelvie said, closes this Friday. I look forward to hearing the Government's response. There are at least 30,000 young carers in Scotland—that may well be an underestimate—and we know that caring can be very stressful and that it is still undervalued by society. Young people struggling to meet the demands of school and the needs of the person they care for can find that their own health suffers, including their mental health. I am glad that the children's commissioner is developing new research that focuses on the needs of that often overlooked group. A young carers allowance, providing direct financial support, will do a great deal to relieve the financial stress that too many young carers live with and will acknowledge the value of the care that they give.

I will address further the section of my amendment that calls for poverty reduction to be part of NHS targets. The review of NHS targets offers us opportunities to be bold in our aim for our health services. With the on-going integration of health and social care, we can do more to ensure that our health service tackles inequality and disadvantage and is not there just to mitigate the effects of inequality and disadvantage.

Many health professions have argued that the HEAT—health improvement, efficiency and governance, access and treatment—targets are too focused on short-term processes, when we need to do more to deliver long-term change. We know that inequality is deeply linked to health outcomes, so it is time that action on poverty reduction is reflected more fully in NHS targets. At the moment, no quality outcome indicators or local delivery plan standards provide a way of measuring the steps that NHS services are taking to reduce health inequalities by improving access to services, delivering more equal health outcomes or tackling poverty. Reducing health inequalities is one of the Scottish Government's stated health and social care outcomes, and I welcome that very much, but none of the Government's 23 indicators shows how health and social care services will actually deliver that. That is not to say that excellent work is not being done in many of those areas—clearly it is—or that we do not have the data that we need to measure progress, but it is not often applied to long-term targets.

It is clear that NHS services can tackle poverty: the healthier, wealthier children project, which has helped secure more than £11 million in benefits for vulnerable families, is a demonstration of that. Financial inclusion can be everyday business in

our NHS and local services, and I am glad that NHS Health Scotland has committed to developing national referral pathways between NHS services and money advice services. However, the referrals need to be well developed and reliable—they should not be just signposting, because we know that signposting does not work well for marginalised groups and those who feel the most excluded.

I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to debate how we can create a fairer Scotland, and I hope that there will many more such opportunities over the next four and half years. There is clearly consensus among all parties on some of the ways forward, although perhaps not on others. However, whatever views are held in different parts of the chamber, it is right that we discuss how we use all the powers of the Parliament, which are increasing significantly, towards the end of creating a fairer Scotland. I, along with the rest of the Green group of MSPs, look forward to contributing to the debate by showing how Holyrood can exercise its powers boldly and radically to create a better and fairer Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Mark Griffin to wind up for Labour. You have eight minutes or thereabouts.

16:31

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the debate and the publication of the "Fairer Scotland Action Plan", which has been a well-read document in my house. Not satisfied with her building blocks, my 11-month-old daughter had a go at it—members can see the result in my hand.

The Government can count on the support of the Labour members in the chamber when it comes to taking concrete action to reduce poverty and inequalities. I welcome the 50 fairness actions for this parliamentary session as a way of tackling the issues and keeping track of progress, which we believe should be in the form of an annual report to Parliament. I am glad that the Government has agreed to that. We look forward to the detail of how the plan will be funded and supported in the upcoming budget—that will be crucial.

I will concentrate on some of the individual pledges. Actions 19 and 48 refer to benefit entitlement generally, and for older people specifically. Given that the bulk of social security spend is reserved, the costs of a move towards a 100 per cent claimant rate would largely fall on reserved budgets, so it makes complete sense in simple economic and budgetary terms that the Scottish Government should do all that it can to drive such a move as hard as possible. Aside from

the economic reasons—we would see millions pumped directly into local economies—there is the much more important human reason and the impact that the move could have on reducing inequalities and poverty. On tax credits alone, more than 100,000 people do not claim what they are entitled to: £428 million in working tax credit and child tax credit goes unclaimed.

We have called on the Government to use the newly devolved powers in the forthcoming social security bill to set a legal duty to increase awareness and uptake of social security benefits in general. That call builds on a key recommendation of the Scottish Government's poverty adviser to ensure that people claim the benefits to which they are entitled.

Local authorities and third sector welfare rights organisations, which are already struggling with millions of pounds in cuts, deliver extensive income maximisation programmes, which help them to tackle poverty and inequality across Scotland. However, there is no statutory duty to publicise social security benefits. Individual local authorities can do publicity drives on an ad hoc basis, but there is no responsibility on them to do that. Using the law to make sure that cash goes to the people who are entitled it to could make a huge difference to thousands of families across Scotland who are struggling and could boost local economies.

As well as maximising the number of people who receive the social security payments to which they are entitled, we should look at who within a household receives those payments. The issue is mentioned briefly in action point 17, where there is a reference to

“considering whether split payments could be offered as a choice”.

The split payment for universal credit is of the utmost importance. The issue has been raised with the minister in the Social Security Committee, and split payments were supported by the relevant committee in the previous session of Parliament.

Engender has said:

“the Scottish Government's pledge that ‘new powers will be founded on dignity and respect’ will be undermined from the outset if social security cannot be accessed equally by women.”

If family universal credit payments are paid to the male in the household, what then for the financial independence of women? How confident would a woman be in leaving an abusive relationship when she knows that the family universal credit payments would be made to her abusive partner? What would be the impact on children's wellbeing? Studies repeatedly highlight the link between women's access to income and reducing child poverty. The Government should look seriously at

making split payments for benefits that are related to children or caring to the lead carer, with the remainder split between couples.

Action point 17 also chimes with a call from MND Scotland and other organisations that represent people with long-term conditions or terminal illnesses—the point was raised eloquently and admirably by Christina McKelvie. Those organisations are calling on the Scottish Government to ensure that people with motor neurone disease are able to access certain benefits without assessment for the rest of their lives.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I do not know whether the member has read the current social security legislation, but it already gives the department or the tribunal that is making the decision the ability to make a lifetime award. I have sat on DLA and PIP tribunals for more than 20 years, and we have often given lifetime awards. What needs to change?

**Mark Griffin:** It is clear that something needs to change, as we have heard enough case studies. There are personal testimonies about people who have had to go through a reassessment or people who waited so long for an award that they passed away before they got their entitlement. Maybe the member should take a look at MND Scotland's website, where he would see the personal testimonies and understand that there is a problem that remains to be fixed. I hope that the Government and, indeed, all parties will commit to looking at and addressing that problem.

I do not think that MND Scotland is calling on the Government without foundation to ensure that people with motor neurone disease will be able to access certain benefits without assessment for the rest of their lives. The Government's consultation on the future of social security in Scotland asks whether some people should be automatically entitled to benefits. Automatic entitlement could mean that people with certain conditions would receive benefits without having to go through a standard application or assessment, which would mean a reduction in red tape and costs and reduced stress for people who are waiting for a claim to be processed. I hope that it would also eliminate the terrible situations in which people who are waiting for the support that they are entitled to die before they receive their entitlement.

The chief executive of MND Scotland, Craig Stockton, has said:

“benefits are not a perk of being ill—they are a necessary payment to help people with MND deal with the financial implications that invariably come from having such a disabling medical condition.”

We should recognise that and not ask people who have been given such a devastating diagnosis to

go through an assessment process or, even worse, a reassessment process when they have a rapidly progressing terminal illness.

I hope that, alongside our support, the Government will take on board what Labour members have said about strengthening the actions that have been set out in the action plan and improving progress through regular reporting to Parliament. I ask members to support Alex Rowley's amendment.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Liam Kerr to wind up for the Conservatives. You have 10 minutes or thereabouts, Mr Kerr.

16:39

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I have 10 minutes during which those in the chamber will be watching carefully to see whether I can resist adopting a particular stance and can avoid taking a robust and strong—yet open and welcoming—position in order to avoid giving George Adam a hot flush. However, in a debate whose headline is “Building a Fairer Scotland—It takes all of us”—and in which the motion is fundamentally agreeable, the only possible stance is collaborative and conciliatory.

As we have heard, everyone here believes that fairness should be integral to everything that this place and this Government seek to achieve. No one would disagree that all sections of society should work together to build a stronger and more inclusive country. No one would disagree with people's right to buy and own their own warm and affordable home, while we recognise that many people simply cannot afford to get on to the property ladder. No one would disagree that our economy should work for everyone to eradicate child poverty and to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities. In fact, everyone here recognises a simple truth: it is time—no, it is long overdue, perhaps by nine years—for the Government to start to build a Scotland that works for everyone.

**Angela Constance:** What does the member have to say about his Government in London scrapping key elements of the child poverty legislation and trying to sweep child poverty under the carpet by abolishing statutory income targets? Does he accept that the child tax credit cuts since 2010 will be a major driver in the explosion of child poverty that we will see by 2020, with 100,000 more Scottish children put into poverty as a result of his Government's actions?

**Liam Kerr:** I do not recognise that at all. I also do not recognise, as I will come to later, why we are harping on about the Westminster Government when we are here to debate the

Scottish Government's action plan and what the Scottish Government can and should be doing.

We welcome the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan” and its 50 fairness actions for the current parliamentary session. Angela Constance is right when she says in her motion that it will take all of us and

“all sectors of society to work together to build a stronger, more inclusive country”.

For this country truly to be fair—for our ambition truly to be met in reality—we must work together, for a united country is a fairer country and one that can work for all.

Unfortunately, there is a distinct lack of the ambition and resolve that are needed to create that society in the Government's action plan. Before we even get past page 1 of the introduction, Angela Constance is already cursing the

“UK Government ... and attempts to take Scotland out of Europe which has brought us further economic uncertainty”.

Please—that is enough of the airbrushing from history of the 1 million in Scotland who voted leave, of whom 36 per cent were Scottish National Party voters. I did not vote leave, but I am staggered that the Government continues to wilfully and divisively pretend that those leavers do not exist or that somehow they did not know what they were voting for, simply because the Government disagrees with the outcome. That is not working together.

As Graham Simpson said, there is also the constant blaming of the Tories and Westminster for all the ills of the world. I panicked earlier—I thought that I had come to the wrong debate when Alex Rowley and Christina McKelvie were focusing just on the Tories and Westminster. We hear constantly about the Tory Brexit. George Adam blamed the Tories for the disability employment rate, although it is 6.5 per cent lower in Scotland than in the wider UK.

Edwin Morgan was mentioned in today's time for reflection. For the opening of this Parliament building, he wrote:

“A nest of fearties is what they do not want.  
A symposium of procrastinators is what they do not want.  
A phalanx of forelock-tuggers is what they do not want.  
And perhaps above all the droopy mantra of ‘it wizny me’ is what they do not want.”

Enough of the phrase “it wizny me”. The Scottish Government needs to take responsibility; it is not Westminster's fault.

**George Adam:** Will the member give way?

**Angela Constance:** Will the member give way?

**Liam Kerr:** I give way to George Adam.

**George Adam:** I know that at odd times the member likes to put his hands on his hips and do the time warp, but is he living on another planet or even in another dimension? Will he take responsibility for the fact that, under the Tories' watch, 48 per cent of the people who live in poverty in Scotland are disabled people, as I said in my speech? The Tories should take responsibility.

**Liam Kerr:** George Adam might be happy to make a jump to the left, but I rarely am.

The reality is that the disability employment rate in Scotland has fallen significantly under the SNP since 2007. I am afraid that, if anyone needs to take responsibility, it is the Scottish Government. It is not Westminster's fault that the number of women aged 18 to 24 who are in work has increased by 2.8 per cent across the UK since May 2007 while it has fallen by 4.2 per cent in Scotland. It is not Westminster's fault that Scotland's employment rate remains lower than the UK's and lower than when the SNP came to office. It is not Westminster's fault that the economic inactivity rate is higher in Scotland than in the UK. It is not Westminster's fault that bursary support for students in Scotland has almost halved in the past five years, as Alison Harris said.

I am sure that all members accept that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation was right to say that the best way out of poverty and the best way to a fair society is through jobs. The foundation was surely also right to suggest that, as Adam Tomkins highlighted in his amendment, a narrow reliance on income measures to identify households that are in or at risk of poverty is insufficient. Wider factors, such as deprivation and the costs that households face, must be used in poverty measurement.

As Annie Wells said, the Government has the power to achieve everything that the motion wants. Alison Johnstone and Elaine Smith made that clear. We do not agree with the methodology, but we agree that the powers are here, so let us use them, as our amendment craves that we do, to address Scotland's poor employment growth rate and high inactivity rate.

Blaming the UK for things that we do not like is not working together. Let us not be distracted and suffer the negative drag on the Scottish economy and Scotland's ambition that would be caused by an unwanted, unnecessary and unproductive referendum. That is not working together.

Just last week, leading accountancy firms warned that companies will leave Scotland, graduates will seek work elsewhere and Scotland's economy will suffer, not because of Brexit, as Jeane Freeman suggested at the outset

of the debate, and not because of Westminster but because of the Government's punitive tax plans.

A strong economy will boost public spending; making Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK will not. It simply cannot be right that perhaps more than half the residents of Inverurie, Whitehills and the Garioch are about to see a council tax rise. They will be raided for £9 million to fund other parts of the country, while Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council remain the lowest-funded local authorities in Scotland. That is not fair.

**Graham Simpson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Liam Kerr:** I shall. [*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I lost my button to speak—that has never happened before and I hope that it does not happen again.

**Graham Simpson:** Does Mr Kerr agree that the Scottish Government's proposals on council tax are an attack on local accountability and that the Government's constant cuts to council budgets do nothing to alleviate poverty, as Alex Rowley said?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Simpson, you have taken Mr Kerr into his final minute.

**Liam Kerr:** I unequivocally agree with Graham Simpson. The point deserves to be made for the record.

We all want to make Scotland a fairer place to live and work. The motion is good but must be amended as we propose. Will any member allow the people of Scotland to see that they did not vote for an amendment that calls for racial and religious prejudice to be taken more seriously and for those matters to be given

"a higher profile than is the case in the Scottish Government's action plan"?

Will any member allow the people of Scotland to see that they did not vote for "a more decentralised country", with greater power and control handed to our cities, towns and communities? Will any member allow the people of Scotland to see that they did not vote for an amendment that called for an acceptance that we must confront the "underlying causes" of poverty?

To vote against or abstain from voting on our amendment is surely to put party prejudice over prudence, expediency over ethicality and self-interest over Scotland's interest. For all those reasons, I commend the Scottish Conservative and Unionist amendment to the Parliament.

16:49

**The Minister for Social Security (Jeane Freeman):** The Government is fully committed to

tackling poverty and inequality. Our “Fairer Scotland Action Plan” makes that absolutely clear, backed as it is by a major funding boost of a new £29 million fund for communities and the third sector. As the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities said in her opening remarks, tackling poverty is a job for all of Scotland—every bit of the public sector, the Government, local government and all of us as individuals.

I am grateful for the many positive contributions from members across the chamber that I heard during the debate, and I will deal with some of them in detail. First, I turn to the speech that Ms Johnstone made in moving the Green amendment. I agree very much with many of the points that she made on social security and child poverty. On her point about a citizens income, it is an interesting idea that is worthy of further consideration, but I know that she recognises, as I do, that with 25 per cent of tax powers and 15 per cent of social security powers, we are far away from making that any kind of reality.

I agree with what Alison Johnstone said about people across the public sector signing up to the agenda. On her points about health, I believe that Sir Harry Burns, who is reviewing our health targets, will be mindful of the connection that he has long described—I agree with him fully—between ill health and poverty.

On the point about taxation, I remind the Parliament that our income tax proposals—on which we were elected and for which we have a mandate—protect low and middle-income families and, at the same time, will generate cumulative extra revenues of about £1.2 billion by 2021-22. I say to Mr Kerr that I do not believe that asking higher earners to forgo a tax cut is unfair; it feels like a very fair proposition indeed.

We are happy to accept the Labour amendment, and I welcome Mr Rowley’s comments and approach. I say to him that, although we are absolutely committed to driving the plan forward, it is not the end of the matter. Other comments and contributions will be very welcome.

I agree that public sector reform is critical to all this, but I am afraid that Alex Rowley is still failing to recognise the reality that the Government’s budget will have been cut by 10.6 per cent across a decade. We must recognise, too, that our Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 includes a living wage requirement for the first time. We argued for employment powers in the Smith commission but, unfortunately, we did not receive all the support that we might have wanted to secure them.

I turn to the Conservative amendment. It is a great pity that Mr Tomkins and his colleagues

have chosen to ignore the approach that we are taking in the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”, which is not only to address actions across the Government but to join up the dots in what we are doing across the Government. For example, he does not seem to have read our economic strategy, to recognise that we have a race equality framework that specifically supports faith and belief equality or to recognise the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which specifically looks to hand powers to local communities and individuals in them.

It is unfortunate that, in Mr Kerr’s 10 minutes, he had so little—if anything—to say about tackling income inequality and economic inequality. He said that we keep harping on about Westminster; I say that we harp on about it because the primary causes of poverty and inequality in Scotland rest in the hands of a Tory Government at Westminster that, I remind him, told us that we would all be better together. I cannot say that many people in Scotland are finding that to be a reality.

My final point on that matter is addressed to Ms Wells. I repeat that our track record on the gender pay gap is significantly better than the UK’s track record. I understand that people can find it handy to be discriminating in the statistics that they use, but it is helpful to be accurate—our gender pay gap now sits at about 7.3 per cent, compared with 9.4 per cent for the UK.

I repeat our absolute commitment to delivering on the “Fairer Scotland Action Plan”. In welcoming the plan, Jamie Livingstone of Oxfam Scotland said that

“it urgently needs to move from paper to practice in order to reduce poverty”.

I could not agree with him more. We need more than fine words and that is why we as a Government have no intention of allowing the action plan to languish on a shelf.

However, although we need more than words, language is important. The cabinet secretary said earlier that poverty can lead to people experiencing marginalisation and discrimination. Where does that stem from? From attitudes that have hardened under the rhetoric of a Tory Government at Westminster—a Government that has chosen to give tax breaks to the rich; to sanction people on benefits and put caps on benefits; and to sell off social housing and increase rents, yet impose the bedroom tax. The Tory Government at Westminster will reduce yet further the benefit cap in the next two weeks or so, which will increase by six times the number of families and individuals in Scotland who are affected.

All the while, the Tory Government is deflecting from the hardship that is caused by its ideology

and its policies by using the language of strivers versus skivers. In the Tory amendment, it is apparently the fault of those with addiction, those who are involved in the anguish of family breakdown and those who are—I cannot believe this Victorian word—workless that is at the heart of what poverty is about. I make it crystal clear that, as a Government, we will never stoop to using divisive language that sets one group against another or to belittling and diminishing those who need our collective help to live the lives that they deserve.

Orwell said that language corrupts thought, and the language that we use is important. That is why we have emphasised the importance of the language that we use in the social security bill. The powers that will come to us will provide us with a significant opportunity to take a different path from that taken by the UK Government and to harness those powers to our values.

**Pauline McNeill:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Jeane Freeman:** I am sorry—I have very little time.

The powers will provide us with an opportunity to support people not on the basis of dogma but on the basis of compassion, ambition and action. We will set the tone from the start with our new social security system and we will have the principles of dignity and respect at the heart of and alive in everything that we do.

However, we also need to be clear about the things that we cannot do—about all the wrongs that are being visited on the people of Scotland that we cannot yet make right. Since May, I have been listening to people across Scotland who have been affected. I have heard about much that is wrong and unfair in the current system. Where benefits are being devolved, we will make changes. I am grateful to organisations such as MND Scotland, Inclusion Scotland, the Glasgow Disability Alliance and others for drawing those important matters to our attention.

Where we do not have the powers, we will continue to advocate hard for the necessary changes. Having heard about issues such as people who are not fit for work being unable to get employment and support allowance, people having their benefits sanctioned and being forced to turn to food banks, and the current shameful UK debacle on tax credits that has been so cruelly inflicted on people, I can only say how much I dearly wish that we had 100 per cent of the social security system devolved to the Scottish Parliament so that we could put dignity and fairness at the heart of the system.

We start from a strong track record of delivery. We have reappointed our independent adviser on

poverty and inequality. We acted quickly on child poverty by introducing clear proposals for a child poverty bill. We will commence the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010 to introduce a socioeconomic duty that supports the no wrong door approach. Those actions are unique to Scotland and show that we are leading the way on fairness and equality.

Scotland is leading the way in creating a fairer country, and we can all be proud of that if we work together to make it happen. I commend our motion to Parliament.

## Standing Order Rule Changes (First Minister's Question Time)

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-02057, in the name of Clare Adamson, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on standing orders changes to First Minister's question time. I invite Clare Adamson to speak to and move the motion.

17:00

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee proposes some changes to the rules on First Minister's question time. Since the start of the parliamentary session, the Presiding Officer has trialled changes to the format for First Minister's question time. Up to eight questions are being selected instead of six, and the time for First Minister's question time has been extended from "up to 30 minutes" to "up to 45 minutes".

On 6 October, the Presiding Officer wrote to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau asking us to revise standing orders to make those changes permanent. The committee's view is that the revised format for First Minister's question time is an improvement on the previous arrangements, and we believe that there is cross-party support for amending standing orders to allow the new format to continue in the future. The relatively limited changes to standing orders that we propose today will allow that to happen.

I am pleased to move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 4th Report 2016 (Session 5), *First Minister's Question Time - Standing Order rule changes* (SP Paper 22), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 27 October 2016.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S5M-02077.1, in the name of Adam Tomkins, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02077, in the name of Angela Constance, on building a fairer Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 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)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Thomson, Ross (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)

Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 34, Against 90, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-02077.2, in the name of Alex Rowley, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02077, in the name of Angela Constance, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-02077.3, in the name of Alison Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S5M-02077, 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, 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 Kinross-shire) (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)  
 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, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 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)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 34, Against 91, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-02077, in the name of Angela Constance, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees to reduce poverty and inequalities and to achieve a fairer Scotland; recognises the challenges in this aim and that it will take all sectors of society to work together to build a stronger, more inclusive country; notes the launch of the Fairer Scotland Action Plan with 50 fairness actions for the current parliamentary session, including tackling the attainment gap, improving mental health care and ensuring that housing is affordable and warm; recognises that this was developed in response to extensive consultation with the people of Scotland, stakeholders and the recommendations of the independent advisor on poverty and inequality, alongside the Scottish Government's ambition to legislate to eradicate child poverty, underpinned by statutory income targets and a robust delivery plan; agrees that the Parliament will receive an annual report detailing the progress made towards the delivery of the plan and necessary revisions to build on its ambition, for instance with regard to fuel poverty, and welcomes the planned introduction of a socio-economic duty on public bodies in Scotland to place poverty and disadvantage at the heart of decision-making in local communities across Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-02057, in the name of Clare Adamson, on standing orders changes to First Minister's question time, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 4th Report 2016 (Session 5), *First Minister's Question Time - Standing Order rule changes* (SP Paper 22), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annex A of the report be made with effect from 27 October 2016.

## Adopt a Station

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S5M-01567, in the name of Christine Grahame, on the adopt-a-station programme. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes what it considers the resounding success of the return of the Borders Railway; recognises the economic potential already being realised, and congratulates communities in Gorebridge, Newtongrange, Stow, Galashiels, Tweedbank, Eskbank and also Shawfair, which is adopting its local station with support from ScotRail, which has improved the appearance of the station with planting, flower tubs and hanging baskets and which it considers is a sure sign of how much the railway means to these communities and how proud they are of its return, and congratulates the volunteers who are involved in Adopt a Station projects throughout Scotland, enhancing the rail journey experience for both tourists and commuters.

17:05

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I thank all those members who signed the motion for allowing me to have the debate, and I thank those who have stayed to take part in it.

Members may be aware that, after nearly 50 years, the Borders railway, which travels through my constituency, reopened last year—incidentally on my birthday, which, as the minister knows, is 9 September. What a present! The railway had been cut down by the Beeching axe in 1969. In 1999, when I entered Parliament, I set up the cross-party group on Borders rail and then sat in the Public Petitions Committee when it considered a petition, which had gathered 17,000 signatures from the Borders and Midlothian, that sought to begin the track building and reinstate the line. In 2000, in another historic event, the Scottish Parliament voted unanimously to do so. Therefore, I am now somewhat maternal and protective—indeed, possessive—of the line and I travel on it regularly to my office in Galashiels. I never take it for granted, though I notice that the young people who travel on it do—and why not? A generation on, even the lambs that used to run from the passing train simply keep munching the grass unperturbed.

Building the line meant that the surrounding embankments were, at first, harsh and devoid of vegetation. The stations, too, were pristine and modern but lacking character. That has all changed over the year, thanks to the individuals and communities who have adopted their local stations. Before the line reopened, I had never heard of the adopt-a-station programme, which is

operated under the auspices of ScotRail—by the way, this is good press for ScotRail, which is much in need of it. Under the programme, people are given guidance and a small amount of funding to make their station attractive, like a well-tended front garden to their community. There are modest rewards for those who keep their station in that way, such as two annual tickets on any ScotRail journey, but that is not why people take it on. No—they do so out of an old-fashioned sense of pride in their community, and the line was rebuilt because communities fought for it.

I thank—as I have before—Gillian Rankin and Kerry-Lee Godfrey of Newtongrange mining museum; Anne Maher and Brian Paterson at Gorebridge; for Stow station, Jack MacKenzie of make Stow beautiful; for Galashiels station, Judith Cleghorn of the Galashiels community council and Ronnie Murray of Gala in bloom; and Sylvie Grundy, Alan Thompson and Malcolm Luing of Melrose rotary club for all their efforts in my constituency. I also thank, for Eskbank station, Elaine Henderson and Beth Thomson of Esk Valley rotary club and Albert Jaster and Jim Orr of Dalkeith rotary club. I know that Colin Beattie wanted to take part in the debate tonight, but he was unable to be here because of a prior constituency commitment.

I am a bit of a planter policewoman. As I journey down from Parliament to Gala, I always have a shifty at the planters to see how they are getting on. In the summer, I watched as they blossomed. Now, as the geraniums and summer bedding are passing, I see the planters being refilled with autumn flowers. I know, too—because I keep up with these things—that, beneath those plants, the bulbs are ready for spring. The displays make such a difference to regular commuters and tourists alike, and they speak volumes for the communities that the stations serve. Some stations even have a plaque telling travellers who to thank for the displays. Following the debate, I will ensure that every station on the line has one—perhaps that is something that ScotRail can help with.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Does the member have libraries in any of her stations? Shettleston station in my constituency has a library that is run by the staff; such facilities can be attractive to commuters.

**Christine Grahame:** I say to the member—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Grahame, you should know that you must wait to be called.

**Christine Grahame:** I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer. I curtsied—why did I do that?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Christine Grahame.

**Christine Grahame:** I know that there are vacant buildings, and there are plans to make them into cafeterias and display rooms for the history of each station, so I am now of the mind that we could use them as libraries.

Do I get my time back, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes.

**Christine Grahame:** Thank you—I was just checking.

I thank ScotRail—which is getting a bit of a kicking, as I said—for helping communities through its adopt-a-station programme. In particular, I thank Lindley Kirkpatrick and John Yellowlees.

While I know that Keep Scotland Beautiful runs an award scheme with ScotRail, I am having my own wee competition—along with my colleague Colin Beattie with his part of the line—for the best Christmas display. The prize will, of course, go towards more plants.

I end with a quote from Phil Verster, who spoke to the Borders railway adopt-a-station folk when they were in Parliament recently. He said:

“We are delighted at the range and variety of floral displays which are already helping give the stations individual character. Galashiels with external sponsorship secured by Judith Cleghorn received red, white and blue flowers in time for the Queen’s 90th birthday. Stow is a riot of brilliant begonias, while Gorebridge has a fine collection of planters and fence-mounted baskets. The Mining Museum has assembled a team to enhance the displays at Newtongrange, and we have three Rotary Clubs showing service to the community by their adoption of Tweedbank, Eskbank and Shawfair Stations. Taken together with Newcraighall and Brunstane which had already been lovingly adopted by another Rotary and a couple who live nearby, what we have is a journey where the charm of the passing countryside is enhanced by the welcoming smile that greets the traveller at every stop along the way.”

Who would have thought that Phil Verster could so speak so eloquently about stations?

ScotRail has a lot for which to thank the adopt-a-station folk. It is appropriate that a railway line that started life as a people’s petition to the Parliament in 1999 should again have its stations’ floral displays in the hands of the people. Those are their stations, and it is their railway, and—by gum!—it has been a great success.

17:12

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** I, too, thank Christine Grahame for bringing the debate to the chamber and for highlighting the importance of promoting examples of commercial and community collaboration. I am glad to declare that I have a registrable interest in the first-ever company to participate in the adopt-a-station scheme back in 2008. I was travelling north by

sleeper and reading the in-house magazine when I saw an article looking for sponsors of the scheme. I followed that up, and shortly afterwards Deeside Timberframe, which is based in Stonehaven, made Stonehaven station the first station to be adopted by a commercial company.

We installed brightly coloured planters, tubs and fence boxes on the platform, which were planted and are now maintained through funding for the Stonehaven horizon team. Under the leadership of Allan Cairnduff, the horizon team does an enormous amount of work, including watering and tending to plants during the summer months and planting bulbs for the spring during the winter. The excellent work of the volunteers at Stonehaven horizon was started in 2004 to foster civic pride in the town. They do everything from picking up litter to working with Stonehaven Town Partnership and Aberdeenshire Council. They have even managed to create their own adopt-a-street campaign, through which residents take on responsibility for looking after their own road or immediate area. That campaign has experienced much success. Their more recent plans include the planting of 60 rowan trees in the area. I wish them all the very best in that endeavour.

Without the hard work of volunteers, such schemes would simply not be possible, so it is to them that we owe the greatest thanks. I have been told that the plantations have made a great impact, and the floral colours are creating a real welcome for all visitors and those who pass through Stonehaven on the train. The scheme has enabled our company to build better relations with not only ScotRail but the wider community. As local companies invest in local infrastructure, they have a vested interest in making our communities better. That is a social solidarity of which we can all be proud.

The scheme is a great opportunity for local organisations to put something back into the community. The idea would have found a home in our former Prime Minister’s big society—I am sure that the SNP members will have no problem with endorsing that sentence.

It is great to see ScotRail developing its concept of community partnership and that it is now actively encouraging communities to use stations for anything from meeting rooms to shops, and from artwork displays to—as we have just heard—libraries. Whether it be litter picking, planting or art work, it is important that we all participate in the communities in which we live. As a former Prime Minister once said, there is one word at the heart of all this, and that word is “responsibility”.

17:15

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** At the outset, I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing the debate. I am delighted that the adopt-a-station scheme is thriving in Ms Grahame's constituency.

I refer members to my register of interests, the reason for which will become apparent shortly.

Adopt a station provides local community groups with the opportunity to become involved with their local stations. Station adoption brings significant benefits to local communities and the rail industry. Communities get a much-improved gateway to their town or village, often including enhanced facilities. The station becomes a part of the community and is something in which local people can take pride. Railway companies are seeing a rise in the use of stations, a reduction in the level of vandalism and, in many cases, they are seeing externally funded improvements. Station adoption is a way of transforming stations, bringing them into the heart of the community and encouraging greater use of environmentally-friendly public transport. More and more community groups and individuals have adopted their local stations. It is all about local pride and seeing the station as an important part of the community.

I would like to touch on the great work of two groups in my constituency. The first is the Greenock and District Model Railway Club and its adoption of the Fort Matilda station. The second is Friends of Wemyss Bay Station and its work. Fort Matilda station is situated on the edge of the west end of Greenock just before Gourrock. In September 2010, it was taken over by the Greenock and District Model Railway Club, which obtained the necessary approvals and funding from the Railway Heritage Trust and the stations community regeneration fund for conservation work and improvements to make the building into a clubhouse. The club has done a tremendous job in turning a shell of a building into something that is once again an asset to the community. The tie-in between the model railway club and the national railway is obvious, but the station is also a community hub—other organisations also use the facility. Last weekend, the club held its annual two-day exhibition in the Lyle kirk in Greenock, which appears to have been a huge success.

My second example is the group Friends of Wemyss Bay Station, which formed in 2009 as part of ScotRail's adopt-a-station campaign. The 300-strong group is made up of local people who were increasingly concerned about the neglected state of the station and anxious to ensure its continued survival. The group's initial aim was restoration of the floral displays for which the station had become famous. Later, it was given

the use of some empty accommodation, which it has restored and now takes the form of a second-hand bookshop and exhibition area as a means of raising funds and making contact with local people and the travelling public, whose appreciation for the group's efforts is very welcome. I have seen the bookshop grow from its first iteration to its present state and an excellent job has been done.

As a result of its efforts, the Friends of Wemyss Bay Station won the best station-adoption group award at the annual community rail awards in 2009, and the group is now planning ways of transforming the remaining empty rooms around the station, with visions of creating a mini shopping mall in the space. All that follows on from a £6 million upgrade to the pier, which was completed in March this year, and a £4 million renovation of the station by Network Rail. From visiting the station on a number of occasions and meeting the group, I know that it has taken a huge amount of pride in renovating the station and creating a pleasant environment for commuters and tourists. Thanks to the group, Wemyss Bay railway station can take pride of place in the landscape of Inverclyde. I also thank the Greenock and District Model Railway Club for what it has done at Fort Matilda.

The adopt-a-station scheme is an excellent initiative and, whether it is in the Borders or Greenock and Inverclyde, it helps to bring life back to stations and to turn them back into community facilities. I say well done to everyone involved.

17:19

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** I join members in congratulating Christine Grahame on securing this debate. In recent weeks, there has rightly been a strong focus on trains and, in particular, on the need to improve their punctuality and reliability. I am sure that members of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee will have a number of questions on those issues for the Minister for Transport and the Islands tomorrow. However, today we have a welcome opportunity to highlight some of the positive work that is being done in communities to support our local train stations. Our stations, and how they look, are important: stations are often the first thing that people see when they arrive in a town and they give visitors a first impression of a community.

ScotRail has 354 stations across Scotland: 214 of those are unstaffed, so the work of volunteers is essential to many stations. The adopt-a-station programme has volunteers and community organisations playing leading roles in projects to improve stations—the projects simply would not have happened without them. As members have already highlighted, the programme has gone from strength to strength since it was launched in 2005.

The fact that more than 260 ScotRail stations across the country are now part of the programme is a testament to how keen communities are to engage with their local train stations. We should congratulate the individuals and groups who have participated, and who continue to participate, in the adopt-a-station programme.

We have heard a number of examples of the programme's success around Scotland and I join Christine Grahame in paying tribute to communities in the Borders on their work to improve the appearance of their local stations. I will also highlight some successful examples of the programme in West Scotland, which is my region.

As Stuart McMillan said, there are a number of positive examples in Inverclyde, including the Inverclyde Association for Mental Health, which has been described to me as a "star turn" among station gardeners. It is an independent charity that provides a network of support and opportunities to people with mental health issues to enable them to maximise their potential within the community. In 1993, the charity established In-Work Enterprises Limited, which is a social enterprise that provides training, voluntary and work-related opportunities in landscaping, ground maintenance and horticulture to people who have experienced mental health issues. In-Work became involved in the adopt-a-station programme in 2010 and, impressively, now looks after floral displays at 22 stations, including Greenock central, Port Glasgow, Gourrock, Paisley Gilmour Street and Clydebank. Allan Maliska, who is the project manager at In-Work, has said:

"Our trainees value the programme greatly and get great job satisfaction from growing the plants from seeds, improving their knowledge and skill-set. Trainees enjoy looking at the final product and take pride in the compliments that they have received from members of the public, showing appreciation for brightening up the platform areas."

The value of the project to both passengers and volunteers is clear.

Stuart McMillan also said that the Friends of Wemyss Bay Station group, which was formed in 2009 by local people, has been an excellent example of local groups that take an interest in their station. He mentioned that they were recognised as Britain's best station-adopter group in 2010 in recognition of their work with the empty accommodation at the station, which they used to create a bookshop and gallery. Their work has been recognised previously in Parliament: one or two older members in the chamber today might remember signing a motion congratulating the group on its success. There are many other examples, but there is not time this evening to list them all, unfortunately.

It is clear that there has been some excellent work done through the adopt-a-station programme and I hope that stations and communities will continue to benefit from the programme for years to come.

17:24

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I thank Christine Grahame for the opportunity to discuss the railways, which is one of my favourite topics.

I am a former transport minister and I am president of the Scottish Association for Public Transport, which was founded because of the closure of the Borders railway. I am also honorary vice-president for Railfuture UK. The only thing that I lack in my railway credentials is a railway in my constituency, but I note that my ScotRail saltire card does not expire until 2031, so there is still time to remedy that, if I might gently nudge the minister on the matter of getting a railway into my constituency at some future date within the currency of my card.

I join others in congratulating the many volunteers and ScotRail on opening its stations to such a programme. Their joint efforts in the adopt-a-station programme enhance our railways, cheer up travellers and create a talking point as we stand on platforms.

I travelled on the Borders railway the first Sunday after it opened, all the way down to Tweedbank, where I had a delightful lunch and then came back. I have not yet got off at any of the other stations, although I am sure that, as Christine Grahame told us, the stations are improving and being enhanced. It is a spectacular line that is the longest new piece of railway in over a century. As is almost invariably the case with new openings, usage levels are substantially ahead of what the model said. Therefore, when the model says that taking a line from Dyce up to Ellon might not be that great, we should remember that the model has lied to us pretty regularly on a whole series of things. We have now had 1 million people on the Borders railway, and we could do something similar in the north-east. Of course, the economic benefits are substantial. Interestingly, on the Borders railway, end-to-end journeys appear to be a much bigger proportion of journeys than was anticipated.

It was interesting to hear Christine Grahame talk about the need to get a plaque in every station. Become transport minister, and that becomes easy. I have got plaques on the west platform of Queen Street station—I will check that it is still there after the recent refurbishment—and on Laurencekirk, Elgin, Markinch, and Alloa stations. I

think, although I cannot be quite certain, that there is also one at Bathgate.

Stations are places of happy memories for me. The porter at Cupar railway station where I lived was Stanislaw Skrodski, who had been a captain in the Polish cavalry and who stayed in Cupar after the war. He had great skill with his welding kit. Given the rather imperfect old cars that my friends and I had, we used to rely on him and we went to the station to get welding done.

My earliest railway journey that I remember was from Benderloch to Oban when I was taken to hospital because I had sunstroke—1956 was a very warm year and railways were very important in my life. They are also very important in the matter of climate change. In 2015, 72 per cent of our transport emissions were from road transport, while 1.3 per cent of transport emissions were from rail.

Rural communities in particular, such as those that are supported by the opening of the Borders railway, get a particular value from railways, because they are further away from the places that people wish to travel to. A railway dramatically opens up those areas. I am sure that there is still much more potential to be opened up from the Borders railway.

On the subject of libraries in railway stations, on the line down to Kyle of Lochalsh, many of the stops are request stops and have little libraries, and one actually has a games room. There are not a lot of trains, so if someone misses one, they will be there for several hours, but they can play dice or poker in the games room. People can do many different things in the rooms of some of those little stations. Stations are loved throughout Scotland. I love the Borders railway, but I would love a railway line to Buchan even more.

17:28

**Rachael Hamilton (South Scotland) (Con):** I think that Stewart Stevenson is the first person in Scotland to actually get sunstroke.

Initiatives such as adopt a station highlight the value that communities place on local train services. They exhibit the feeling among us that trains play an important role in the community and promote a feeling of pride in us. I have lived and worked in the Borders for many years and, like all members, was delighted to see the reintroduction of the Borders railway 50 years after Beeching's report on British railways, which led to hundreds of stations and 650 miles of railway line being closed in Scotland. The closure left the Scottish Borders as the only region in Britain without a train service.

The Scottish Borders has been reawakened by the reopening of the Waverley line. Public and

private sector employers can recruit and attract people to posts that would otherwise be unfilled, opportunities for school leavers have broadened and Borders attractions have seen an upturn. For example, visitor numbers at Abbotsford have increased by 12 per cent.

I remember with fondness the day that the railway was reopened. Although the weather was a little damp, it was not enough to dampen the spirits and deter the Queen from cutting the ribbon. Indeed, the Queen coming to the Borders to reopen Tweedbank station shows the importance and value that we all place on the Borders railway.

We must thank everyone who was involved in bringing about the railway's reintroduction. The effort involved was incredible. For the first time since 1969, 30 miles of track were renewed and refreshed at a cost of £294 million. Every penny spent on the Scottish Borders railway is worth it. It has been—for the most part—a success. I want visitors to experience the same delightful journey through the Borders as I do. The train follows the winding Gala water, past the imposing St Mary of Wedale kirk in Stow, where my parents-in-law were married, the patchwork fields that follow the seasonal farming calendar and the pretty stations along the line.

Celebrating the line's first birthday along with Christine Grahame's birthday, ScotRail was delighted to announce that the new railway's 21,000 train services had carried 1 million passengers, which exceeded all expectations. However, the Borders railway has had some difficulties and performance has been a problem. ScotRail has given reassurances that the service will be improved, and I welcome that commitment. We all want there to be a reliable Borders rail service that departs and arrives on time. We want it to be the best that it can be and I hope that the issues that passengers have encountered will become a thing of the past.

**Christine Grahame:** Does Rachael Hamilton agree that, to judge by my experience and my inbox, there has been an improvement in the service's reliability in recent months? It was a bit bumpy at the beginning but it is not now.

**Rachael Hamilton:** I agree with Christine Grahame. The figures that I am talking about were for between 1 January and the end of August. I hope that we can continue to make improvements.

I ask members to allow me to jump on the success of the Borders railway to make a plea to the Minister for Transport and the Islands to reopen the East Linton and Reston stations—a proposal that has huge public support. Those two stations would provide a valuable commuter link, ease overcrowding and, more importantly, bring

people to the south of Scotland. Scottish Borders Council and East Lothian Council are committed to their reopening and the Scottish Government has agreed to provide 50 per cent of the funding for the project. However, due to the size of the investment, we need to find further funding.

It is great that schools, local businesses, charities, clubs and individuals work together to help to make commuter and visitor journeys a welcoming experience. I thank Christine Grahame for bringing the motion to the chamber and congratulate everyone who is involved in the voluntary work.

17:33

**The Minister for Transport and the Islands (Humza Yousaf):** I am grateful to Christine Grahame for bringing the motion to the chamber, which gives us an opportunity to acknowledge the success of the reopening of the Borders railway. That is not to take anything away from the performance issues about which Rachael Hamilton spoke. However, overall, the people who are involved in the Borders railway and those who use it would say that it has been a great success. It is a story of regeneration, passion from the people who were committed to fighting the campaign over the years and belief in the success of our railways throughout the country. I thank everyone who was involved in the campaign.

Of course, the railway was reopened on Christine Grahame's birthday. I do not understand how she managed to campaign for five decades for the Borders railway to be reopened when she is only 29. Nonetheless, she would be first to say that the credit for the reopening goes to the grass-roots campaigners in her constituency who, over the years, were told that the railway would never be reopened. It must have been an incredible moment last year when the reopening happened.

**Christine Grahame:** I would not wish to take the credit. It was lucky that we had the Parliament to give the campaigners a voice. It was the Campaign for Borders Rail and the 17,000 people who signed the petition who really set the railway on its tracks.

**Humza Yousaf:** Yes, and I continue to engage with the campaign as it continues to suggest improvements.

The Borders railway was opened to the public on time and on budget—I am pleased to say—by Her Majesty the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh and the First Minister, on 6 September last year. As Stewart Stevenson said, it is the longest new domestic railway to be constructed in Britain for more than 100 years. To go back to Stewart Stevenson's point, I suspect that the railway has a plaque with Her Majesty's

name on it. Mr Stevenson seems to have collected numerous plaques, but there is no plaque with my name on it. To be honest, I will just be pleased if there is no picture of me on a dartboard in a train station office, but we will see what happens in that regard over the years.

The line has been transformational. As Rachael Hamilton said, it has opened up communities as new places to visit and in which to live, work, learn, play and grow businesses. Direct transport links are key to growing Scotland's tourism industry, and the Borders railway is playing its part in transforming the tourism economy and supporting growth in the Scottish Borders, Midlothian and Edinburgh, and I think that its effects go wider than that.

As the motion does, I congratulate the communities in Gorebridge, Newtongrange, Stow, Galashiels, Tweedbank, Eskbank and Shawfair who, through their efforts, demonstrate a genuine pride in their new stations by keeping them looking beautiful for locals and visitors alike. I took note of what Christine Grahame said about an old-fashioned sense of community, which I think is very much displayed by those volunteers. I met some of the volunteers when they came to Parliament for lunch a couple of weeks ago. I do not want to be unkind, but they were not all in the age group that one might assume they would be in. People of all age groups are showing a real interest in volunteering to keep the stations looking beautiful—not only retired people but those who might well have work to do but see the stations as vital to attracting people to their communities. That is welcome.

**Christine Grahame:** I suggest that the minister tread carefully, because retired people also have work to do.

**Humza Yousaf:** Yes. I maybe should not have got into that and should probably back pedal quickly. Christine Grahame's point is well made.

There is a long tradition of railway stations having gardens created by station staff to greet the passing traveller, and it is good to see that tradition being kept alive through the work of the volunteers in the Borders. Of course, the examples that Stuart McMillan gave from his constituency show that we are talking about a scheme that is working right across Scotland.

As people know, the ScotRail franchise operates more than 2,270 train services each day, delivering more passenger journeys than ever per year, and it is the single biggest contract that is let by Scottish ministers, worth a total value of more than £7 billion over 10 years. As almost every member has noted, the performance of the franchise is not at the level that I would like it to be

at. As Neil Bibby suggests, I suspect that I will receive some questions about that tomorrow.

*Meeting closed at 17:40.*

Of course, that is not to say that everything is bad on our railways, and the adopt-a-station scheme and other community and social initiatives that have been taken forward by ScotRail show that a lot of good work is happening across the country.

Stations are among the first thing that people see when they arrive in a town, village or city, and they can help to form people's first impressions of a place. Any improvements that can be made to them should therefore be welcomed.

More than 70 per cent of ScotRail's stations have been adopted, with volunteers doing gardening and using surplus accommodation for purposes ranging from artists' studios and heritage centres to community meeting rooms, clubrooms and the games rooms that Stewart Stevenson mentioned. More than 110 stations in Scotland also benefit from floral displays that are maintained by volunteers.

The scheme goes far beyond aesthetic and cosmetic concerns. It also helps the Government to achieve some of its national outcomes. For example, it contributes to tackling health inequalities. Members will be aware of the Association of Community Rail Partnerships, which is the membership body for almost 50 community rail partnerships, representing more than 80 community rail lines across the UK. I was delighted at the news that, at the ACoRP community rail awards in September, NHS Lanarkshire occupational therapy and mental health teams and Clydesdale community initiatives were awarded first place in the outstanding teamwork category. CCI staff and volunteers worked in partnership with NHS Lanarkshire's mental health and forensic occupational therapy staff and clients through the adopt-a-station project. To date, five stations in Lanarkshire have been adopted by the NHS and CCI partnership: Hamilton West, Sunnyside, Wishaw, Whifflet and Coatbridge Central. Volunteers were involved in planting, maintenance, drawing plans, woodwork and craft activities, which helped to address mental health issues, showing that there is a health benefit as well as cosmetic and aesthetic benefits.

I congratulate Christine Grahame again but perhaps she will not mind it if, more important, I congratulate the volunteers who have helped to make the adopt-a-station project such a great success, not just in the Borders but throughout Scotland.



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.

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