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Wednesday 29 November 2017

Session 5



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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 29 November 2017

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

Business Motion

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. We start with consideration of business motion S5M-09292, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for today.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 29 November 2017—

delete

5.30 pm

Decision Time

and insert

5.00 pm

Decision

Time—[Joe

FitzPatrick]

Motion agreed to.

Portfolio Question Time

14:00

Health and Sport

Scottish Sports Association

1. **Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will provide sustainable funding in the future for the Scottish Sports Association. (S5O-01523)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government has a strong relationship with the SSA and appreciates the support that it provides to Scottish sporting governing bodies. The SSA is a membership organisation for sporting governing bodies. We route funding to support our SGBs through sportscotland and do not provide core funding to the SSA. In financial year 2017-18, we provided funding for the SSA to carry out a short-term project that focused on assessing equalities issues within SGBs, as well as work to support the Government to identify grass-roots nominations for the honours process.

Lewis Macdonald: I am glad that the minister appreciates the importance of the SSA as the independent voice of Scottish sport and I hear what she says about 2017-18. My question concerned sustainable funding for the future. The minister went to the SSA's annual general meeting last year and made a commitment to ensure that the association would have sustainable funding for the future. However, the funding directly from the Government and from sportscotland is planned to be cut. Does she acknowledge that that falls short of the commitment that she gave? Will she review the funding position to ensure that the SSA has the funding that it needs to continue to act as the independent voice of Scottish sport?

Aileen Campbell: I attended the SSA's AGM last year and we made that commitment to provide funding for the association to carry out the short-term project to which I referred. There was also work with the SSA to enable it to secure additional sources of funding.

We absolutely respect the right of the governing bodies to come together under a representative body. We recognise that, although the SSA does not represent all governing bodies, some of its members value the role that it plays as the collective voice of the governing bodies. We also recognise that the SSA continues to ensure that it articulates the voices of our governing bodies of all different sizes.

Our relationship with the SSA is strong, but we do not provide core funding. That is why we

provided the support last year for it to do the specific work to which I referred. We continue to consider whether there are ways that it can provide additional information to us or work with us collaboratively to create the active Scotland that we all seek.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Does that mean that the minister plans to find a way to fund the SSA in the forthcoming financial year?

Aileen Campbell: As I said, we do not provide core funding to the SSA. We route our funding to support our governing bodies through sportscotland. The SSA is a membership organisation for those governing bodies. I reiterate that we respect the right of governing bodies to come together under a representative body and will continue to work with the SSA to explore the avenues for it to have a sustainable financial future.

I will continue to engage with members who have a particular interest in the matter. A lot of correspondence is coming to us on it, including from MSPs across the chamber. We will continue to keep them updated on the progress that the SSA makes.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I put on record my apologies for coming in slightly late for the start of Lewis Macdonald's question.

National lottery income for good causes reduced by 14 per cent between 2015-16 and 2016-17. Does the minister agree that the United Kingdom Government's lack of action to address that important issue is putting the delivery of sport at risk? *[Interruption.]*

Aileen Campbell: I am a bit surprised at the groans across the chamber, considering that many people continually come to the chamber and ask me to provide funding, given that we all know that the national lottery is an important source of the funding for sportscotland and given that we know that its income in the next financial year is expected to be 26 per cent lower than it was in 2015-16. All these cries and moans from across the chamber are a complete surprise, because we absolutely need to recognise that this is a challenge.

That is why, on 7 November, along with my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, I sent a letter to the UK Government that highlighted that impact on both the sport and cultural sectors and the concern that, at that point, the UK Government was failing to act to address the issue. I have now received a response to that letter from Karen Bradley that talks about how her department will look to bring about some improvements. However I will continue to monitor the situation and will raise

the issue again when I next meet the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport, Tourism and Heritage.

Presiding Officer, despite the groans, I think that Fulton MacGregor is absolutely right to raise this as an issue because it is a concern for many good causes across our country.

Sport (Access for All)

2. **Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that sport is funded to enable access for all. (S5O-01524)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government remains committed to helping Scotland be more physically active by providing the right facilities in the right places and ensuring that our world-class sporting facilities cater to performance athletes and local communities alike.

We are committed to ensuring that sports facilities are affordable, accessible and inclusive to people who want to get involved and stay involved in sport. For example, there are now better and more opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to participate in sport and physical activity right across Scotland, with 181 community sport hubs up and running. That number will increase to 200 by 2020.

In 2017 alone, we have provided sports governing bodies with an additional £2 million specifically to target work on equalities; established the £300,000 sporting equality fund; established the Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board to drive female sports participation; invested nearly £1 million to support all older adults in care to become active; and formally opened the sportscotland national sports training centre Inverclyde, which offers world-class sporting facilities and services that will have a positive impact on users at all levels of physical ability.

Brian Whittle: On the back of the withdrawal of funding to ensure that all primary school pupils have the opportunity to learn to swim, the debacle with jog Scotland, when funding was only reinstated after much lobbying, and the reduction in the sports budget by some £4 million last year, we now hear that the Scottish Sports Association, which is the direct link between Government and sport, has had its funding withdrawn.

How can the minister state that the Scottish Government is committed to sport and activities for all, with the implications that that has for the preventative health agenda, when it seems hell-bent on cutting every budget that has a positive effect on the health of the nation and tackling health inequalities?

Aileen Campbell: Again, after that question to me, I do not understand why the member groaned so much when Fulton MacGregor made a perfectly reasonable point about recognising the impact that the reduction in national lottery income will have on sport and activity across the country.

I outlined a range of work that we are taking forward to ensure that sport and opportunities to be active are available to everybody across the country. Of course there are still more things that we need to do.

Aside from that point, Brian Whittle continually comes to the chamber looking for us to come up with the answer to issues around inequalities. He says that we are the Government. It is this Government that continually has to pick up the pieces from the mess that his Government at Westminster continually leaves behind. It is this Government that has a child poverty bill. It is this Government that is trying to ensure that people with disabilities are treated with dignity. It is this Government that has provided a sporting centre in Inverclyde that will enable people with physical disabilities to take part in the sport of their choice—unlike his Government, unlike Brian Whittle. I do not think that we will be taking any lessons from Brian Whittle or the Conservative UK Government.

National Health Service Workforce (Impact of Brexit)

3. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what national health service workforce planning it is undertaking in relation to the potential impact of Brexit on staffing levels. (S5O-01525)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): All of us in Scotland benefit enormously from the contribution that is made by NHS staff from across the European Union. The free movement of people from the EU and European Economic Area allows skilled and experienced health professionals to work here, providing safe, high-quality services to Scotland's people.

The possible impact of Brexit on staffing levels in NHS Scotland will depend on the precise form of withdrawal from the EU that is imposed by the United Kingdom Government. The Nursing and Midwifery Council reported that significantly fewer EEA nurses are registering in the UK, and the British Medical Association reported that many EEA-trained doctors are considering leaving the UK. Nevertheless, we remain fully committed to continuing to recruit EEA healthcare staff, and we will continue to work hard to protect their rights and their place here in Scotland.

Gillian Martin: The cabinet secretary mentioned the Nursing and Midwifery Council, which has claimed that European staff are already leaving the UK in their droves. Latest statistics show that 4,067 nurses from the EU left their jobs last year, which was a rise of around 67 per cent on the previous year, and that there was a fall of 89 per cent in the number of nurses who came to the UK from EU countries to work. Brexit has not even happened yet, but the NHS is feeling its impact. Will the cabinet secretary outline any assessments that she has made of the scale of the staffing crisis that could envelop the Scottish NHS and give details of what contact she has had with the UK Brexit minister and the Home Secretary to impress on them the urgency for clarity around their future immigration policy?

Shona Robison: The figures that Gillian Martin cites are very concerning, which is why the Scottish Government has repeatedly called on the UK Government to provide an immediate guarantee of the rights of all EU citizens living here.

On 1 September, I wrote to the Home Secretary and the UK Government health secretary to signal my concerns about the approach that was being taken to Brexit, about the uncertainty that the UK Government's position on Brexit is creating for EU nationals and their families and about how that is compromising our ability to recruit and retain talent. The Scottish Government believes that maintaining the free movement of people as part of the single market is in the best interests of the UK as a whole and of Scotland.

We are doing what we can to increase staffing here, which has increased by more than 9 per cent. The number of qualified nurses and midwives has risen by 5.6 per cent under this Government, and we have plans to continue to increase the supply of health staff. Meanwhile, my cabinet colleagues and I will continue to press the case for further clarity, because the situation will damage the potential for us to recruit from outwith Scotland to maintain quality services in Scotland.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): It is clear for all involved in the debate that NHS Scotland's workforce problems did not begin on 23 June 2016, as they have been presided over by the Scottish National Party Government for 10 long years. Given that Audit Scotland has said that the Government's long-awaited workforce plan is "not a detailed plan", but merely a "broad framework", what plans do the cabinet secretary and the Government have to increase the number of nurses on our hospital wards?

Shona Robison: As Jeremy Hunt recently announced, NHS England does not even have a workforce plan, but I am happy to share our plans

with Jeremy Hunt to get him on his way to developing and delivering a workforce plan.

As Miles Briggs will know, we have already published part 1 of the plan, the social care plan is imminent and the primary care plan will follow once we have had a decision on the general practitioner contract. We have increased nursing training places by 2,600 by the end of this parliamentary session, we are expanding medical education with the graduate medical school and we have more training places for medics, so we are taking action here.

Miles Briggs likes to dismiss the issue of Brexit because it is uncomfortable for him to acknowledge that it will only add to the pressures on our NHS and care services not just in Scotland but in the rest of the UK. He would do well to acknowledge that.

Pancreatic Cancer

4. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to raise awareness of the symptoms of pancreatic cancer. (S5O-01526)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Through our detect cancer early programme, we aim to increase the proportion of cancers that are detected at the earliest stages. Central to that work is our social marketing strategy. Next year, the programme will focus on the overall benefits of early detection for all cancers, aiming to encourage anyone with any concerns or changes to their body to visit their general practitioner.

We are also committed to supporting GPs to be more aware of the potential signs and symptoms of cancer, and we updated the Scottish referral guidelines for suspected cancer in 2014. More recently, that was supported by the development and launch of an app in 2016.

My officials are in discussion with Pancreatic Cancer UK about how we can support awareness messages through our wee c strategy and social media and digital channels.

Clare Adamson: Pancreatic Cancer UK carried out a survey that showed that 35 per cent of adults in the United Kingdom would not be worried if they had several of the potential symptoms of pancreatic cancer. Events such as pancreatic cancer month, which we have just had, and light it up purple are raising awareness of the cancer, which has not seen significant changes in outcomes, as other cancers have. Does the cabinet secretary support those campaigns going forward?

Shona Robison: I very much support those campaigns. The light it up purple campaign is a

way of raising awareness among the public. We know that the earlier a cancer is diagnosed, the easier it is to treat, and we recognise that the signs and symptoms of pancreatic cancer can sometimes be vague and non-specific. Through collaboration with the Scottish primary care cancer group and third sector colleagues such as Macmillan Cancer Support, we are commissioning a refresh of the Scottish referral guidelines for suspected cancer, which will take place in 2018, to ensure that any new and emerging evidence is considered. That work will be supported by the development of education and training on early diagnosis for primary care colleagues. I hope that that will make a difference in ensuring that we can get people into treatment earlier than we do at the moment.

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): There are problems with the late detection of pancreatic cancer, but it is vital that it is detected as quickly as possible. According to the latest figures, one in eight cancer patients is waiting more than 62 days for urgent treatment. Although we have just heard from the cabinet secretary of some measures to counteract that, they are rather woolly. Can she be more specific? Can she get the waiting time down below 62 days, and what can we expect in four years' time?

Shona Robison: I do not think that my answer was woolly. I was laying out some of the work that we are doing to ensure that people are treated earlier because of early detection.

I have already said clearly that we need to make improvements on the 62-day treatment target that Tom Mason refers to. That is why we are investing additional funding into diagnostics. Once people are diagnosed, treatment for cancer takes place, on average, within six days, so the issue is the need to improve diagnostics. I am personally chairing the cancer improvement group, which is looking at rolling out some of the best practice that we see—for example, in NHS Lanarkshire, which is meeting the 62-day target.

I would say, though, that for some of the complex cancers, the staging and treatment are not always straightforward, and the 62-day target applies only to some cancers because of the complexity of treatment. I would be happy to write to Tom Mason if that would help him to understand some of the more complex issues.

Orthopaedic Patients (Waiting Times)

5. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many orthopaedic patients are waiting longer than the guaranteed waiting time limit of 12 weeks to receive treatment. (S5O-01527)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): In the quarter ending 30 September 2017, 4,060 patients had waited longer than 12 weeks for orthopaedic surgery, with 5,071 patients being treated within the legal guarantee.

I recognise that some patients are experiencing long waits, which is why I have made £150 million available to the national health service over the next three years. A sum of £50 million has already been allocated to boards in the current year, and that additional funding will build up capacity and ensure that all patients are seen and treated in a timely fashion, including in the specialty of orthopaedics. I expect to see improvements between now and the end of March next year.

There are challenges in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which has been funded with an additional £500,000 to improve orthopaedic waiting times between now and the end of March. It expects to deliver significant improvements in waiting times through performing hip and knee replacements in the Golden Jubilee national hospital, as well as additional internal orthopaedic activity.

Jackie Baillie: I thank the cabinet secretary for her response and for her recognition that the treatment time guarantee means little to those who wait longer than 12 weeks. I have many constituents, as she knows, who have waited much longer than even a year for treatment. The cabinet secretary did, indeed, announce in May £50 million to improve waiting times, which was welcome; £11 million of that is for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. However, that was in May. We are now seven months on, and people in my area are still waiting far too long. Can she guarantee that we will see an improvement, so that my constituents no longer need to wait beyond 12 weeks, in pain, for treatment?

Shona Robison: NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has received £11.2 million of the £50 million. As Jackie Baillie will appreciate, it takes time to build up capacity. I can, however, tell her that the feedback from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and other health boards is that they are seeing some of the longest waits reducing. I am confident that, between now and March, we will see further improvement. We have asked boards to tackle the longest waits and I certainly make it clear to boards that they have to do so.

In my first answer to Jackie Baillie, I specifically laid out the fact that we have given additional funding of £500,000 to help NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to make the further improvements that it needs to make between now and the end of March, specifically because of the types of case that Jackie Baillie referred to.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I am grateful to Jackie Baillie, whose constituents' experience mirrors that of my constituents in Orkney. The cabinet secretary will be aware that capacity problems in NHS Grampian have led to similar delays. Is she also aware that NHS Grampian appears to be sending outpatient letters that offer appointments that must be confirmed within two weeks via a very busy helpline that is only available 9 to 5, Monday to Friday? Does she think that the approach of passing back to patients the onus to confirm their appointments is the best way of reducing waiting times that are, by her own acknowledgement, far too long?

Shona Robison: NHS Grampian is trying to manage its capacity as well as possible, and to ensure that every appointment opportunity is used. Malcolm Wright, who is the chief executive of NHS Grampian, is working with NHS Highland, in particular, to consider management of capacity across the whole north of Scotland, especially when it comes to elective and outpatient appointments. That is a good move, because we need to look at new ways of working.

Additionally, the work that Derek Bell is doing in reforming delivery of elective procedures and outpatient appointments will ensure that we use our capacity in the most effective and efficient way.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): A constituent of mine, who has been waiting for a specialist appointment for a number of months, was in touch with me yesterday after once again receiving a call from the Scottish Ambulance Service to cancel a booking to take him to hospital for an appointment today. Does the cabinet secretary agree that cuts in one area of the service are making waiting times worse and hindering the efficient working of the wider service? Surely when a cancellation is made at such short notice, arrangements for a taxi service should be made.

Shona Robison: I am concerned to hear that. It is not good for patients to have their appointments cancelled at such short notice. From what Mark Griffin said, I am not clear whether the issue is one for the Scottish Ambulance Service, but if it is, I am keen for him to write to me with the circumstances and I will certainly want to look into it. It is important to have a joined-up service and that, when someone has an appointment, that appointment is kept. If there is an issue around transportation to appointments, it needs to be resolved. If Mark Griffin wants to write to me with the details, I will certainly look into the case.

Healthy Lifestyles (Promotion)

6. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what it is

doing to support and provide resources for organisations that promote healthy lifestyles. (S5O-01528)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government is taking forward a wide range of actions, including funding in many key policy areas, to encourage physical activity and to improve diet and mental wellbeing, as well as initiatives to tackle alcohol and substance abuse. We aim to ensure that people in all our communities, particularly children and their families, have the knowledge and skills to make healthy living choices.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: As we have heard, the Scottish Sports Association plays a vital part in connecting the value of sport in our communities with our efforts to improve the health of our nation through policy. Does the minister consider that withdrawal of funding from the SSA could be perceived as a cynical attempt to silence what is, in essence, the voice of sports in our communities before further budget cuts to sports are announced? Will she listen to the consensus that has been established among the Opposition parties this afternoon and directly fund the SSA in the future?

Aileen Campbell: I reiterate that the SSA is a membership organisation that is made up of sporting governing bodies. We route funding to support our governing bodies through sportscotland. We do not provide core funding to the SSA. We have a strong relationship with the SSA, which is why we provided funding last year to enable it to take forward some short-term focused work. We will continue to listen to Opposition members and to any other representations.

Parkhead Hospital (Upgrade)

7. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde regarding the planned upgrade of the Parkhead hospital site. (S5O-01529)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Plans for the Glasgow east end health and social care centre are at a relatively early stage. They are currently being developed by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Glasgow city health and social care partnership. The Scottish Government supports the project in principle and is keen to review the plans as they develop.

John Mason: Does the cabinet secretary accept that residents in the east end of Glasgow are resistant to travelling to Stobhill in the north of Glasgow for health facilities? Does she agree that

it might help health outcomes in the east end of Glasgow if we had more facilities there?

Shona Robison: John Mason will be aware that I met local stakeholders in September as part of my consideration of the major service-change proposals for local rehabilitation services, including Lightburn hospital. I assure him that I am fully aware of the significant levels of deprivation in the local area, and of the understandable concerns about appropriate access to services, including regarding issues about public transport. I intend to make my decision on the major service-change proposals in the coming weeks. As I have said, I welcome the commitment from the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's board and its planning partners to develop, as a priority, a health and social care hub in the east end of Glasgow for the benefit of local people.

Drug Use

8. Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce levels of drug use. (S5O-01530)

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): We continue to take forward a range of initiatives to tackle problem drug use. We invest significant resources in education and prevention work, and we will shortly issue good practice guidance that is based on recent work on the effectiveness of education and prevention initiatives. We work closely with Police Scotland and the United Kingdom Government to limit the supply of illicit drugs in Scotland and to support effective implementation of the relevant legislation.

Yesterday in Parliament I outlined my plans to introduce a drug and alcohol treatment strategy that will seek to address the challenges that we face in our attempts to tackle problem drug and alcohol use, while ensuring that we continue to provide high quality person-centred services to meet the wide-ranging needs of the people who are most at risk from those substances.

Oliver Mundell: What we need is urgency. It is worrying that Dumfries and Galloway has the highest percentage of drug-related hospital admissions in Scotland. The number of people who die from drug overdoses in the area has reached a record high. Families are suffering, and people are dying. What measures will the Scottish Government take now to tackle drug misuse in rural areas?

Aileen Campbell: I reiterated yesterday that, because of the rise in drug-related deaths, there is a real need for us to work out what we need to do better to enable people to feel supported. That is why I set out that we are developing our seek, keep and treat approach in order to understand the vulnerable cohort of ageing drug users who

present in the tragic drug deaths that we see each year.

Oliver Mundell is right to recognise that there are particular issues in rural Scotland. As we seek to develop the refreshed approach, I am happy to meet him to make sure that we focus on the rural issues that he, as a constituency member in Dumfriesshire, wants to outline. I, too, am a rural MSP, so I understand that sometimes services are not always on the doorstep. That is why it is important that we have a flourishing recovery community across the country—some in rural parts—to allow them to feel that they are supported and to help them on their recovery journey. The opportunity to meet is open for David—I am sorry—Oliver Mundell to take up, because it is a really important issue to work together on to ensure that it has the cross-party support that we had previously, when we published “The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland’s Drug Problem”.

General Practitioners (NHS Ayrshire and Arran)

9. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to recruit and retain GPs in NHS Ayrshire and Arran. (S5O-01531)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): We know that the recruitment and retention of GPs is an issue for some areas of Scotland. That is why the groundbreaking new GP contract for Scotland—jointly designed and agreed with the British Medical Association—will help to ensure that GPs are able to spend more time with patients and less time on bureaucracy. If accepted, the contract will help to reduce doctors’ overall workload and make general practice an even more attractive career prospect by allowing GPs to focus on the patients who need them most.

Not only that, we have committed to increasing funding directly into general practice by £250 million by 2021, including over £71 million this year, as part of our commitment to increase primary care funding by £500 million. We have also increased funding for GP recruitment and retention fivefold, to £5 million.

In Ayrshire and Arran, we have invested £400,000 of that GP recruitment fund to develop new posts, with a special focus on particular subjects, and NHS Ayrshire and Arran has successfully recruited four GPs, who start in post this year.

Jamie Greene: Those are all very warm words, but the reality is that the Scottish Government’s GP recruitment and retention programme has only managed to attract three GPs to work in Ayrshire and Arran. Freedom of information figures show

that the health board is paying up to £800 per day for locum GPs to cover those shifts. Does the cabinet secretary really think that that is an effective use of our health budget? What does she have to say to my constituents in Ayrshire who have lost their GP?

Shona Robison: I will say to Jamie Greene, as I have said to other members in this chamber, that the recruitment and retention fund has funded a number of projects that are supporting not just the direct recruitment of GPs but the support structures around them. Instead of complaining about that, I would have thought that Jamie Greene might have welcomed that additional investment.

We are working hard with the BMA to bring in a new era for primary care and a better deal for GPs. I hope that Jamie Greene and his Tory colleagues will get behind that new contract, because it is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to set the future of general practice in Scotland and to make it a very attractive career for young doctors who are making their decisions about which specialty to go into. Maybe we need to talk up general practice a little bit more than we do.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Cabinet secretary, the Tories have been frightening the old and sick in West Kilbride, in my constituency, by saying for weeks that the surgery there will close. In fact, a new GP is due to join the West Kilbride medical practice on 1 January in a post that is funded for two years by the GP recruitment and retention fund. Furthermore, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, which currently runs the practice, is inviting tender bids by GP partnerships to take over.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that, since taking over West Kilbride medical practice in August, NHS Ayrshire and Arran has made significant progress, which it should be commended for, and that there is no intention whatsoever to close the practice? Can she reassure patients and practice staff alike that any rumours to the contrary are untrue?

Shona Robison: Kenny Gibson is correct—the West Kilbride practice will not be closing its doors to patients and we should be highlighting the positive work that has been under way to support that practice since the board took over in August this year. Kenny Gibson makes a good point—we should be talking up our GP services and making GP practices attractive places to come to work, whether that is in Ayrshire and Arran or anywhere else in Scotland. NHS Ayrshire and Arran has worked very hard to make sure that the West Kilbride practice has a good and stable future and I am happy to write to Kenny Gibson with any further details that he might find helpful.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Just as there is growing demand for GP services in North Ayrshire and Arran, there is also growing demand for other services, not least chemotherapy. That service has been under review since 2014; in 2015, NHS Ayrshire and Arran completed an options appraisal that, if implemented, will lead to the loss of chemotherapy care at Ayr hospital, forcing local cancer patients to travel up to 100 miles for treatment in Ayrshire.

Given that it is now three years since that options appraisal was carried out and, in the meantime, demand has continued to rise, and given that NHS Ayrshire and Arran has not yet even consulted on the proposal, will the health secretary intervene and urge the health board to drop this damaging and clearly unpopular proposal?

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): That was a little bit broader than the original question, but do you want to give a brief answer, cabinet secretary?

Shona Robison: I have spoken to John Burns, the chief executive of NHS Ayrshire and Arran, about that matter recently in order to get an update. It is, of course, for NHS Ayrshire and Arran to take forward its local services, as it would be for any local board. John Burns is keen to see the chemotherapy service as part of the development of the west of Scotland cancer services. He is well aware of the strength of feeling and, as I made very clear in my call to him, what is important is that he consults local people properly, taking into account their views and considerations as he moves forward with proposals, whether they are for that service in Ayr hospital or for any other service across Ayrshire and Arran.

Mental Health (Sport and Leisure)

10. **Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact engaging in sport and leisure activities has on mental health. (S5O-01532)

The Minister for Mental Health (Maureen Watt): Our vision is of a Scotland where more people are more active, more often, in part because being active is good for mental wellbeing. The active living becomes achievable programme—a collaboration between the Scottish Government and the mental health charity, Scottish Association for Mental Health—builds on the well-established links between physical activity and improved mental wellbeing, as well as physical health. That is further evidenced by the recent partnership announcement between SAMH and jogscotland, which recognises the clear link between physical and mental health.

Gordon Lindhurst: The minister will be aware of physical activity programmes such as the healthy active minds project that is run by Edinburgh Leisure to assist those who are facing stress, anxiety and depression. Does she welcome the fact that rates relief for leisure trusts will now be continued, to allow for the provision of such services, thanks to Scottish Conservative pressure, and will she lobby colleagues to ensure that adequate funding is given to local authorities to allow for their long-term sustainability?

Maureen Watt: I have to laugh at the fact that the Tories think that they managed to get the rates relief on sport and leisure facilities, as if we had not been working with our colleagues to take forward and look specifically at what was in the Barclay review, which, of course, we will be debating later on.

NHS Tayside (Meetings)

11. **Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met NHS Tayside. (S5O-01533)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Ministers and Scottish Government officials regularly meet representatives of all health boards, including NHS Tayside, to discuss matters of importance to local people.

Murdo Fraser: NHS Tayside has a plan to remove all emergency surgery from Perth royal infirmary and move it to Ninewells hospital in Dundee. That plan has caused serious concern among many residents in Perth and Kinross regarding the impact that the decision might have on the future viability of the accident and emergency unit at PRI. What assurances can the cabinet secretary give my constituents that the A and E unit in Perth has a secure future under this Government and will not be downgraded or closed?

Shona Robison: NHS Tayside has given a clear commitment that urgent unscheduled care will continue to be provided from the PRI, as have I. The PRI is a very important district general hospital and a very important part of the infrastructure of the national health service. Therefore, I hope to get rid of any scaremongering that might have been taking place on that issue.

Murdo Fraser will be aware that NHS Tayside has been carrying out a consultation about the delivery of surgery across Tayside. The board has been clear that no decisions have been made and that any proposals agreed by the board that involve a major change will come to me for a final decision. I will carefully consider all information and representations before reaching my decision.

What is important is delivering safe patient care—that is of the utmost importance. In terms of emergency general surgery, I understand that the board took that temporary measure to ensure that it could continue to provide a safe and appropriate level of care to its patients. I am sure that Murdo Fraser will understand that.

NHS Grampian (Funding)

12. Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland)

(LD): To ask the Scottish Government what the difference has been since 2007 between NHS Grampian's actual funding and the amount it would have been allocated under the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee formula. (S5O-01534)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): When the NRAC formula was introduced in 2009-10, NHS Grampian was 3.7 per cent behind its target funding allocation. The Scottish Government has invested significantly in supporting the boards that are behind parity. In 2017-18, the Scottish Government has invested an additional £50 million of NRAC funding, which takes all boards for the first time to within 1 per cent of their target allocations. Since 2015-16, NHS Grampian has received additional funding of £47 million for the specific purpose of accelerating NRAC parity.

Mike Rumbles: To answer the question that I asked, it is £165 million—that is the amount of money that the Scottish Government has not given NHS Grampian since the NRAC formula was introduced. That information comes from the neutral Scottish Parliament information centre. Will the cabinet secretary ask her officials to contact SPICe just to make sure that I am not misunderstanding and that it is correct that Grampian should have received £165 million but has not and that, even without the NRAC formula, it is already the worst-funded health board in the country?

Shona Robison: As I recollect, the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration did nothing to ensure that NHS Grampian's funding was brought into line. The NRAC formula is there to ensure that issues such as deprivation are reflected in the funding that boards receive. Under this Government, since 2006-07, and since Mike Rumbles's party was in administration, NHS Grampian's budget has increased by £315 million, to almost £900 million in 2017-18, which is an increase of 54 per cent. In addition, we are investing £128 million this year to support the delivery of service reform, and NHS Grampian is of course benefiting from that.

The NRAC formula is the most objective measure of funding equity that we have developed. It explicitly takes account of

demographics, deprivation and geography in order to promote equity of access to health services for all residents across Scotland.

Policing

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a statement by Michael Matheson on policing. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:43

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): I am grateful for the opportunity to update Parliament on the leadership and performance of policing. When we created Police Scotland in 2013, we purposely strengthened the governance, accountability and scrutiny arrangements for policing and created a clear statutory framework for investigations of misconduct allegations against police officers. There is also a clear and independent process for investigating criminal allegations under the direction of the Lord Advocate.

We created the Scottish Police Authority and the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner to provide independent investigation and decision making on misconduct matters, and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland provides professional and independent scrutiny of policing, with a statutory duty to support policing to deliver best value and continuous improvement.

As members know, last Friday, an assistant chief constable was suspended by the Scottish Police Authority. The Scottish Police Authority board took that decision after the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner brought allegations to its attention. Those include criminal matters that the commissioner had been directed to investigate by the Crown Office. That criminal investigation has commenced and is on-going.

The SPA also referred misconduct allegations about the senior officer to the PIRC, and the commissioner is now establishing whether a misconduct investigation is required. In addition, three other officers were suspended and two were placed on restricted duties. Decisions on those officers were taken by Police Scotland in line with the relevant conduct regulations as passed by Parliament.

Those are live investigations and we must respect the process. Until the investigations are completed, further comment on or speculation about the individual cases would not be appropriate.

I am aware of some criticism of the current process. There has been widespread speculation about the individuals involved in cases and the nature of allegations before the process has

concluded, and I have considerable sympathy with the view that that is unhelpful. Going forward, it will be important to reflect on the operation of the process, particularly around confidentiality and how the existing process can be improved and developed once the current cases are more advanced.

The events have caused understandable concern, and I wish to highlight the measures that are being put in place to strengthen the senior command team in Police Scotland. Following the recent suspensions, Deputy Chief Constable Designate Iain Livingstone acted quickly to review his command structure. In doing so, he stated his confidence in the leadership that is provided by Police Scotland's officers and staff, reinforcing the point that leadership exists across all aspects of policing from his role as the deputy chief constable all the way through the organisation to the police constables who are serving their local communities. I whole-heartedly support that view. His recommendations to strengthen Police Scotland's senior team were approved by the SPA board yesterday. As a result, two officers will be promoted to temporary assistant chief constable with immediate effect. Gillian MacDonald and Alan Speirs have passed the UK-wide strategic command course and are ready and fully qualified to step up. Steps have also been taken to ensure that the operation of Police Scotland's counter-terrorism and firearms units are unaffected by recent developments. Operations and training continue as normal, with experienced officers filling key roles.

Some commentators have sought to use recent events to question Police Scotland's performance. However, the evidence on that performance is clear. The latest national statistics show that recorded crime is at a 43-year low and that public confidence in the police remains strong. All local areas have experienced a significant reduction in the overall level of recorded crime over the longer term. The number of non-sexual violent crimes recorded fell by 49 per cent between 2006-07 and 2016-17, and it remains at one of its lowest levels since 1974. The number of homicide cases has also fallen by 47 per cent in the past 10 years. Looking forward, the SPA and Police Scotland have a clear strategy for the next 10 years following the publication of "Policing 2026" earlier this year. That will ensure that Scotland continues to benefit from a modern, responsive and sustainable police service.

Moving on to governance, I welcome the appointment of Susan Deacon as the new chair of the SPA. Susan takes up the post on 4 December and brings extensive experience of high-profile roles in the public and private sectors. She will bring a new approach to the governance of policing. With decades of experience of leading

changes in public, private and academic organisations, and having served the democratic interests of communities for years as both a member of the Scottish Parliament and a minister, she has a track record of bringing together people and ideas in ways that lead to lasting improvement and change. As she turns the focus of the SPA outwards, she intends to strengthen partnerships with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and others, involving them in improvement and change.

I also welcome the appointment of Kenneth Hogg as the interim chief officer of the SPA. His background in public service reform, financial accountability and leadership will stand the SPA in good stead.

Those appointments sit alongside the significant improvements in SPA governance that have been made this year and the review that I commissioned of the authority's executive functions. All those things will support the board to perform its role effectively.

I commend police officers and staff for the tireless job that they do every day to keep Scotland safe. I will now set out what the Scottish Government is doing to support policing.

Yesterday, Andrea MacDonald of the Scottish Police Federation reinforced the fact that

“front line officers are still out there, they have been out there all weekend still doing their job, still going to the calls from the public and out there patrolling to prevent crime”.

Since Friday, I have met the SPA, the deputy chief constable designate, other senior officers in the command team and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland. The recurring theme in all those conversations was one of strength and continuity in Scottish policing. Earlier today, Derek Penman said:

“I agree with the view of the Scottish Police Federation that there is no crisis in policing ... Our ongoing scrutiny of Police Scotland has consistently shown that police officers and police staff at all levels remain committed to delivering policing to our communities”.

As well as the usual local policing activity that we see every day in our communities, the next few days will see the launch of the drink-driving campaign, and there is a very visible police presence at our winter festivals. This morning, at the Police Scotland violence prevention conference, officers from across the country came together to focus on working collaboratively to reduce crime in Scotland. In short, operational policing continues and the public can have confidence in the police service.

To support that important work, this Government is committed to supporting policing, promising to protect the police resource budget in real terms in every year of this parliamentary session—a boost

of £100 million by 2021. This year, I also committed a further £61 million for reform.

We have lobbied the UK Government on VAT for the past five years. The chancellor's announcement that Police Scotland will be eligible to reclaim VAT from 1 April 2018 is welcome and long overdue. The benefits of that will flow directly to policing, as VAT will be reclaimed directly from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

The creation of a single service has improved the ability of our police to respond quickly and effectively to serious crime, terrorism and other major incidents uninhibited by the previous forces' boundaries. It has delivered a scale of operational flexibility and specialism that was not possible under the legacy arrangements, and it continues to deliver an excellent local service to communities that is the match of policing anywhere in the world.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement. I welcome Deputy Chief Constable Designate Iain Livingstone's appointment of temporary Assistant Chief Constables MacDonald and Speirs. I am sure that I speak for the whole chamber in offering continued support to the deputy chief constable designate, who is working hard to provide stability during what he describes as difficult days.

Despite the tireless work of officers and staff on the front line, which I applaud, the public fears that the police service is in a critical state. The cabinet secretary refuses to admit that. Even today, he spins the plugging of gaps at the top as strengthening the senior team. He says that the force is acting quickly, but when will Police Scotland's leadership return to normal, with no people in executive posts on leave and no such posts temporarily filled? Has the cabinet secretary sought specific reassurances that no major investigations have been adversely affected by the present turmoil? Given the circumstances, will he now abandon his ill-thought-out, unwanted and unnecessary merger of the British Transport Police and Police Scotland?

Michael Matheson: Liam Kerr started off by welcoming the two temporary ACC appointments that Deputy Chief Constable Designate Iain Livingstone made yesterday, yet he questions whether that strengthens the leadership team in Police Scotland. If he knew either of the individuals concerned, he would know that they are very capable police officers, who have gone through the process and have extensive experience of discharging the responsibilities that are involved in being an ACC. I hope that he will reflect on the fact that Iain Livingstone made those appointments on the basis of the skill sets of the two officers concerned. I do not think that it reflects well on Liam Kerr to question further the

command structure in Police Scotland and the individuals who have been appointed to it.

As regards the issue of when Police Scotland's leadership will return to normal, I have stated in recent days that the executive team in Police Scotland faces a challenging set of circumstances. No one would wish to be in the situation that it is in, with an officer suspended and a chief constable on extended leave. However, as Liam Kerr will recognise, all the incidents in question are being investigated. We must wait for that process to be completed. It is wholly inappropriate to seek to undermine the process that is under way by suggesting that it can simply be brushed aside.

As I am sure that Liam Kerr recognises, there are many dedicated and highly experienced officers in Police Scotland who are always able to support the organisation in particular investigations as and when that is necessary. That will continue to be the case, and I have every confidence that Iain Livingstone and his command team will continue to make use of those officers in addressing the current situation.

I understand that Liam Kerr opposes the idea of the integration of the BTP into Police Scotland, despite his party's commitment to abolish the BTP altogether. As with any other Government policy, I keep such matters under regular review. The joint programme board that is overseeing the integration process is made up of experts. If they highlight concerns or issues to me, I will duly take those matters into consideration. That has always been the case; it was the case before Friday of last week, and it will continue to be the case.

Now is the time to get behind the men and women in our police service, who protect our communities day in and day out. It is not the time to question the suitability of people who have been appointed to key posts to support the command structure.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing an advance copy of his statement.

Nobody is questioning the fact that our dedicated police officers and support staff work every day to keep our communities safe, but there is no denying that this has been a bad year for leadership and governance at Police Scotland and the SPA—one that has been full of suspensions, resignations and early exits.

Given the events of the past few days, the cabinet secretary's statement looks complacent. He must take responsibility for what happens on his watch, and there are legitimate concerns. Many people wonder why the chief constable has been granted special leave, while other officers who have dedicated their whole careers to policing in Scotland have received suspensions.

The chief constable has now been absent for almost three months. What guarantees can the cabinet secretary give that the PIRC, who is in the unprecedented position of investigating several senior officers, has the capacity to resolve matters, so that we can get Police Scotland to a more stable situation?

Michael Matheson: The member raises an important issue about the capacity of the PIRC to deal with a number of different investigations, including the investigation into the complaints that have been made against the chief constable. As she will be aware, we have increased the PIRC's resource base to assist with the undertaking of the detailed investigations that are required.

The PIRC not only undertakes investigations in relation to complaints that are received directly but is also directed by the Crown Office when it conducts crime-based investigations; in that sense, it will operate almost as the police force for the Crown Office in investigating such complaints. I recognise the challenges and the demands that are placed on the PIRC in looking at such matters. We are presently considering the existing resources that are available to the PIRC. It is in everybody's interests for such complaints and investigations to be completed as quickly as possible.

In relation to the member's comment that she believes that my statement reflects a form of complacency, I say to her that take my responsibilities as Cabinet Secretary for Justice very seriously. Today, I set out a range of measures that are being put in place by Police Scotland and the SPA to make sure that we address the issues as effectively as we can. We are also making sure that we make additional investment available to Police Scotland. I will continue to make sure that we do everything that we can to support the men and women who keep our communities safe, day in and day out. The member may choose to sit on the sidelines, carping and making political comments, but I will get on with the day job of supporting our police force in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Time for business this afternoon is extremely tight and there is no spare time at all, so can I have short questions—and shorter answers, please, cabinet secretary?

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the great strength of Police Scotland—and of its predecessors—is its ability to operate as a team within a framework of laws and to grow new senior officers, and to do so without hands-on interference from politicians?

Michael Matheson: In recent years, I have met a range of officers from right across the organisation, from local policing to specialist units. It has been very clear to me that one of the real benefits of having a national force is the ability to deploy specialist support as and when it is necessary and to utilise all the skill sets that are based in the organisation, at appropriate times, to address particular investigations as and when they occur. I believe that Police Scotland has a very rich seam of leadership in the organisation, as Deputy Chief Constable Designate Iain Livingstone also suggested recently, when he said that he believed that Police Scotland has strong leadership from the top right through to local policing. I believe that that is the case, and that we should all look to support that.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary asserts that, in the creation of the single force, the governance, accountability and scrutiny arrangements for policing in Scotland were strengthened. However, concerns over the lack of checks and balances expressed at the time persist. I therefore ask him again whether he will now confirm that the Scottish Government will revisit the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 specifically to look at the methods of holding Police Scotland and the SPA to account. Will he confirm exactly what he does, as cabinet secretary, to ensure that accountability and transparency are evident in practice and not just in theory?

Michael Matheson: I remember being asked that question a few weeks ago. The answer is the same: we have no plans to revisit the 2012 act at the present moment.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree with the Scottish Police Federation, which has said that

“there is a lot of media speculation and hype and perhaps some political people getting involved in this, but there is no crisis. It is business as usual”?

Michael Matheson: It is important that there is robust, effective scrutiny of our police service and that we have an independent complaints process that allows complaints to be investigated appropriately, as and when they are made. That is what we have in the PIRC. Of course, when complaints relate to criminal matters, it is also important that investigations are directed by the Crown Office. I recognise the concerns that have been raised by the SPF around the speculation relating to those complaints. However, we need now to make sure that due process and the natural justice that is due when with such complaints are dealt with are allowed to take their course. It is in everyone's interests to ensure that we reflect on that before commenting on the nature of some of the complaints.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement.

With officers at the top of Police Scotland having been suspended or placed on restricted duties and the chief constable having been placed on special leave, can the Cabinet Secretary for Justice explain what impact the disarray in the command structure will have on the merger with the BTP, with questions having already been asked about the financing of the merger?

Michael Matheson: If Mary Fee took the opportunity to engage with the command structure in Police Scotland, she would be reassured that there is no disarray. The actions that the deputy chief constable designate has taken over the past 24 hours, having reviewed his command structure over the weekend and having decided to temporarily appoint two assistant chief constables, were taken to support and strengthen the command structure as it stands. He has also set out the slight difference that he is creating for those two roles in order to strengthen aspects of what he believes are areas that could be improved in the overall command structure.

On the BTP—and I recognise Mary Fee's opposition to its integration into Police Scotland—I say to her exactly the same thing that I said to Liam Kerr: I keep all areas of policy under constant review. The Scottish Government, the SPA, Police Scotland and others, including the United Kingdom Government, are on the joint programme board. If issues of concern are raised about the integration and how it is being taken forward, I will give them due consideration. It is in no one's interests to compromise the operational aspects of how policing is delivered post the integration of those services. That has always been the case, and it will continue to be the case. I reassure Mary Fee that, despite our different views on the matter, I constantly consider those issues and if concerns and issues are raised with me I will consider them seriously.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for the early sight of his statement and particularly for mentioning the outstanding Scottish police service results last week in the face of all the on-going events. That shows the dedication of the officers—both women and men.

A shadow is being cast by two individuals—two lame ducks: the chair of the Scottish Police Authority, Andrew Flanagan, who is going, and his mate Phil Gormley, who, in my opinion, should be suspended and should go. However, we must look to the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you come to your question, please, Mr Finnie?

John Finnie: Yes, indeed.

It is important to ensure that there is proportionality and equality in decision making about suspensions between the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland. What will the cabinet secretary do to ensure that that happens?

Michael Matheson: We have to recognise that due process is being gone through for the complaints that are being considered—I mentioned the need to reflect on aspects relating to confidentiality.

I have always taken the view that we should never accept that we are at a point at which we cannot make further improvements. As is the case with any process in any area of public policy, we should always reflect on whether there are ways in which the system could be made to work better and improved in some way. There is no doubt that we should always do that with complaints, conduct issues, other aspects of policing in general and how policing deals with and responds to local incidents. We should always reflect on how we can improve our responses.

I have no doubt that how complaints are handled in the future will be given due consideration, but we have to recognise that due process is being gone through with the existing complaints and ensure that we protect the integrity of that process for the purpose of the investigations and the parties who have had complaints lodged against them so that they are given natural justice in how the matters are taken forward.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): What discussions has the cabinet secretary had with the UK Government regarding the repayment of the £140 million in VAT that has been taken out of the pockets of our emergency services over the past few years?

Michael Matheson: I welcome the chancellor's decision last week to change the VAT rules after our sustained pressure, although the UK Government eventually conceded that it could always have changed the VAT rules. That money from reclaiming VAT will now go directly back into the police service and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. The outstanding £140 million will be £175 million by the end of this parliamentary year. We believe that the Treasury is treating that almost as a windfall, but it is a windfall out of the pockets of our emergency services, and that money would be better invested in our emergency services in Scotland.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Does the justice secretary agree with Kenny MacAskill that today's problems in Police Scotland are someone else's fault, and with Scottish National Party back

benchers, who think that there is nothing to see here?

Is it not the case that all this can be traced right back to the decision to rush through centralisation, create a toothless police authority, break local community links and appoint the first chief constable to undermine traditional Scottish policing? Does the justice secretary accept responsibility for any of that?

Michael Matheson: I recognise that there have been significant challenges since the creation of Police Scotland. In a number of areas, the organisation has not performed as well as we would have wanted it to do, when we consider that it was a major part of public sector reform.

For example, there were clearly issues to do with the way in which the service took forward call handling, which the service now recognises and acknowledges. I commissioned work, through Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland, to review how the service was conducting call handling—an issue that the member pursued on a number of occasions—which identified areas in which action could have been taken. That work has led to improvements. The 30 recommendations in the report that HMICS published at the beginning of the year demonstrated the improvements and progress that Police Scotland is making in the area.

I also think that the way in which we took forward the integration of the eight forces resulted in aspects of local policing not being given the priority that they should have been given. I have taken forward work with the SPA to ensure that there is a much clearer focus on the need for local policing in the context of how policing is delivered in Scotland. Localism is at the heart of the new national policing priorities that we published. The policing 2026 strategy sets out the need to reflect on how policing is delivered locally, to meet local need.

I fully accept the points that Willie Rennie made. There have been challenges and issues as we have taken forward the integration of our police service. However, there have also been benefits for the operational ability of the organisation, for example in relation to its ability to respond to major incidents and support local policing by providing national support.

Is there more to do? There absolutely is. I assure the member that the incoming chair of the SPA, Iain Livingstone while he leads Police Scotland, and I are committed to doing everything possible to drive the organisation forward, address issues and ensure that policing in our local communities reflects the needs of those communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Ben Macpherson. Please be very brief.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary please reassure constituents about the calibre of Police Scotland's performance, and can he reassure them that day-to-day policing will not be affected by the investigations into senior officers?

Michael Matheson: In my statement, I set out how the recent performance data demonstrate the significant progress that Police Scotland continues to make in improving how it tackles, reduces and prevents crime in our communities. The comments of the Scottish Police Federation and others, including Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, Derek Penman, provide clear assurances that operational policing continues to be delivered to an extremely good standard.

This morning, I was at the Police Scotland and Scottish Government violence prevention conference in Glasgow, where operational police officers from across the country shared good practice on how we can more effectively tackle violence in our communities, particularly our more deprived communities, which continue to suffer disproportionately. Operational policing of that nature will continue, and, as Iain Livingstone said at the SPA board meeting yesterday, the public can be assured that that will continue to be the priority as the organisation moves forward in the weeks and months ahead.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Maurice Corry to ask the final question—please be quick.

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): We understand that some of the allegations are about the illegal use of firearms. Will the cabinet secretary say what measures are in place to ensure that firearms are available only for use by authorised officers? What further measures are being considered in light of the scandal?

Michael Matheson: The member will be aware that there is a live criminal investigation into matters. It would not be appropriate for me to get into the details of investigations that are being directed by the Crown. No doubt, once the investigation has been completed and we know its outcome, we will be able to identify the reasons why the issue came about in the first place and the measures that need to be put in place to prevent such things from occurring in future—if indeed they happened; at this point we are talking about allegations.

I assure the member that when the investigations are completed, if there are lessons that need to be learned and actions that need to be taken, that will happen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement on policing. Ms McAlpine, I apologise for not being able to call you.

General Practice

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-09218, in the name of Miles Briggs, on general practice.

15:15

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I am pleased to open the debate and bring a focus on general practice to our Parliament.

Members from across the chamber will be acutely aware of the shortage of general practitioners in their communities, the number of practices that are unable to take on new patients and patients who struggle to secure appointments with their family doctors due to ever-increasing demands. The fact is that the number of GPs has remained around the same since 2008 but the number of patients has increased by more than 5 per cent in Scotland and the number of patients who are aged 65 or over has risen by around a fifth. At the same time, the number of general practices in Scotland has fallen by 6 per cent, while average list sizes have increased by 12 per cent. All the time, the demand for consultations continues to grow significantly.

The Royal College of General Practitioners Scotland has correctly identified “the longstanding underfunding” of general practice over the past decade. For everyone who takes part in the debate, it is worth noting that general practice in Scotland receives 7.24 per cent of the health budget, compared to 8.24 per cent in Northern Ireland and 8.79 per cent in England.

Another stark indication of the huge pressures on GP services will be demonstrated in Lothian region tomorrow. The GP partners at the East Craigs practice here in the capital, which serves almost 8,000 patients, will become the latest in a growing number to hand back their practice to the local health board, having previously closed their list to new patients. A notice to current patients from the GP partners states:

“Due to the ongoing nationwide recruitment crisis in General Practice we are unable to provide the level of service we’d like.”

Local people in that part of west Edinburgh are understandably anxious and uncertain about the future of their practice and angry that their valued family doctors feel that things are now so bad that they can no longer manage the practice and provide local healthcare.

The fact that even general practices in dynamic, attractive and growing cities such as Edinburgh find it impossible to recruit new GPs speaks volumes. Two decades ago, many GPs would

have jumped at the chance to secure any position in an Edinburgh practice. What frustrates our hard-working GPs, who have to deal with such pressures and demands as our population grows, is that Scottish National Party ministers were consistently and repeatedly warned that a GP shortage was likely and coming, given the demographics of our doctors and the increasing demands on general practice.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Will Miles Briggs give way?

Miles Briggs: Briefly.

Tom Arthur: Richard Vautrey, the chair of the British Medical Association general practitioners committee, has said that eight out of 10 of England’s GPs say that their workload is unmanageable, that there was a record number of closures of general practices in England last year and that we are now seeing a—*[Interruption.]* Miles Briggs has raised issues and he has referred to Northern Ireland, Wales and England. The pressures are felt throughout the United Kingdom, so does he recognise it as a broader, global phenomenon? If he is going to make accusations against SNP ministers, does he not see that Jeremy Hunt has responsibility as well?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you an extra half minute, Mr Briggs.

Miles Briggs: Thank you. I think that I might need three, actually.

I remind Tom Arthur—as we have to do with all SNP members—that this is the Scottish Parliament and we are talking about Scottish health.

Tom Arthur: Does the member’s party take responsibility for the situation in England?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you stop shouting, please, Mr Arthur?

Miles Briggs: Back in the spring of 2008, the BMA said that a workforce crisis was imminent, as too few GPs were being trained to replace those who were retiring or leaving early. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing at the time, who is now the First Minister, insisted that there no problem and that the SNP had

“robust GP workforce plans in place to retain and recruit doctors”.

However, the reality is that those plans do not appear ever to have existed—except, perhaps, in Nicola Sturgeon’s imagination—and, all these years later, we are still waiting for the Government to publish a national GP workforce plan.

Meanwhile we are nearing a severe crisis that could affect primary care in every community of

our country, as a shortfall of 856 GPs by 2021 is predicted. The situation is critical.

The truth is that, when general practice works well, our national health service works well. The new GP contract contains some welcome elements, but many of them have come too late. Rural GPs in particular have serious concerns about aspects of the proposal, as voiced in the past few days by the Rural GP Association of Scotland. Those will need to be addressed as GPs begin to vote on whether to accept the new contract in the next few days. The new contract needs to contain flexibility, as a one-size-fits-all approach will clearly not suit the needs of all GPs in the different parts of our country.

As Margaret Watt, the chair of the Scottish Patients Association, said at the weekend,

“We need fresh blood in our government who have new ideas for a way we can take our GPs and NHS collectively forward in the future”.

As an Opposition, we are working hard to provide some of the new thinking and fresh ideas that are needed to make general practice as attractive a career choice as possible. That means investing in front-line technologies to make long-term savings and a redesign of service to help modernise health systems.

It also means more Scottish medical places for Scottish students from all backgrounds, and it means encouraging them to stay in Scotland, work in Scotland and give back to our NHS in Scotland. It is worth reflecting on the fact that, had the SNP Government retained at 1999 levels the percentage of Scotland-domiciled students studying medicine and not allowed it to plummet, we would be training hundreds more young Scots to become GPs every year. Today, we see a recruitment and retention crisis in general practice in Scotland and an SNP Scottish Government that has almost had as many GP recruitment campaigns as it has managed to recruit GPs. Just as this SNP Government has dragged down Scotland's once world-class education system, it has presided over a crisis in our GP surgeries. To use the First Minister's favourite saying in the chamber, SNP members should hang their heads in shame.

It is now conceivable that Scotland could face a shortage of over a thousand GPs by 2021. It is little wonder that we will hear excuses, as we already have, from SNP ministers and back benchers. It is time that SNP ministers take responsibility for the crisis in general practice that they have presided over. Our NHS desperately needs effective and strategic leadership from the Government. Instead, most people I speak to who work in our NHS, and even the Government's own advisers, are simply waiting for the SNP front bench to be sacked or redistributed.

We make no apology for bringing this debate to Parliament today. We on the Conservative benches care about the NHS. Like GPs and patients across Scotland, we want change.

In closing, I call on the other Opposition parties to support the motion. The Parliament can send a clear and united message that the SNP Scottish Government needs to take urgent action on general practice and to do far more than it is currently doing to prevent a meltdown in GP services. Until the Government fundamentally addresses the crisis that is facing general practice in Scotland, I believe that it will fail to realise the other health and social care opportunities and policy agendas that have cross-party support. Shifting the balance of care from acute to community can truly be achieved only with a well-resourced and funded GP service in Scotland.

Above all, when the SNP Government is rejected by the people of Scotland in 2021, I believe that it will be because of its mismanagement of our NHS by Nicola Sturgeon and the Government over the past decade.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that general practice is a vital frontline service of the NHS; believes that the Scottish Government has underfunded general practice over the last decade and failed to shift the balance of care from acute to primary services; notes with concern Audit Scotland's report that there is a lack of national data on the primary care workforce; further notes that one-in-four GP practices has a vacancy and one-in-three GPs is approaching retirement, and believes that the Scottish Government must take urgent action to prevent a crisis in general practice.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Shona Robison to speak to and move amendment S5M-09218.4. You have no more than six minutes, please, cabinet secretary.

15:23

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): Thank you, Presiding Officer. This is a landmark month for general practice, and I welcome the chance to talk about what we in the Scottish Government, working hand in hand with the BMA, integration authorities, health boards and the wider health professions, hope to achieve together for primary care over the next few years. It is ambitious and it is exciting. This is an opportunity to talk up general practice in Scotland, which is something that we have heard very little of in the past few minutes.

Before I get to that, let me stress, as I have on many occasions, that I fully understand the issues that are facing GPs and patients right now and that we are far from complacent. That is why we are taking the action that we are, which I will come on to in a minute.

In particular, I am very aware of the specific challenges of recruitment and retention for GPs in some areas, but those are the same issues that affect GPs elsewhere in these islands. Under this Government, there have been increases in the number of GPs, which is up 6.9 per cent since 2006. On its own, though, that is not enough. We need more GPs and more members of the wider multidisciplinary team, and healthcare has to adapt to meet Scotland's changing needs.

In March, I announced that funding in direct support of general practice would increase by £250 million by the end of this parliamentary session, as part of our commitment to increase primary and community care funding by £500 million to 11 per cent of the front-line budget. That investment was described by the BMA as

“a positive step in the right direction”.

In September, we announced plans to lift the pay cap in Scotland for NHS staff in our next budget.

We have announced a game-changing new GP contract offer. The offer was prepared jointly by the BMA and the Scottish Government, which had never been done before, and was in marked contrast to the contract that was imposed on GPs in England in 2013. I understand that many of those GPs are considering with great interest our offer in the new GP contract that was published on 13 November, and that Alan McDevitt of the BMA has been invited to many meetings in England as that interest has grown.

GPs told us that they were overworked and spending too much time on matters that would be better led by other professionals such as nurses or pharmacists, so the contract offer will mean that the core role for GPs is one that they have trained to do: caring for people who do not know why they are unwell or who have complex needs and, in their leadership role, improving the quality of care.

At a local level over the next three years, new services that are based in general practices will be developed and staffed to take work off our busy GPs where it is safe and appropriate to do so. They will be run by multidisciplinary teams of pharmacists, nurses, allied health professionals, community link workers and many others.

We cannot mandate a one-size-fits-all approach.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I am listening very carefully. What would the cabinet secretary say to the practice managers and GPs I met over the summer who told me that they are a resignation away from closure?

Shona Robison: I would say that I hope that they support the new GP contract and vote for it, because it will usher in a new era for general practice and primary care in Scotland.

In Scotland, some of our practices have a lot of older patients, some practices are in rural, remote and island communities, and others are in areas of socioeconomic deprivation, so we have published a draft memorandum of understanding that sets out how we expect services to be developed and delivered locally, led by the health and social care partnerships with national and local oversight involving our GPs.

We are not starting from scratch. Through our primary care transformation fund, we have already funded tests of change in every corner of the country, the learning from which will support development of the new services locally. In some areas, such as in our test of change in Inverclyde, GPs are already seeing the benefit of having embedded pharmacy support. Across the country, 198 pharmacists and 47 pharmacy technicians have already been recruited and are providing support to more than a third of practices in Scotland. Under the contract, every practice will receive pharmacy support by April 2021.

At national level, the third part of the national workforce plan, which focuses on primary care, will be published early next year, following on from the contract negotiations. It will help to identify and address the key issues for every part of the workforce. We are also dealing with the premises problems that GPs face and we have published a new premises code, which is backed by £30 million of new investment.

We are addressing the day-to-day challenges that GPs tell us they face. We have increased funding five-fold to £5 million for GP recruitment and retention this year, which is part of an overall £71.6 million package of investment this year in direct support of general practice. The number of GP specialty training posts in Scotland was increased from 300 to 400 in 2016, and bursaries of £20,000 were available for some of them. More GP training posts have been filled this year in Scotland than at any other time since the beginning of the decade.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very quickly, Alison Johnstone.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The cabinet secretary spoke of the importance of recruitment and retention. Although recruitment lies at the heart of the issue, does she agree that we simply do not train enough doctors and that a significant number of new training places needs to be made available beyond those that have already been created by the new graduate school of medicine?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That brings a new meaning to “very quickly”. Very quickly, Shona Robison.

Shona Robison: Alison Johnstone will be pleased to know that we have increased the supply of doctors and widened access for medical education, and that we have increased the number of training places. We will look to do more, but we are already investing £23 million in a wider medical education package that includes an increase of 50 undergraduate medical places from 2016-17, two pre-medical entry programmes, which commenced this autumn, and the establishment of Scotland's first graduate-entry medical programme, which will commence in 2018 and will focus on rural medicine and general practice, in particular. Bursaries are available to students on that ScotGEM course in return for service to the NHS in Scotland. Above and beyond that, we have committed to investing in a further 50 to 100 undergraduate medical places over the course of this session of Parliament.

We are investing in the here and now and are planning ahead for the challenges to come. That means more investment, more staff, more GPs and locally driven change. We want everybody involved to get behind our vision of the future for primary care and help to make it a reality.

I move amendment S5M-09218.4, to leave out from "believes that the Scottish Government" to end and insert

"recognises the challenges, including in recruitment and retention, faced by GPs and the wider primary care sector; notes that the new GP contract, developed in partnership with the BMA, aims to reduce GP workloads; recognises GPs as expert medical specialists leading a wider primary care workforce; welcomes that the contract plans to significantly improve national data on primary care, as well as move to address the inverse care law by giving greater emphasis to the effects of deprivation on both physical and mental health and wellbeing; believes that an increasing share of NHS frontline funding being directed to primary care is necessary in order to help increase the number of GPs and wider primary care workforce, and that steps toward this should be set out in the primary care workforce plan, and is concerned that the potential impact of Brexit on free movement and the mutual recognition of qualifications may become a serious barrier to current and future recruitment efforts."

15:30

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): General practice is at the heart of our NHS. Almost 90 per cent of patient interactions are with primary care. For many, GPs are the first and vital point of contact with our healthcare system, but GPs and their practices also have vital on-going relationships with patients, whether in managing long-term conditions such as diabetes or in throughcare outwith the acute hospital setting.

However, a decade of cuts to the share of NHS spending for GP services and to training places has left that point of contact at breaking point. Like the NHS as a whole is, GPs are facing ever-

increasing demand. In the decade up to 2016, the average practice list size increased by 12 per cent, but surgeries simply are not being equipped with the staff and resources that they need to meet demand. In fact, GP practices are closing at an alarming rate, with 70 fewer practices in Scotland than there were in 2006. A record number of practices have had to be taken over by health boards, with 1 in 20 now being operated by boards. Put simply, the number of patients is growing but the number of GPs is not.

In my home region of Dumfries and Galloway, the number of GPs who practise has decreased from 160 in 2008 to 130 in 2016, and over the same period the average practice list size has increased by 228. Crucially, research by the British Medical Association found that almost half of practices in Dumfries and Galloway have a vacancy. Nationally, one in four GP practices has at least one vacancy, and three quarters of those vacancies have been open for more than six months.

The problem is set to get worse. A BMA survey found that a third of GPs in Scotland plan to retire within five years, while only 15 per cent of medical students indicate an interest in entering general practice. An estimate from the Royal College of General Practitioners predicts a shortfall of 856 GPs by 2021. Frankly, that is a ticking time bomb. It is a crisis not just that is happening on the Government's watch but that has been caused by many decisions that the Government has made.

As Miles Briggs highlighted, it is also a crisis that the Government has been warned about time and again. In 2008, Audit Scotland called on the Scottish Government to collect comprehensive data on GP and GP practice staff numbers in order to support workforce planning and to avoid a crisis. Almost a decade on, that crisis is upon us and the Government's response so far has been woeful.

A GP recruitment and retention programme that was set up in 2015 with the aim of securing more GPs in rural and deprived areas has, since it was launched, recruited a total of 18 doctors across only five health boards. Those tokenistic attempts to improve recruitment fail to recognise the deep-seated issues that underpin the workforce crisis that our health service faces. Workloads are increasing, but resources simply are not keeping up with demand.

In general practice, we have seen the share of NHS funding fall by more than a fifth, to just 7.3 per cent—even lower than it is in England. As is the case for all staff across the NHS, GPs' wages are falling in real terms, but the Scottish Government has continued to impose a pay policy that means that someone who enters nursing today is £3,400 worse off in real terms than

someone who entered nursing seven years ago. There is a pay cap that every single SNP MSP voted with the Tories to keep when Parliament voted on the issue in May; they failed to recognise the link between the pay cap and the recruitment crisis in the NHS.

Shona Robison: Can Colin Smyth explain why on 1 November Labour voted against an SNP amendment that said that

“Parliament believes that the Scottish Government should work with the unions to lift the pay cap”?

Colin Smyth: Labour members voted for the motion that we lodged. If there is a debate about who will vote to lift the pay cap today, will Shona Robison get to her feet and tell us whether she is going to support Labour’s amendment, which calls for a real-terms increase in staff wages in the NHS?

I did not think so.

Staff shortages in surgeries compound the pressure on GPs, so it is not surprising that patient care is being put at risk. A British Medical Association survey found that nine out of 10 GPs believe that the quality of care that their patients receive has been negatively affected as a result of their growing workload. I repeat: nine out of 10 GPs are saying that patient care has been negatively affected. The reality behind all the figures and reports that will be quoted today is that patient care is being compromised by decisions that the Government has taken.

It is not just in relation to GPs that the Government has failed to listen to warnings about the inadequacy of its workforce planning. There are 3,500 nursing and midwifery vacancies, more than 950 of which have been vacant for three months or more. There are 476 consultant vacancies, 543 vacancies among allied healthcare professionals and 159 pharmacy vacancies. The consequence of those high vacancy rates is an increase in the burden on existing staff, which adds to their already unsustainable workloads.

From GPs to nurses, we have an NHS workforce that is overworked, under pressure, underresourced and underpaid. It is a workforce that the Government has failed.

I move amendment S5M-09218.2, to insert at end:

“; further believes that long-term workforce planning failures, including years of pay restraint, have contributed to rising rates of vacant posts across the health service, often placing general practice under further strain, and calls on the Scottish Government to deliver a real-terms pay rise to NHS staff as part of future support for Scotland’s health workforce.”

15:35

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I am grateful to Miles Briggs for lodging this motion for debate in Opposition time today.

Some members will recall that, back in 2008, the BMA said that a workforce crisis was imminent, with too few GPs being trained to replace those who were retiring or leaving. They gave that warning to the then health secretary, Nicola Sturgeon, now First Minister. She said at the time that the SNP had

“robust GP workforce plans in place to retain and recruit doctors”.

Nine years later, where are we? One in four surgeries in Scotland has a vacancy and one in 11 is turning away new patients. One surgery closes every month and a record number of surgeries has been taken over by health boards. At the current rate, we are looking at being more than 800 GPs short by 2021. If the First Minister had robust GP workforce plans in place, the simple question that remains to be asked is: what went wrong?

Perhaps I can offer some insight. Promises and policies are one thing, but they must be backed up by sufficient funding. Investment in GP services has fallen from 9.8 per cent of NHS spending in 2005-06 to just 7.2 per cent in 2015-16, and that at a time when demand for health services is increasing due to an increasing and ageing population. In my own region, NHS Ayrshire and Arran is running a £5 million healthcare deficit, which has built up over many years. In Scotland, spending has been stagnant at £800 million a year, despite there being more than 125,000 extra patients since 2012.

Members do not have to take my word for it; what do the experts say? The RCGP Scotland chairman said recently:

“The state of the general practice service in Scotland is the worst it has been for at least a generation.”

Last year, the BMA said that the lack of GPs in Scotland was extremely concerning. This year, the BMA accused the SNP of ignoring a critical shortage of doctors.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Jamie Greene has mentioned the BMA three times. Will he join the BMA in encouraging GPs to vote for the new contract?

Jamie Greene: I would like doctors to make that decision for themselves.

As it stands, 52 Scottish GP practices are now classed as 2C, which is to say that they are run by the local health board, mostly because of a lack of GP staff. The number of patients who are being treated by 2C practices in Scotland has almost doubled, from 83,000 in 2007 to 160,000 in 2016.

In our eyes, that is wholly unacceptable. Anyone who took part in my recent members' business debate on GP shortages in West Kilbride learned that that practice was handed back to the health board by its longstanding GPs.

Anyone who was in the chamber for portfolio questions today will have heard the health secretary claim that I am simply complaining about the state of affairs in GP practices in Scotland. Apparently we are talking down GP practices in Scotland; in fact, the local Ayrshire MSP, Kenneth Gibson, said that we are scaremongering in the local community by highlighting the situation.

The SNP faux outrage that the Conservatives dare to come here and raise these issues on behalf of our constituents is as laughable as it is telling. I make no apologies for coming here to be the voice of the many people whose messages fill our inboxes or who attend our surgeries to ask us to raise these issues. The knock-on effect is not surprising. When people cannot access their GP, they turn to acute hospital treatment, which causes massive additional strain on A and E services that are already under intolerable pressure.

The debate is about much more than a GP recruitment crisis; there is a crisis of governance. I urge all members in the chamber to support Miles Briggs and his motion today.

15:40

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): As members know, I am the parliamentary liaison officer to the Cabinet Secretary for Health.

I leave aside the outright brass neck of the Conservatives in criticising spending on health or any public service to say that it is important to recognise that general practice is a highly valued part of our healthcare system in Scotland. I agree that we should take measures to ensure that general practice is an attractive path for doctors to pursue, and that can be achieved through the new GP contract. As has been said, that reform has been reached through discussion between the BMA and the Scottish Government, and I support the view that it best supports Scotland's health needs at this time.

I was pleased to read in today's *Coatbridge Advertiser*, my local newspaper, that the Scottish Government's proposals are being welcomed, particularly by Dr Chris Mackintosh of the Lanarkshire health and social care partnership. He is a professional in the field, who does not have the doom-and-gloom approach that we have heard from the Conservative benches today. He has stated that the proposals have the potential to ease current pressures on GPs by cutting

bureaucracy. Through the new contract, GPs will be able to achieve a much-needed balance, allowing patients to have access to GPs when they really need them.

Many reforms to general practice are needed. The discussion about who we see when we attend our local surgery is an important one. Is it always necessary for us to see a doctor when we need health advice? The answer is almost certainly no. The local Waverley practice in Coatbridge health centre in my constituency has operated with nurse practitioners for some time; theirs is a model that is worth looking at.

Miles Briggs: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: I am sorry but I do not have time.

The practice operates a system in which GPs answer the triage line. It is often possible for a doctor to give advice over the phone, reducing the number of sick people in the waiting room.

I recently visited another GP practice in my constituency, the Jamieson practice in Chryston, and had a useful and frank discussion with the doctors, nurses and support staff about the challenges that they face as a village practice. It is a sister practice to one in Moodiesburn, which has issues that I am taking up with the health board. It was made clear to me on my visit to the Jamieson practice that a major stumbling block to getting more GPs into the practice is the requirement to take a share of the financial risks associated with the building. I am glad to see that part of the proposed reforms is the creation of a fund to ensure that health boards take on the ownership and associated financial burden of the buildings. That simple step will undoubtedly bring more young doctors into general practice.

Despite all of the good work that is being done by the Scottish Government to drive up standards in our NHS, there can be no doubt that the Brexit shambles, presided over by the Tory Prime Minister in London, is doing more damage to our health service than can ever be mitigated.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: No. I am running out of time.

It is shameful that the Tory UK Government refuses to guarantee the rights of EU nationals post-Brexit—[*Interruption*]. The Conservatives do not like hearing this, but it is one of the biggest threats to our current NHS workforce. EU nationals currently account for 3 per cent of the workforce in the health and social care sector, and around 5.8 per cent of doctors are non-UK

qualified. Yet again, I make it clear how much we value those workers; we will continue to fight for their rightful place in our diverse workforce.

Our NHS will undoubtedly be damaged if our EU medics and their jobs are not secured after Brexit. Our Tory members need to start providing assurances and answers rather than attacks on this SNP Government.

15:44

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The searching speeches of a parliamentary liaison officer—every one of them. [*Laughter.*]

Over the summer, I held a drop-in session for GPs and practice managers, and what they told me was truly shocking. Things are at a critical stage in many practices.

Here are the facts. NHS Lothian is spending nine times as much on locum doctors for staff practices as it did two years ago. NHS Lothian has been forced to take over the running of nine practices in recent years—more than any other area in Scotland. Many practices are reliant on locums to keep their doors open. Several long-standing and well-established practices have told me that they are one resignation away from closure. Locums are commanding a starting fee of anywhere upwards of £450 a day and are able to dictate what they will and will not do for that money. The simple principle of supply and demand is seeing costs soaring at a time of shortages. In short, it is a locums' market.

In NHS Lothian, 51 of 122 general practices are restricting new registrations, and a number of them are informally closed to new patients entirely. At the then Deans and Eliburn medical practice in Livingston, all five GPs resigned back in March from the practice, which had been taken over by the health authority. It is now run by a company called the Barclay Partnership, which has been invited in to take over failed practices and has a growing portfolio of them. I think that the same company has taken over the East Craigs medical practice.

I hear regularly of practices reporting that they are unable to secure cover. Others say that they have advertised for new GPs or new partners: in the past, they would have had a dozen applicants, but today many are very lucky if they get one. Many receive no applications at all.

All the time, patients wait longer and longer for appointments and existing staff drown under the pressure of trying to keep things afloat. Strathesk medical practice in Bonnyrigg recently had to tell patients that it could offer only emergency appointments because of staff shortages—another

example of how the crisis is impacting on patient care.

Of course, the more a patient's ability to see a doctor is blocked or delayed, the more likely they are to present at accident and emergency, where—according to yesterday's figures—we have the longest waiting times on record. Is that any wonder, given the GP situation?

Alternatively, people start putting off getting things checked, so bigger health issues emerge down the line. All that causes more delays in the system and, ultimately, increased costs. The overwhelming majority of patients do not have the option to go private: they do not have the option to go anywhere else, and neither should they have to. The NHS is their only option and the SNP Government is failing them.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): If he is so concerned about spending, can Neil Findlay explain why he stood on a Labour manifesto last year that committed less to the NHS than the SNP has committed? In fact, Labour committed less to the NHS than any other party in Parliament did.

Neil Findlay: Ms McAlpine likes to mislead Parliament. She has just done it again, as usual.

The Government may have increased funding, but the problem is in recruitment and retention of GPs. With high workloads and lack of support, many junior doctors are not considering general practice as an option.

The Scottish Government has to be called to account for the crisis. It cannot have come as a surprise to it that a large cohort of GPs are approaching retirement age, or that potential recruits to the profession want a better work-life balance, so where was the workforce planning? What did previous health secretaries do to plan for this situation? What did the First Minister do to avoid the crisis when she spent years as health secretary?

A combination of Tory austerity and the SNP's shambolic incompetence has brought one of the most vital elements of community healthcare to the brink. We have to stop cutting and start investing, and we have to do things better and smarter, but we also have to train more GPs. My fear is that things will get much worse before they get any better.

15:48

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): For many of the reasons that members have mentioned in relation to the situations in their own constituencies, I have had more reason to speak to local GPs and medical staff in Moray over the past year than I had in the previous 12 years. I have to say that what they are telling me does not

exactly chime with what we heard from Miles Briggs. I do not hear vitriol from them, or simplistic solutions: what I hear from GPs in Moray is that there is a very complex situation.

It is not just the rest of the UK that also faces such a situation, as we have heard from members. Many western societies do, because of demographic trends that they are experiencing, along with other issues that we are also experiencing in this country, including people wanting a better work-life balance.

Of course, in this country, we have also had budget difficulties over the past few years—in particular, because of the Conservative Party's austerity agenda. Those are some of the issues that I hear about.

Miles Briggs: In a written answer from the cabinet secretary about the finance that the health service will be receiving, she says that in the budget for 2017-18, there will be £304 million in additional Barnett consequentials. Is that not new money for our health service?

Richard Lochhead: One thing that we have not heard in Scotland is that the NHS is facing a humanitarian crisis, which we have heard about in recent years, where the Conservatives are in charge south of the border. The SNP Government has a good track record of stewarding the NHS in this country and action has been taken.

The GP contract will make a positive difference to GPs. We will pay close attention as the GP contract moves forward, but early feedback to me in Moray is that GPs will not have to own their buildings and that more staff will be employed in their practices, which will help to free up GPs to focus on specialities. A number of other measures, including the minimum income guarantee, are very popular. We hope that they will make general practice a much more attractive career choice for our young people.

I had the pleasure of welcoming the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to Moray on Monday, to visit Dr Gray's hospital, Keith health centre and the Turner memorial hospital. She met local GPs and consultants at the hospitals and discussed some of the fantastic opportunities that we have to change things to attract more doctors to work in Moray, as well as some of the challenges that they face. Facilities are very important. A modern state-of-the-art health centre will be more attractive in recruiting more GPs to come and work there, especially in rural areas. That is why Keith health centre, along with the local community, is campaigning for new facilities.

Another issue that has been raised with me and which, again, I am thankful that the Government is addressing, is the need to ensure that we give more incentives to medical graduates to stay and

work in the Scottish NHS after they graduate. That is why I very much welcome the first graduate-entry medicine programme, which will commence in 2018. It includes a return-of-service bursary of £4,000 per year and an optional grant worth £16,000 over the four-year course that will be payable to students in exchange for a year of service in the NHS in Scotland.

Many doctors now choose to go and work elsewhere for a few years: we have to attract them back to the Scottish NHS and we need to attract them to work in rural locations, as well. Trainee doctors have to undertake some of their training at local hospitals; I spoke to one at Dr Gray's hospital. Caitlin Collins said that she will praise Dr Gray's hospital to the sky to other trainee doctors across Scotland to try to encourage them to train there. She said:

"I have just finished Foundation Year 2 (FY2), and have therefore completed my basic training that all UK junior doctors must complete. Usually at this point in our career we apply for 'specialty training' or other training jobs. I am sure you are aware, however, that there is an increasing trend for junior doctors at my stage to move out of training, out of the NHS and even out of the country"

to places such as New Zealand and Australia.

"This has become popular for a number of reasons, mainly: better work/life balance; further experience in a specialty they are interested in (before applying for a training post)",

hopefully back in Scotland;

"experience in a different hospital/area;"

and

"opportunities to improve their CV".

The demands of trainee doctors in the 21st century are very different from what they were in past times.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Mr Lochhead, you need to conclude, please.

Richard Lochhead: We have to take that on board and recognise it as we move forward. I welcome all the effort that has been made by the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government, and I ask the Conservatives to bring some common sense so that we can move forward with a much more rational debate.

15:53

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): General practice is clearly a

"vital frontline service of the NHS".

None of us can do without access to a family doctor, and current vacancy rates are unacceptable. We cannot support early healthcare interventions without well-resourced GPs. In Parliament and beyond I have made the case that investing more in general practice is key to

tackling health inequalities. It is unacceptable that GPs in the most deprived areas received very little additional funding per patient when they typically manage longer patient lists, and more patients with complex long-term health conditions.

The Conservative motion calls on the Scottish Government to take

"urgent action to prevent a crisis in General Practice".

I agree that action has been urgently needed. I do not want to prejudge the proposed GP contract; it was published only a few weeks ago and we have not yet heard all the representations that GPs and other health professionals will wish to make. However, whatever one's opinion of the new contract, it clearly represents a significant intervention by the Government to address GP workload and conditions. For that reason, I will not support the Conservative motion today.

The contract outlines a new way of working. I note that Dr Petra Sambale, a deep-end GP, says that she is "surprised and proud" that the Scottish NHS is trying a "different way" of supporting GPs. It is important that a revised allocation formula for the first phase of the contract will give greater weight to deprivation—a change that I have called for, and which I welcome.

Ultimately, recruitment and retention challenges lie at the heart of pressures on general practice. I agree with the Labour amendment that "years of pay restraint" have affected staff retention across the NHS, and that staff shortages elsewhere create pressures on general practice. The Scottish Green Party has been clear that the NHS pay cap must end and that staff should have the real-terms pay rise that they deserve.

We also have to tackle at its root the shortage of GPs. We simply do not train enough doctors and we must seriously increase the number of medical school training places.

We must also make careers in medicine much more accessible to students from working-class backgrounds. Last year, researchers at the University of Dundee found that the vast majority of students at Scotland's medical schools come from the most privileged backgrounds: in fact, 86 per cent of Scottish medical students have parents in the very highest-earning professions. Between 2009 and 2012, less than 5 per cent of medical students in Scotland came from the least affluent 20 per cent of postcodes in the country.

We understand that access to other publicly important professions—in the judiciary, in our media and in our Parliament, for example—should reflect the population that we serve. The medical profession is no different. It is a fact that competition for medical school places is less intense than it is generally believed to be. When

NHS chief executives presented evidence to the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, they noted that last year 830 students leaving school in Scotland applied for a total of 834 available medical school places. We must increase the number of places and take strategic action to contextualise admission to medicine at university and radically change the intake. Such steps are necessary to ensure that, in years to come, we do not struggle to recruit and retain talented and enthusiastic junior doctors who are keen to build their careers in the NHS in Scotland.

Making general practice an even more attractive profession is vital, too. I have seen the difference that a little bit of protected time makes to GPs and patients in the Govan SHIP—social and health integration partnership—project by encouraging young GPs to commit to working with patients who have complex health needs. That involves providing additional funding so that GPs can lead extended consultations with patients and so make a difference to the most vulnerable families and reduce demand on acute services.

All practices should also have access to expert money-advice workers, because embedding financial support in general practice is a really effective way of boosting low family incomes and protecting health. A focus on the family is vital. We often talk about person-centred care, but GPs get to know families across generations. We cannot allow that unique perspective to be lost.

15:57

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con):

Over the SNP's 10 years in government, it has systematically driven general practice to the brink. One Scottish surgery closes or is handed back to the local authority every month, one quarter of GP training places go unfilled and thousands of GPs who have been trained right here in Scotland are leaving the country to live and work abroad. We have a crisis of recruitment, a crisis of resources and a crisis of confidence in the SNP Government.

The situation did not emerge overnight. The cabinet secretary was warned last year by the BMA that the lack of GPs in Scotland was "extremely concerning". As Miles Briggs and others have said, the First Minister was warned in 2008, when she was health secretary—again, by the BMA—that a workforce crisis was imminent, with too few GPs being trained to replace those who leave or retire. The First Minister did not listen. Instead, she declared that the SNP's GP workforce plans were "robust". I wonder whether she would now like to reconsider that declaration. We must not look at the issue in a vacuum. As the SNP has systematically weakened general practice over the past decade, A and E services, out-of-hours services and acute hospital

admissions have been put under extreme pressure.

To give credit where it is due, I say that I believe that the new contract for GPs is a step in the right direction. As well as a new funding formula better to reflect workload demands and demographics in practice's local areas, there will be service redesign to permit longer consultations for patients with complex health needs. There are proposals to refocus and refine the role of the GP and to expand multidisciplinary teams, and to factor in and expand the skills of other health professionals, including nurses and pharmacists. Those are laudable and necessary actions that should go some way towards relieving the unsustainable workload that is facing general practice, and towards allowing our incredible GPs to do what they do best, which is to provide expert and patient-centric generalist medical care.

However, for many who have lived and loved the profession, the damage has been done. This is particularly stark in my region—South Scotland. I have spoken with constituents on the doorsteps and I have heard their concerns at my surgeries. Their opinions do not diverge from one another—GPs are brilliant and their expertise and compassion are unquestionable, but getting an appointment feels like an insurmountable task. Seven out of 13 GP surgeries in Midlothian now operate restricted lists. One of them—the fantastic Newbyres medical group in Gorebridge—wrote to me in September to explain the decision to restrict its list. It said:

"We did not take the decision to restrict our list lightly. We came to the decision in order to provide safe, quality and accessible care to our existing patients. Over the last 18 months, our list size has grown by over 12%, with no increase in central funding, whilst we have had to increase the number of GPs, along with an increase in nursing and phlebotomy hours."

Midlothian is the fastest-growing local authority area in Scotland. The increase in new housing and the influx of new families, all of whom will need a GP, will exert further pressure on surgeries such as Newbyres. I submitted written questions to the cabinet secretary in the hope of clarifying for my constituents exactly what the Government is doing to support the surgeries. One question was on action to improve GP recruitment in Midlothian, while the other was on what discussions the Government has had with Midlothian GPs on the impact of increased house building. It will come as no surprise to many members that the answers that I received were almost identical. They were cut-and-paste responses that did nothing to address the concerns of GPs and patients. That is simply not good enough.

That is not an isolated example. GPs on the front line have been crying out for help from Gorebridge to Garthdee, and from West Linton to

West Kilbride, but they are consistently let down and underfunded. A cut-and-paste solution will not work. I hope the new contract will be a catalyst for fundamental change, but after years of empty rhetoric from the SNP, it is no surprise that many GPs are not holding their breath. I hope that members will support the motion.

16:02

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western)

(LD): I am grateful to the Conservatives for securing time for the debate, and although I believe their motion to be incomplete, I am happy to assure them of our support for it.

Just days after I was first elected, something strange began to happen in my constituency. A small but steady stream of people walked into my office with letters stapled to their prescriptions from the doctors at East Craigs medical practice. The letters were short, but amounted to something akin to a distress call. "Help us", they said, "Contact your MSP—we cannot go on like this." Members should find that story familiar because I have told it in almost every debate about the GP crisis since I took my oath, and I have backed it up with representations to the cabinet secretary and NHS Lothian.

Nevertheless, irrespective of the work that I have undertaken and the work of the partners at the East Craigs practice, it emerged last week that the partners have to hand back their contract to NHS Lothian, and the surgery will be taken over by Barclay medical practice. There will now be disruption, a loss of local knowledge and relationships and possibly even a reduction in out-of-surgery services. I put on record my thanks to the partners, doctors and staff at East Craigs for soldiering on so valiantly in the teeth of the worst crisis facing our surgeries since the formation of the NHS. The pressures on that practice represent, in microcosm, a story that is being played out in every constituency in the country. Increased demand on lists are compounded by the needs of an ageing population and worsened still by an inability to fill partner vacancies caused by widespread retirement.

Therefore I welcome the motion lodged by the Conservatives and stand with them in their condemnation of a Government that seems wholly unequal to the task of dealing with the crisis, given its reluctance to put local medical services at the heart of planning reform; its workforce planning cycles of five years, which fail to recognise that it takes seven years to train a GP; and its failure to address mental health problems, which still account for one quarter of all GP appointments.

The motion is timely, but it is incomplete. It conveniently fails to address the 600 lb gorilla in

the wings that is the headlong rush of the Conservative Party into a hard Brexit. Put simply, Brexit has the potential to turbocharge our GP staffing crisis. Indeed, the Royal College of General Practitioners in Scotland said that if the 226 GPs from other EU countries who are working here were forced to leave there would be grave consequences for patient safety.

The uncertainty is already having a material impact on staffing levels: EU doctors who might have come here are put off and those who work here are returning to other EU countries. Frustratingly, that uncertainty is far from necessary. The UK Government could—and should—immediately guarantee the rights of all EU citizens who are working here, in recognition of how important free movement is to our NHS. I am quite certain that nobody who voted leave in June last year did so on the basis that their local GP could be deported.

What makes the situation all the more pressing is that, irrespective of Brexit, by 2021, Scotland will need an additional 856 GPs. The Scottish Government has been staring the crisis in the face for years and is still found wanting. The UK Government is threatening to compound the situation with uncertainty for our European workforce. My party will not back down from calling out either Government in that regard. We owe our primary care staff at all levels in our NHS a great deal. They are there when we need them; the least that they can expect is to have our support when they need us.

16:06

Colin Smyth: Today, we have a chance to show Scotland's healthcare workforce our support, not just with warm words, but with meaningful action. Speaker after speaker from the SNP and the Conservative Party highlighted that our GPs are the bedrock on which our NHS is built, as are our nurses and allied healthcare staff, who deliver care and compassion every day. It is just a pity that none of those speakers said that staff should be properly rewarded for the job that they do. Praise and goodwill go only so far. They will not end the record number of nursing vacancies in Scotland's NHS, with 3,500 nursing and midwifery staff missing from our hospitals, and they will not magic up the 856 GPs that we will need by 2021 just to return to the levels of 2009.

Today's debate has exposed the Scottish Government's failure to listen to warnings given 10 years ago by Audit Scotland, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association on workforce planning. That failure has left us with a workforce crisis—a workforce that is under pressure, underresourced and underpaid. The Government's amendment fails to

recognise that its decisions, such as Nicola Sturgeon's decision to cut nursing and midwifery training places by almost 300 in 2012, have helped to create the workforce crisis that we face today.

In responding to the crisis, the cabinet secretary talked a lot about the new GP contract. *[Interruption.]* Does Mr Mackay want to make an intervention? No.

There is a great deal in the contract that I support, including the reductions in bureaucracy, which Fulton MacGregor mentioned, and the removal of the burden of premises from GPs' shoulders.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): Will Mr Smyth take an intervention?

Colin Smyth: Yes.

Derek Mackay: Does Mr Smyth support the position of the Labour Party in Wales that, no matter what, it will not lift the pay cap and properly remunerate NHS staff—or anyone else for that matter?

Colin Smyth: Let me tell Mr Mackay a wee bit about Wales. Wales, unlike the Scottish Parliament, does not have tax-varying powers. However, Mr Mackay will not use those powers to stop the cuts in social care and the cuts to our local councils. I hope that, when it comes to the budget, we will force him to wake up to the crisis that faces our health service, our local councils and social care across Scotland.

As I said, there is much in the GP contract that I support—*[Interruption.]* I do not know whether Mr Mackay has another intervention—he keeps shouting out.

Derek Mackay: I will make another intervention if I can get one. I have never had so much time in the chamber—I am quite enjoying it, Presiding Officer.

Why did eight Labour authorities not raise the council tax to invest in local services?

Colin Smyth: Let me tell Mr Mackay a wee bit about the hated council tax, as he used to call it. The council tax increased in every single local authority because this Parliament voted to increase it. I would have thought that he would have remembered that, because it was his proposal. If he wants a solution to the council tax, here is one: scrap it and replace it with progressive taxation that does not impact most on the poorest.

If Mr Mackay has finished making his speech, I will return to the GP contract. As I said, there is much in it that I support, but there are issues that need to be resolved. The Rural GP Association of

Scotland has raised significant concerns about the impact that it will have on practices in rural areas. It has stated that

“certain key features in the proposal intended to address the challenges faced by the profession will instead destabilise rural practices”.

It is therefore vital that the Scottish Government engages constructively on those concerns to ensure that the new contract works for rural areas, where the impact of the SNP’s workforce planning failures are particularly acute.

Shona Robison and Alex Cole-Hamilton also talked about the possible impact of Brexit, and I share many of their concerns. Scotland’s health and social care sector employs around 12,000 EU nationals, and we know that parts of the sector would simply not function without their contribution. Therefore, I support Alex Cole-Hamilton’s call for the UK Government to guarantee the rights of those EU workers to remain in the UK.

The Government’s amendment fails to recognise that, while 3 per cent of Scotland’s NHS workforce is made up of EU nationals, 12 per cent of it is made up of workers from other parts of the UK. The staffing crisis that our NHS faces is with us here and now, even before the hard Brexiteers have their way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Colin Smyth: In the debate, SNP members have failed to address the issue at the heart of the workforce crisis—the forcing down of the value of wages year on year. If anyone believes that a pay rise is not affordable, they should listen to what Neil Findlay said about NHS Lothian, which now has to spend nine times more on locums than it did two years ago.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close now, Mr Smyth.

Colin Smyth: I urge members to support our amendment, so that we can tackle the workforce crisis.

16:11

Shona Robison: I will try to respond to as many of the points that have been made in the debate as possible.

I thank the Rural GP Association of Scotland for its positive and thoughtful response on the approach to and intention behind the GP contract. We will listen to what the association has said, and I will offer to meet it at the earliest opportunity.

I turn to the issues that Miles Briggs raised. He said that the solution to the problems in general practice was to improve the IT and to increase the

number of medical places. We have just put out a contract for a new GP system, and we will expand the number of undergraduate medical places by 50 to 100 over the course of the parliamentary session. Therefore, those things are already happening. If that is it from the Tories, I am afraid that it does not amount to much.

Miles Briggs: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shona Robison: In a minute.

Miles Briggs could have shown leadership by backing the BMA and backing the new contract. It is interesting how prevaricating and equivocating Miles Briggs and the other Tory members—with one exception—were about the new contract. That tells us all we need to know.

Miles Briggs: When it comes to retention and recruitment, the Scottish Government has put a cap on the number of Scottish students who can study medicine in this country. If the cabinet secretary wants to show some leadership, she could today announce the lifting of that cap, so that we can train more Scots to study medicine.

Shona Robison: I have set out clearly how we are expanding the number of medical places—we are expanding not just the number of undergraduate places but the number of graduate places. We are providing a brand-new medical school, where bursaries will be offered in response to a commitment to the NHS. Those are solid proposals that will make a difference. We have had no ideas from Miles Briggs and the Tories, other than suggestions about things that the Scottish Government is already doing, so I will take no lessons from them.

Neil Findlay: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Shona Robison: I let Neil Findlay in during my opening speech, and I need to make progress.

On pay policy, I have already said that we will negotiate a pay deal in partnership with the unions, as they expect us to do. On 1 November, we put forward a clear proposition, whereby we said that we believed that

“the Scottish Government should work with unions to lift the pay cap”.

Fulton MacGregor rightly highlighted the £30 million that will be provided over three years to support the premises fund. It is a significant problem, with GPs concerned about being the last people standing with negative equity in their premises, so it is right for us to seek to make progress on that.

Richard Lochhead was right to mention the issues in his constituency. I had the pleasure of visiting Keith health centre on Monday. What I saw

there was a group of very dedicated health professionals—not just GPs—running a very high-quality service. It is important that, as part of our modernisation, we have a primary care estate that is able to meet the needs of patients not just in the here and now but in the future.

I welcome Alison Johnstone's comment about the GP contract being a significant intervention, which it is. She has had a commitment to the issue for some time, having wanted the Scottish allocation formula to better reflect deprivation. I am pleased that she recognises that the new contract does that. She also asked about more training places—

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is in her last minute, Mr Scott.

Shona Robison: Of course, we have more training places and, through our medical education access programmes, we are opening up medical training to those from more deprived backgrounds. I believe that we will see more doctors from our more deprived communities coming through those access programmes. I will be happy to write to Alison Johnstone with more detail on that.

I thank Michelle Ballantyne for welcoming the GP contract—I say well done to her for that, as she was the only member on the Tory benches who did so. There are other points on which I might not agree with her so much. Just so that she is aware, local authorities do not take over GP practices; health boards do. Our salaried GPs do a fantastic job—just as those who are GP partners do. We should remember that when we talk about 2C practices.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please come to a close, cabinet secretary.

Shona Robison: Finally, Alex Cole-Hamilton made an important point about Brexit. It will compound some of the challenges that we already have. [*Interruption.*] The Tories do not like to hear it—of course, they do not.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Shona Robison: I thank all those who contributed to the debate. I will write to those I have not managed to mention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Brian Whittle to close the debate. We have already eaten into time for the next debate, so a speech of less than six minutes would benefit us all.

16:16

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Health debates tend to be rather feisty, and today has been no exception. I was interested to hear the cabinet secretary suggest that the NHS has to adapt to the changes in healthcare, without mentioning the fact that the Scottish Government has failed to do exactly that.

The Scottish Government may very well argue that there are record numbers of healthcare professionals working in our health service, but it conveniently ignores the record number of vacancies. However, the Royal College of Nursing said to me recently that it is fed up hearing the SNP boasting about the numbers working on the front line when there is a serious shortage of staff across all disciplines required to enable nurses to do the job for which they are trained. That is just another example of the poor workforce planning that is becoming a hallmark of the Government.

There are worrying signs that being a GP is no longer seen as the career path that it once was. In 2010, 99.7 per cent of GP training places were filled. By 2016, that had fallen to just 68 per cent. The cabinet secretary and her predecessor must shoulder some of the blame for that. As has been mentioned, the situation is compounded by a steady decline in the number of home-grown students studying clinical medicine at Scottish universities, which has dropped from 63 per cent in 1999-2000 to 51 per cent in 2016. The strain on our GPs and GP practices that we see today has been a long time in the making.

As numerous members have mentioned today, surgeries across Scotland are closing. I am aware of at least two cases of surgeries closing or being taken over by the health board in Kilmarnock alone. Those might be the first, but I fear that they might not be the last. I recently visited a surgery and heard from practice partners who are faced with three GPs nearing retirement and are unable to find anyone to come in as a replacement. Increasingly, locums are being used, at serious financial cost to the health board. However, there is also a real social cost in losing the continuity of care that long-serving community GPs can give—knowing and understanding their patients' needs, and knowing the things that are not in the notes.

As Miles Briggs highlighted, GP numbers have stagnated since 2008, while the number of patients has risen by 5 per cent, and the BMA has accused the SNP of ignoring a critical shortage of doctors. In 2015-16, around 7 per cent of the health budget was invested in general practice, against over 9 per cent in England. Here is the crux of the matter: in government, there are choices to make, but the SNP Government has consistently chosen not to invest enough in our GPs and GP practices. By failing to invest, the

Government has failed to shift the balance of care from acute to primary care, despite pledges made to the contrary. It is not too late to act. We have made it clear that, if that is the direction of travel in which the Scottish Government is going and how it chooses to act, we will support it. However, we will not support it if its only action is to promise action and not to deliver.

This is not Oz and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is not Dorothy. Clicking her heels together three times and saying that there is no staffing crisis will not get the job done. Inaction, indecision and denial have left general practitioners without the resources that are required to deliver the service that they are trained to deliver and the service that we ask them for. If the status quo remains, the mental health strategy, the diet and obesity consultation and the shifting of care to more community-led initiatives, especially around palliative care, will end up gathering dust on a shelf because the very people we need to take the lead on delivering those strategies—our GPs—will not be there or will be under so much pressure firefighting that they will be unable to commit time or resource to the preventative agenda. Primary care is called that for a reason: it is the first port of call and the first step into care. We need to get it right.

Other members have been less vociferous in their interjections. It seems to me that the SNP is content to descend into blaming anyone else. The Scottish Government's health team needs to spend more time thinking about how to address those problems and less time finding a comparison from elsewhere in an attempt to make Scotland's situation look much better. It is time for less spin and more doctors.

For nearly two decades—in the second of which the SNP has been in charge—health has been a devolved matter. It is time that fingers stopped pointing elsewhere and people stopped hiding behind Brexit, as they have done recently—Fulton MacGregor tried to do that earlier—to cover up an increasingly difficult problem.

Fulton MacGregor: Will the member take an intervention?

Brian Whittle: I do not have time.

I recognise the difficulty in delivering solutions and that health is a major issue way beyond the Scottish Borders, but we cannot use that as an excuse for not making tough decisions, as Richard Lochhead tried to do. Tough decisions have to be made because making no decision at all for fear of making a tough decision, which happens currently, is not an option any more.

There is no getting away from it: our GPs and GP practices are suffering from a chronic lack of investment and support. If the Government is

serious about shifting the balance of care into the community to relieve pressure on acute services, it is time to stop talking about it and to get on with the job.

The place to start has to be with our GPs. They lead our healthcare front line, they are the trusted professionals in our communities, and they are the first point of contact in the health service. We need to listen to what is being said on the ground and let the GPs help us to develop a profession that offers a desirable long-term career path once again.

GPs tell me that, most of all, they require time. They require time for proper consultations and continuing professional development, which is a luxury item these days, and in order to do the job that they are trained to do. Dismay at not being able to give the service that they want to give because of a lack of time is a significant reason that is given for leaving the profession.

It is time to support general practice, to give our GPs the tools to do the job that they trained for, to give general practice back the status that it deserves and to give GPs the chance to lead the drive towards a primary care, preventative health-led service and relieve the pressures on our hospitals.

Non-domestic Rates (Arm's-length External Organisations)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-09221, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on the Barclay review and arm's-length external organisations.

16:24

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It is fair to say that this debate will be rather different from the one that we expected when we put down the subject for discussion last week. I expected to come to the chamber and demand that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution axe the swim tax. He has, of course, beaten me to it. As I am a generous soul, I thank the cabinet secretary for announcing yesterday that the proposal to remove rates relief from local authority arm's-length organisations—or ALEOs—will not now proceed and for bowing to the inevitable. We have to accept that he did that. I am sure that the timing of yesterday's announcement was purely coincidental, in the context of this debate taking place this afternoon, so let me be generous in my thanks to the cabinet secretary for his U-turn.

I also thank the other Opposition parties in the Parliament for their co-operation and for indicating that they were prepared to work with us and ensure a united front. Most of all, I thank my Conservative colleagues for leading the charge against the swim tax and delivering a significant victory for this Parliament, for the Opposition parties and, most of all, for the Scottish Conservatives.

Just two weeks ago, there was a members' business debate in this chamber on a motion in the name of my colleague Gordon Lindhurst about the Barclay review recommendation that the current charitable exemption from paying non-domestic rates for local authority arm's-length organisations should be removed. I do not intend to rehearse all the arguments in the debate, but it is worth reminding ourselves how we got here.

Before I go further, I reassure members, particularly Bruce Crawford, who has a strong personal interest in this, that I will not be modelling a pair of Speedos during the debate. I am sure that that will come as a great disappointment to Mr Crawford and other members. I have to say that I cannot speak for Mr Lindhurst. However, I will not be modelling Speedos.

The background to the issue is the Barclay review of non-domestic rates, which produced a comprehensive summary of the issues, albeit that

it was hamstrung from the start by the finance secretary's requirement that recommendations be revenue neutral. The Barclay review characterised arm's-length organisations, including those that provide leisure and cultural facilities, as "tax avoidance" structures. Although that might be technically correct, that language was unhelpful, particularly in the context of what we have heard in recent weeks about the paradise papers.

Incidentally, I was interested to hear the finance secretary say in the debate a couple of weeks ago that tax avoidance might not be "a bad thing". I am sure that he will want to reassure me that he was referring only to the limited circumstances that we were debating, rather than to the more general issue.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: Of course I will.

Derek Mackay: My purpose in life is to reassure Murdo Fraser, and I am happy to do so. Of course there is a world of difference between tax avoidance whereby people take money for profit and squirrel it away and ALEOs, which take the tax that is avoided as a construct of their corporate governance arrangements and reinvest it in public services.

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to the finance secretary for giving me that reassurance on the record.

I was interested to read some of the cabinet secretary's comments yesterday about what might happen in future when local authorities that do not currently have ALEOs consider setting up such structures. Perhaps he will clarify those comments in his speech.

Derek Mackay: I hope that this is a helpful intervention; I will sum up the debate and I will be interested to hear members' views on this point. I recommend that current ALEOs in trust status have their relief maintained, but I have made the point in previous debates that there is a risk to future services, therefore we should draw a line to ensure that no new services are transferred into that category. That is my position.

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for clarifying his position, which will be of interest to some local authorities in Scotland, who I am sure will want to raise the issue.

The proposal that rates should be charged of ALEOs met a great deal of objection from across the country. Robin Strang, the chair of Sporta Scotland, which is the membership body for culture and leisure trusts in Scotland, and Anthony McReavy, the chair of VOCAL, the association for culture and leisure managers in Scotland, wrote

jointly to committees of this Parliament to express their concern, saying that the implementation of the recommendation would result in a “catastrophic and irreversible impact” on the provision of community-valued leisure, parks and culture across Scotland. Sporta and VOCAL were clear on the impact of implementing the recommendation.

It would have seemed particularly strange to charge rates of ALEOs at a time when we are trying to encourage more people to get involved in sport and leisure activity and to tackle obesity, and when our cultural output is vital to our economic and tourism offer.

I am therefore glad that the cabinet secretary has responded to a vigorous Conservative campaign and that we have this climbdown from the Scottish Government. In a spirit of generosity, I say that we will be happy to accept the Scottish Government amendment to our motion.

It was after mature debate and consideration that the Scottish Government withdrew these tax proposals. Of course, we are having another mature debate about and giving mature consideration to levels of income tax. I can only hope that the mature debate on income tax will lead the cabinet secretary to the same conclusion that he reached on the swim tax, and that we will see that proposal axed as well.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the recommendation of the Barclay Review of Non-Domestic Rates that local authority arm’s-length external organisations (ALEOs) providing leisure and cultural facilities should have their charitable exemption from rates removed; further notes that this proposal has caused widespread concern across Scotland with fears that, if implemented, it would mean the closure of a large number of facilities and/or substantial increases in user charges, and calls on the Scottish Government to reject this recommendation.

16:30

The Minister for Public Health and Sport (Aileen Campbell): From the outset, the Scottish Government said that it would consider the Barclay review’s 30 recommendations, which were for a mix of support and revenue-raising measures. They were presented as measures that would support growth, improve administration and increase fairness. It was acknowledged that none of them would be easy.

Kenneth Barclay estimated that ending charity relief for council ALEOs would generate £45 million. It was the review’s biggest revenue-raising recommendation. During his statement on 12 September, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance accepted the vast majority of the recommendations, including a range of measures

to support growth and investment that have been widely welcomed by business.

The Barclay review aimed to ensure that non-domestic rates support growth and reflect economic conditions. It suggested that ALEOs—in particular, leisure trusts—had an unfair competitive advantage over privately operated gyms.

The cabinet secretary undertook to fully engage with and listen to those who would be impacted by the recommendations, which he did. He reflected on what he was presented with and made yesterday’s positive announcement. This Government will go to great lengths to protect the Scottish public from seeing Murdo Fraser in Speedos.

Derek Mackay announced that qualifying properties that are currently occupied by ALEOs will continue to benefit from charity relief from non-domestic rates. As we have heard, those include many well-used leisure and cultural venues across the country. The Scottish Government will take steps to offset the charity relief benefit for councils from any new ALEO expansion in the future.

I put on record our appreciation of the excellent work that sport and leisure trusts and cultural venues do across the country, along with the work of the local authorities that manage the services.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The minister spoke about offsetting charity relief benefit for councils to deter future ALEOs. Will councils that still have every one of their sport and leisure facilities in-house receive compensation for the full rates that are charged for those facilities? If they will not, they will not be deterred from creating an ALEO in the future.

Aileen Campbell: In his statement yesterday, the cabinet secretary said that he wants to offset any further charity relief benefit for councils to deter future ALEO expansion, and he continues to engage with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on many of the issues. I am sure that we will continue to pick up on those points throughout the rest of the debate.

I have thanked sport and leisure trusts for their work. I also thank all those who have taken part in the consultation process. In my portfolio, Sporta and VOCAL worked with their partners to provide us with the required information as the Government reflected on what Barclay had recommended. Their research suggested that 92 per cent of all trusts confirmed that they would be forced to close leisure centres and swimming pools, with 65 per cent of them stating that community facilities such as town and village halls and community centres could face a similar fate. Similarly, cultural organisations outlined a pretty bleak future for facilities that provide much-needed

and enriching cultural offerings, including museums, galleries and libraries. It is important to remember that those facilities are more than just potential revenue streams; they are community assets that provide places to meet, be active, play, learn and enjoy a host of pursuits.

In my roles as the Minister for Public Health and Sport, the constituency member for Clydesdale and a mother who takes her two wee boys to the local leisure centre—regardless of where it is—it has been my privilege to visit a number of leisure trusts and hear about their work. That work often goes above and beyond simply being a sports centre and aligns them with the Government's priorities to get people more active more often and to tackle unfair inequalities. From swimming classes for disabled children to strength and balance work for the elderly and dementia-friendly exercise classes, leisure trusts provide a variety of services, often benefiting the hardest people to reach in society.

However, I have always made it clear to leisure trusts that they must better evidence the impact that they are having in their local communities. Although the Government has rejected the recommendation, that does not mean that we can be complacent or continue as we have been. We must work collectively to articulate with robust evidence exactly what those community facilities bring and what further potential they have.

We are familiar with the arguments on the need to nudge our population towards being active. We are also familiar with the statistics that show that physical inactivity results in around 2,500 premature deaths a year, costs the national health service around £94.1 million annually and can have a significant impact on more than 25 chronic conditions.

Leisure trusts can position themselves firmly in that preventative health space, and some already do. There they can clearly differentiate themselves from other leisure providers, as they have opportunities to collaborate with the NHS, local authorities and third sector colleagues in the delivery of health and social care services. The power of that potential collaboration, if it is done in a consistent way, is huge. They also have the opportunity to support local groups without fear that they are in competition with them, and there is surely scope for them to collaborate across their territorial boundaries in the pursuit of maximising the impact of their significant resource.

Yesterday afternoon, I spoke to both Sporta and VOCAL, which are rightly proud of what their members achieve. There is great scope for us to continue working in partnership, along with my colleague Derek Mackay and others, to seize the chance to get the most out of this considerable

resource, which should be maximised so that the benefits for all can be felt.

I look forward to hearing the speeches from across the chamber.

16:35

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): It gives me pleasure to speak in this afternoon's debate on the Barclay review and ALEOs. As Murdo Fraser said, it is perhaps a very different debate from the one that we expected a little over 24 hours ago. Much as the Government talks about the consideration that it has given to the issue, the consultation on it and so on, the reality is that, 24 hours ago, the Government faced the prospect of a defeat on the issue, with the Opposition parties uniting to vote down the Government at 5 o'clock. Mr Mackay rushed out his press release yesterday afternoon in order to avoid that defeat. [*Interruption.*] If evidence of that is needed, it is usual in finance debates to see Mr Mackay leading the charge for the Government from the front, but, bearing in mind that this is a concession—

Derek Mackay: Will the member take an intervention?

James Kelly: Let me finish this point. Because this is a concession that he has been dragged into making, he has put the valiant Aileen Campbell up to front the debate this afternoon.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I cannot allow any extra time, Mr Kelly.

Derek Mackay: I think that it is appropriate that the minister who is responsible for the area, which includes sport and sporting organisations, speaks for the Government in the chamber.

With regard to ministerial views, rather than Murdo Fraser, it was Aileen Campbell who represented the sector by ensuring that the Government took the decision. That is all the more reason for Aileen Campbell to speak in the debate.

James Kelly: Much as Mr Mackay tries, that does not sound very convincing.

I was interested to hear Aileen Campbell talk about the consultation. I am surprised that the Government felt the need to consult on the recommendation. It follows logically that, if the sporting venues in the various council areas were going to have to pay business rates, that would lead to the closure of many of them. Not only would that have had a detrimental effect on local communities, which see those sporting facilities as the lifeblood of their local area; it would also have significantly reduced sport participation rates, which is something that Aileen Campbell talks about consistently as the sports minister.

During health questions this afternoon, there was quite a vigorous debate about funding for the Scottish Sports Association, which showed how strongly members feel about funding sport. That funding would have been severely undermined had the original decision been followed. From that point of view, I welcome the Government's U-turn.

It is essential that we look at the overall funding package to see what will be raised through non-domestic rates, because the £2.8 billion is to contribute to local authority budgets. This is a complex area in which it is important to make the solutions correct and transparent, and it is absolutely essential that the effect is cost neutral and does not result in reductions to the overall local government settlement.

Although the U-turn will be welcomed by many councils, we will need to examine the consequential issues that Colin Smyth and other members have raised, such as the situation for council sporting facilities that are not ALEOs and the fact that the local government settlement cannot be undermined as a result.

16:40

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I thank Murdo Fraser for securing the debate, and I thank those who provided briefings for it. As I said during Gordon Lindhurst's members' business debate last week, the way in which we have developed policy on non-domestic rates historically has often been ad hoc and opportunistic, but the system of non-domestic rates itself is based on sound principles.

The cabinet secretary and his predecessor are fond of citing Adam Smith's four maxims of taxation, one of which is the equality or proportionality of the ability to pay. However, the Scottish ministers never complete the maxim, which, in full, reads:

"The subjects of every state ought to contribute towards the support of the government, as nearly as possible, in proportion to their respective abilities; that is, in proportion to the revenue which they respectively enjoy under the protection of the state."

When Adam Smith wrote that, income tax did not exist—it had yet to be invented—and the revenue that he was referring to was the revenue arising from the economic rent of land. Today, almost 250 years later, the non-domestic rating system continues to capture or socialise that economic rent.

On the question of charitable relief for arm's-length organisations, as I said in the previous debate on the issue, I am not persuaded that there is a case for withdrawal of the relief, and such a case as might exist should follow a full impact assessment. We welcome yesterday's

announcement by the Government, but we regret a little that a system that is already complex and dealt with in an ad hoc fashion is to have further ad hoc provisions attached to it in the form of Derek Mackay's proposal for future ALEOs, which will add more complexity.

The fact that the proposal is even under consideration is a result of the peculiar manner in which the Barclay review was framed. In September 2013, Derek Mackay, the then Minister for Local Government and Planning, published a response to the consultation document "Supporting Business, Promoting Growth" in which he said that the Scottish Government would

"conduct a thorough and comprehensive review of the whole business rates system"

by 2017, which would deliver

"a fairer, simpler and more efficient business rates system."

That review never took place. Instead, we had the Barclay review, which asked only one question:

"How would you redesign the business rates system to better support business and incentivise investment?"

Further, the review was instructed that its recommendations should be revenue neutral, which meant, in practice, that any proposals that were made to reduce liabilities in any way had to be balanced by measures that would make up for the lost yield. Barclay was not the comprehensive review that was promised in 2013; that review has yet to take place.

It was in the narrow context in which the Barclay review took place that the idea under debate emerged, with no proper grounding in taxation principles or recognition of the legitimate debate to be had on charitable relief and other reliefs. I have long argued that charitable relief is a blunt instrument, as is the small business bonus scheme, which, as I reported some weeks ago, results in many short-term lets in Edinburgh avoiding £6 million in tax liabilities.

It is high time that we had a proper debate on the system of local taxation and how to make it fairer, more transparent and locally accountable. The Greens advocate a system of land value tax whereby there would be no tax liability on improvements but a levy solely on land values. My colleagues and I recently calculated that, despite the current housing crisis, there are thousands of hectares of derelict and vacant land, some of which is owned by users of offshore tax havens who pay not a penny to local services.

Councils could and should be provided with powers to tax the capital gains of main residences, and we could scrap the land and buildings transaction tax, revalue domestic property and do much more. Every hour that we spend debating ad hoc proposals arising out of flawed reviews is an

hour wasted, when we could and should turn our efforts to far more fundamental reform.

16:44

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I suggest that Murdo Fraser should apologise to Derek Mackay. There was poor Mr Mackay trying to think of one or two cheerful bits of news for the budget in two weeks' time and he alighted on the obvious thing to do, which is to take away the threat that is hanging over our sports clubs and many other organisations around Scotland. However, the Tories lodged a motion, which the rest of us will support, and Derek Mackay's opportunity for glory in two weeks' time was swept away from him. We should have started the debate with Mr Fraser apologising to Mr Mackay for that disgraceful bit of political grandstanding.

This is an important outcome for the sports clubs, leisure facilities and many other organisations across Scotland that would have been in a big financial hole if the measure had been allowed and the rates relief had been removed. It is in that spirit that we should debate. The sports organisations made a careful and considered case to both Government and Opposition parties about the importance of wider policy in any decision to remove rates relief, and they did so in a way that was important from a number of perspectives.

In my part of the world, one of those perspectives is competition. Barclay considered that there should be a change in respect of those sports facilities that were, as he saw it, competing with the private sector. That does not exist in Shetland and it does not exist in many parts of rural Scotland. It may exist in some of our cities, but there are different arguments there, as was made clear during Gordon Lindhurst's debate a week or so ago.

I am pleased that the cabinet secretary recognised that point and made the change, but I want to highlight another point. In response to Murdo Fraser's remarks, the cabinet secretary made an observation about definitions and what may or may not happen in future, and about keeping that under review. It is important that, when the Government looks again at the use of ALEOs by local government, it recognises Audit Scotland's definitions. There is some room for sensible arrangements to be made by local government in trying to ensure that the people whom it serves receive the best service possible through the kinds of organisations that we are protecting here tonight.

I have two final points. On Friday night, instead of having a debate in the Clickimin leisure centre in Shetland about how to find £700,000 of savings,

we will have our annual sports awards. We are honoured this year to have Gregor Townsend, the Scottish national rugby coach, joining us as our guest. It would have been Derek Mackay, but we did not know that he was going to make this U-turn, or we would have invited him to do the honours—[*Interruption.*] Not in Speedos, no. There are some things we will not put up with in Shetland and that is certainly one.

The important point is that we have an agreed sports strategy in my part of the world that involves the national health service, sportscotland, our local council and our leisure facility trust. That ensures that, as the Government asks us to, we look at participation in healthy lifestyles and at tackling mental ill health across all ages. For me, that is at the heart of what this debate should be about. The Minister for Public Health and Sport suggested in her opening remarks that we should look collectively at how we can work on those things, and I agree. Perhaps the test for the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution, when the budget is announced in a couple of weeks' time, will be to ensure that there are no further cuts to the sports budget like those that we have seen since the Commonwealth games, and that instead we recognise how important sport is to all those wider Government objectives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. I call Jackie Baillie. Can I have a speech shorter than four minutes, please?

16:47

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I shall be quick, then. I thank the cabinet secretary for making this one of the shortest debates in the Parliament, and I will gently observe that when it comes to the cabinet secretary it appears that the mere prospect of losing a vote in this chamber has him on the run.

His usual answer for everything is to say that he cannot possibly tell us anything until the budget is announced on 14 December, but clearly he has changed his mind, and I very much welcome his making the right decision yesterday. Of course, he will say that his announcement had nothing at all to do with today's debate, and of course we believe him. Although I might enjoy teasing the cabinet secretary, at the end of the day the right conclusion has been reached. I will, however, put him on notice, because the temptation to lodge a series of motions that would enjoy majority support in the chamber during the budget is too strong to resist, and I look forward to the cabinet secretary responding positively.

Members across the chamber have been contacted by their local leisure trusts. I was

approached by the West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust and by Live Argyll.

Derek Mackay: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: Not in the time available.

Both those organisations were genuinely concerned about the impact of paying business rates on the services that they provide. I know that leisure trusts across Scotland were facing the possibility of closing facilities, raising prices, reducing hours and even making staff redundant. They are both relieved and grateful for the decision made by the cabinet secretary to continue their exemption from non-domestic rates.

The cabinet secretary has, however, been silent on other recommendations that he believed required further consideration and engagement. Has he reached a view on private schools or on empty properties? Will he increase the large business supplement again in this budget, and will he tell us now?

Derek Mackay: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: Rather than telling us now, he can do it in his closing contribution, because the Presiding Officer has told me that I do not have time.

I suspect that, in his closing contribution, he will actually give us that gentle refrain that we always hear: that he cannot reveal anything until the budget. He has clearly made a decision on part of the non-domestic rates package, however, so why not on the rest?

Derek Mackay: Will the member give way?

Jackie Baillie: Perhaps the cabinet secretary should listen to what I am saying, because it is a package. I remember the cabinet secretary saying that the Barclay review would be cost neutral when it started. He repeated that in the chamber on 6 September when he made his statement to Parliament. So far, he has announced the giveaways—the good stuff—but he has not told us how he will raise the income to keep it cost neutral. I look forward to his closing contribution telling us that. I want to know whether he is proposing that the balancing funding, which must be in excess of £120 million per year, should come from the areas that he is still to consider. If so, that is some burden.

The money matters to businesses and organisations that need to plan for increases, and to local authorities that rely on the income. The cabinet secretary needs to tell us whether he is going to stick to the outcome of Barclay being revenue neutral or whether he will forgo vital resources and cut local government even further than he is already planning to do.

He should tell us in his closing contribution. He might want to continue to hide behind his mantra that all will be revealed in the budget, but I am asking him about a principle. Will the outcome of the Barclay report, when implemented by the cabinet secretary, be revenue neutral for the coming financial year, yes or no?

I am always happy to welcome ministerial announcements that give hard-pressed organisations a financial break—for goodness sake, we all are—but it shows arrogance on the part of the cabinet secretary for him to simply pick and mix what he tells the chamber. SNP and Labour members are rightly pursuing the Tory Government about transparency in the European Union negotiations. Perhaps the cabinet secretary should start closer to home and provide transparency to this Parliament now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Derek Mackay. We will see whether the cabinet secretary knows what “shorter than four minutes” means.

16:52

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): I will do my best, Presiding Officer. I am in your hands.

I welcome this constructive and consensual debate in which the Parliament has united—we have united! Even Jackie Baillie has had to compliment me. What she said was as close to a compliment as Jackie Baillie gets.

Aileen Campbell covered many of the benefits of the decision, as have many other members, to be fair. Those who are interested in the decision have also welcomed it warmly.

A key Barclay recommendation that members also welcomed was that if the Government was to make substantive changes to non-domestic rates, it should consult first. We agreed that that is an important principle and that is exactly what I did as finance secretary in the Scottish Government. It is therefore hardly a U-turn in Scottish Government policy when it never was Government policy. It was an independent panel's recommendation for us to consider.

I engaged, consulted and considered. Some members have asked why I consulted; it was within the spirit of the Barclay report to engage on such matters. In his thoughtful contribution, Andy Wightman made the point that if we ever want to change anything, we should do an impact assessment, and that is exactly what I have been engaged in. It included stakeholders, trusts, ALEOs, councils, COSLA and political colleagues such as Bob Doris, who took an interest as the convener of the Local Government and Communities Committee. I also listened closely to

the members' business debate that we had on the issue and, at that point, I said that the matter was not concluded and that what I heard would feed into my thinking.

Stop press! Minister listens, engages and responds constructively and positively!

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): On that point, cabinet secretary.

Derek Mackay: I do not have enough time

I listened closely to what the Greens and Labour said about the particular ALEO model, which is why I have said that we have to draw a line. Some local authorities were engaging in the concept of putting school gym halls into this status to avoid paying non-domestic rates. There were a range of reasons for us to consider at what point it was appropriate to say, "No further" and also for us to give stability and continuity to those trusts that are delivering operations right now.

There have been arguments about who should take credit for this decision. I see that Richard Leonard is not in the chamber.

Colin Smyth: Will the member take an intervention?

Derek Mackay: I do not have time. I will try if I have a minute left.

This decision was, of course, about engagement and about listening to the impact and responding appropriately. I say gently to the Conservative members: when they speak about sport and culture, are they not aware of the downturn in lottery resources that is impacting on sport and culture organisations across the country? They have failed to address that issue. I said that I was listening and engaging and that is exactly what I have done.

Barclay had revenue neutrality as a remit, but we can clearly look at the totality of resources to arrive at the right decisions around the right thing to do for non-domestic rates. This debate has been quite a mature one, but it has flushed out once again that the Opposition parties—particularly the Tory party—know how to spend money, but they have no idea how to raise revenue for our public services. I say to everyone in the chamber—touching on the point that Tavish Scott made—that I said that I would listen to everyone in the chamber. I look forward to the budget on 14 December, and here is yet another reason to back it.

16:56

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): After the previous two speeches, I was not sure whether peace on earth had come early to the Parliament, but the speeches then developed one or two

critical points. I will not enter the earlier debate between my colleague Murdo Fraser and Derek Mackay about either Speedos or squirrels.

It is good that the Government has listened to the views of the Opposition parties and of the ALEOs that would have been affected by this decision and has come to the chamber on the back of my members' business debate, which gave members of different parties across the chamber the opportunity to express their views on the consequences for ALEOs if Barclay recommendation 24 was implemented. The message was loud and clear: removing charitable relief from ALEOs would have inflicted devastating cuts on vital facilities and lifeline services in our communities. Those organisations have sat somewhat uneasy for the past couple of weeks awaiting this decision, which I am sure that they welcome—as do we on these benches.

At the heart of the Barclay review, as has been commented on, was a misunderstanding about the purpose of those ALEOs and an idea that they were involved in tax avoidance in the commonly understood sense. As has happened in the debate, it has been good to remind ourselves of the services that are delivered by them. In my region, Edinburgh Leisure's community access programme provides free leisure cards to partner organisations that work with some of the most vulnerable people in society. The goal is

"to promote positive partnerships to create opportunities for everyone to get active".

That is an example of the sort of programme that was potentially under threat. That is the sort of programme—and, indeed, a triumph of the Scottish Government's policy objectives as stated—that we all agree with.

Another example was West Lothian Leisure's Xcite, which has numerous programmes that could have been affected, including free swimming—I fear that neither Murdo Fraser nor Derek Mackay could benefit from that scheme as it is for those aged over 60 or under five. For those who do benefit, it is a crucial programme to help keep people active and in good health.

All in all, this is a welcome decision by Derek Mackay. Rate relief not being removed will mean that, as Robin Strang of Xcite in West Lothian Leisure said, many thousands of people in our communities will not lose their only connection to physical activity and social inclusion. We are agreed upon that.

In closing, I ask Derek Mackay whether he has any further news on recommendation 27 in the Barclay review, because that would affect community sports clubs that I have visited in Lothian, which operate in a not-for-profit way. Again, they provide services not just to those who

come to them but to local state schools; they provide playing fields free of charge. That recommendation would have an impact on them, so I would be interested to hear Derek Mackay's response on that particular recommendation, which I do not think he has yet clarified—no doubt, he will very shortly do so.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of five business motions. Business motion S5M-09274, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, sets out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 5 December 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Public Petitions Committee Debate: PE1517 on Polypropylene Mesh Medical Devices

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 6 December 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Communities, Social Security and
Equalities

followed by Scottish Liberal Democrat Party
Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 7 December 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Ministerial Statement: Improving
Scotland's Air Quality - Putting in Place
Scotland's Low Emission Zones

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Sea
Fisheries and End Year Negotiations

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 12 December 2017

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 13 December 2017

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Finance and Constitution;
 Economy, Jobs and Fair Work
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 14 December 2017

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

and (b) that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on 7 December, in rule 13.6.2, insert at end "and may provide an opportunity for Party Leaders or their representatives to question the First Minister".—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Business motions S5M-09275, S5M-09276, S5M-09277, and S5M-09278, all in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, are on the timetables for four bills.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Historical Sexual Offences (Pardons and Disregards) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 20 April 2018.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (Relief from Additional Amount) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 9 March 2018.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be extended to 15 December 2017.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 15 December 2017.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-09281, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Pollution Prevention and Control (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick*]

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-09218.4, in the name of Shona Robison, which seeks to amend motion S5M-09218, in the name of Miles Briggs, on general practice, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 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)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (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)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 58, Against 54, Abstentions 6.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-09218.2, in the name of Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend motion S5M-09218, in the name of Miles Briggs, on general practice, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 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)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 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)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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)
 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)
 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)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 89, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-09218, in the name of Miles Briggs, on general practice, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (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)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 49, Abstentions 6.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that general practice is a vital frontline service of the NHS; recognises the challenges, including in recruitment and retention, faced by GPs and the wider primary care sector; notes that the new GP contract, developed in partnership with the BMA, aims to reduce GP workloads; recognises GPs as expert medical specialists leading a wider primary care workforce; welcomes that the contract plans to significantly improve national data on primary care, as well as move to address the inverse care law by giving greater emphasis to the effects of deprivation on both physical and mental health and wellbeing; believes that an increasing share of NHS frontline funding being directed to primary care is necessary in order to help increase the number of GPs and wider primary care workforce, and that steps toward this should be set out in the primary care workforce plan, and is concerned that the potential impact of Brexit on free movement and the mutual recognition of qualifications may become a serious barrier to current and future recruitment efforts.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-09221.4, in the name of Derek Mackay, which seeks to amend motion S5M-09221, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on the Barclay review and arm's-length external organisations, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-09221, in the name of Murdo Fraser, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the recommendation of the Barclay Review of Non-Domestic Rates that local authority arm's-length external organisations (ALEOs) providing leisure and cultural facilities should have their charitable exemption from rates removed; acknowledges that, in responding to the Barclay report, the Scottish Government undertook to have further dialogue with stakeholders to inform consideration of this recommendation from Barclay; notes the engagement that the Scottish Government has undertaken, and agrees that, following the views expressed by stakeholders, this recommendation should not be accepted.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-09281, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Pollution Prevention and Control (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2017 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: Before we end decision time and move to members' business, it has been brought to my attention that one of the members took a photograph of the chamber while we were sitting, and tweeted it out. I draw attention to my guidance on the code of conduct, which was published at the beginning of this session. It makes clear that photographs should not be taken in the chamber. The guidance forms part of the code of conduct and I draw members' attention to their responsibilities under that code of conduct. I

will be writing to the member concerned, but I hope that all members will take that on board. That concludes decision time.

Small Business Saturday 2017

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-07806, in the name of Ash Denham, on small business Saturday 2017. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that 2 December 2017 will mark the fifth Small Business Saturday, which is a grassroots, non-commercial campaign that aims to highlight small business success and to encourage consumers to "shop local"; understands that, in 2016, customers in Edinburgh and across the country spent £717 million with small businesses on the awareness day, which was a 15% increase on 2015; understands that over 80% of local authorities across the UK actively support the campaign in a variety of ways, from networking events to offering free parking, which means that, for everyone, Small Business Saturday will be happening nearby, and notes the calls on Members to share their support for the campaign on social media, visit small businesses in their area, with media engagement to help raise local consumer awareness, and for them to encourage small businesses to get involved and register on the website, smallbusinessaturdayuk.com.

17:07

Ash Denham (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP): I am very happy to lead this debate on small business Saturday. From the time I was a young girl, I saw first hand the hard work, pride and determination that go into running a small business. Between my parents and grandparents, I experienced what it takes to run a small kilt shop, a video shop, a horticulture business and what was probably my favourite as a girl—my grandparents' sweet shop.

In my youth, all the effort that went into those enterprises was evident, and now that I am a member of the Scottish Parliament, my interaction with small businesses seems to have come full circle. I have had the pleasure of visiting and shopping at many small businesses across Edinburgh Eastern, where that same determined drive to work hard and that same sense of pride that I saw in my family's businesses are unmistakable.

In fact, Edinburgh Eastern has seen what the Federation of Small Businesses has described as an "explosive growth" in small enterprises, with a 40 per cent increase since 2010. Small business Saturday is taking place this weekend, and it is an opportunity to celebrate that growth and to help sustain it, in Edinburgh and across Scotland, because our small businesses are fundamental to the Scottish economy. The day is supported by the FSB, and interested businesses can sign up at the small business Saturday website. People can visit the website to find out more about the range of

businesses that are available in their area that are taking part in small business Saturday.

Small and medium-sized enterprises account for about 99 per cent of all Scotland's businesses and 1.2 million Scots are employed by those firms. The livelihoods of countless people who reside here, and to an extent our nation's economic productivity, very much depend on the vitality of our small business sector. That is why small business Saturday is not just a one-off day to allow people to visit a couple of local shops while shopping at large online retailers for the rest of the year; instead, it is an opportunity for Scots to acquaint themselves with local businesses in their area and to find that new favourite shop, cafe, restaurant, pub or other retailer. It is about allowing people to get to know and love local products, to tell their friends and family about them and then to keep going back for the rest of the year. That localised network of support keeps our local businesses thriving, and we need them to continue thriving. Most importantly, money that is spent at a local business is more likely to stay in the community, benefiting the people who live there as well as our public services.

Across Scotland, people are bound to find any number of unique businesses that cater to a wide variety of tastes and interests—there is literally something for everyone. However, it would be remiss of me not to highlight some of the fantastic work that is going on in my constituency. As I mentioned, Edinburgh Eastern has seen many businesses grow over the past seven years in places such as Portobello High Street and promenade and through a number of developments that are happening through the Craigmillar regeneration project. There is no short supply of businesses to experience, but I will mention just a couple that I have visited over the past few weeks.

One is Bellfield Brewery, which is just round the corner from the Scottish Parliament at Abbeyhill and which is the first dedicated gluten-free brewery in the United Kingdom. It was founded by two coeliac friends who thought that they would be able to produce great gluten-free beer, which they have gone on to do. It is a family-run brewery that has made it its mission to develop small-batch craft-brewed beer that is certified gluten-free and which tastes as good as the real stuff, if not better. I have tasted its Lawless Village IPA and Bohemian Pilsner, and I can say that the brewery has succeeded in its aim of developing great-tasting beer.

Bellfield has been in business for just shy of two years now, but it has already landed a number of awards for its beers. It was a finalist in the Aldi Scottish beer awards and its Lawless Village IPA was named UK country winner in the gluten-free

category. In this month's world beer awards, the Bohemian Pilsner received second place—it was the silver winner. Both beers also won top awards in London's free-from food awards this year, so they are becoming very successful. The brewery has also just got a contract to sell both of the beers through the 75 Aldi stores across the country.

If people have any coeliac friends who are distraught about having to give up good craft beer for their health, they could always purchase some of Bellfield's brews this small business Saturday and send them along to their friends, as they do not have to give it up. People can also order Bellfield beer to go with their meal at a couple of small businesses in my constituency: the Beach House cafe and the Skylark restaurant, which are both in Portobello.

In this digital age, when more and more things are done online especially shopping, small businesses do not have to be based on bricks and mortar. Indeed, Bellfield's brews are also available for purchase online. Another business that I have visited recently is Urban Twist, which is a creative design company that is headed by Cameron Pitcairn and has its studio in Meadowbank, again not far from the Parliament. Urban Twist, which supplies its customers through its website, specialises in personalised gifts, wedding stationery and jewellery. A big seller this year that I saw and that I thought was very cute was personalised Christmas tree decorations in the shape of Christmas jumpers that people can hang on their tree. I also liked the large framed family trees to which people can add the names of their immediate family, which would obviously make a great gift. People who are looking for unusual personalised Christmas gifts could do worse than to look at the online catalogue, which is at urbantwist.co.uk.

Those are just two of the almost 1,600 registered small businesses in my constituency. Collectively, they provide vitality and livelihoods on that side of the city.

I offer my gratitude for the cross-party support in recognising small business Saturday. I appreciate the contributions of members who will take part in the debate, and I am encouraged that we can all come together to support small businesses throughout the country and to support small business Saturday. Last year, there was a 15 per cent increase in spending as a result of the campaign, and I hope that we can do even better this year. I encourage everybody to go into their communities and shop local to boost small business Saturday even further.

The Presiding Officer: There is a huge level of interest in the debate, so I encourage all members

to keep their contributions to less than four minutes.

17:15

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):

This is the first speech that I will deliver using an iPad, so I hope that all goes well, because I am a bit of a luddite.

I thank Ash Denham for introducing this members' debate, in which it is good to see so many members taking part. Like my colleagues, I am keen to use this opportunity to namecheck and celebrate small businesses throughout my constituency, including in the towns of Turriff, Ellon, Inverurie, Oldmeldrum and Mintlaw. More small businesses are being set up in Aberdeenshire than ever before. The region has a proud history of its towns and villages and their small businesses being visited from afar. The number of enterprises with up to 49 employees is estimated to be 13,800, and they account for the employment of 49,500 people, while the number of enterprises with up to 249 staff is 240, and they employ 12,730 people.

I pay tribute to Phil Anderson Financial Services in Ellon, which was recently named employer of the year at the pride of Aberdeen awards. He is a living wage employer, and Phil and his staff also give back to the local community through sponsorship and charity work. I noticed in the local newspapers that he is taking his staff to the United States on an all-expenses-paid holiday to celebrate winning the award. Other bosses should look at what Phil is doing—maybe they would like to give their staff a nice Christmas present this year. The business started only six years ago and now also has offices in Aberdeen and Caithness. It is an example of how a small local business can expand and thrive.

Earlier this month, Kira Pirie won an award for her success in running the Chocolate Bar in Ellon. Kira was given support by the Federation of Small Businesses and the Prince's Trust to run the premises. With dedication to her craft, she was named retail manager of the year at the *Evening Express* retailer awards. She is but one example of the many people who are so important to the local economies of Scotland's towns.

My village of Newmachar is home to one of my favourite businesses in my constituency—Kilts Wi Hae—which I have mentioned previously in the chamber. It is run by Lindsay Ritchie, who has turned her sewing hobby into a full-time business. She is a global ambassador for that part of the country, as her products are sold world wide. In five years, she has built a thriving business that expects turnover of almost £1 million this year.

That is an incredible achievement for someone who started out making kilts in her house.

I would also like to highlight the success earlier this year of the Inverurie Business Association, which comprises small businesses in that thriving market town. Following some incredibly hard work, its application for Inverurie to become a business improvement district was successful, with more than 80 per cent of local businesses voting to support the application and to maintain one of Scotland's best retail town centres.

I would also like to mention Glam Beauty Therapy in Kingseat, which is a collaboration of small businesses. It is owned by Gillian Macleod. She has opened her doors to beauticians, hairdressers and therapists who all work out of the premises. They include my own fabulous hairdresser, Elaine Cornish, who will probably be screaming at the monitor if she is watching the debate.

We should give a huge cheer to microbusinesses, particularly those in the creative and craft industries that are filling our towns and villages with Christmas fairs. Many of them are led by women and, as convener of the cross-party group on women in enterprise, I have to mention them because there is a wealth of talent on display in artisan and craft fairs at the moment throughout Scotland.

If members want to buy Christmas presents that no one else duplicates to put under the tree, I urge them to go to Christmas fairs and to take advantage of the hugely talented people who keep craft fairs going. We should support all those people as we begin our Christmas shopping; more important is that we support them throughout the year.

17:20

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): First, I declare an interest as the owner of a small chartered accountancy firm.

I am delighted to take part in a debate on small business Saturday, which is an annual initiative that is in its fifth year and has steadily raised the profile of small business throughout Scotland.

Over the past five years, the number of small businesses has steadily risen, to more than 360,000. Although that number sounds good, the figure per 10,000 of the population is well below that in the rest of the UK, albeit that the sector plays a growing part in the Scottish economy.

Scottish Government figures show that, as at March, 1.2 million people were working for small and medium-sized businesses, thereby accounting for well over half of private sector employment. From sole traders to partnerships to small and

medium-sized enterprises, that spirit of entrepreneurship is at the forefront of making a more dynamic Scotland, paying for public services, making us a more prosperous country and providing the jobs on which so many of our fellow Scots depend.

The Government also has a part to play in growing the small business sector: business must be nurtured and assisted by the Scottish Government. The builders of the businesses, the creators of jobs and the risk takers should not be threatened with having to pay more tax than their fellow entrepreneurs in other parts of the UK. Setting up and establishing a small business is rarely easy. As an accountant, and from personal experience, I know only too well how hard it can be. People who are not in business often do not appreciate the challenges that are involved. Men and women try to make their business a success at the expense of working long hours, often with no holidays for years on end, and limited access to benefits at times of sickness or maternity.

Many businesses struggle to get established. Sadly, for various reasons, some do not make it. Every person whom I know who has attempted to set up a business gave it a good go. Often with the odds and bureaucracy stacked against them, some have sunk every penny that they had into trying to make a success of their dream, to the extent of remortgaging their homes. Those who have succeeded are now running businesses that serve our local communities and are creating jobs and paying taxes.

It is great that small business Saturday puts a spotlight on the businesses that serve our communities throughout the year—shops and service providers that we too often take for granted. Small businesses, which are the lifeblood of town and village centres not only throughout Central Scotland, but throughout the rest of Scotland, offer the personal service that has been lost by many large businesses and superstores. In an age when more and more supermarket checkouts are machines telling the customer to “Please scan again”, and when many people in our society are not comfortable giving their credit card numbers to a computer screen, the personal contact that is offered by small businesses is a lifeline to many people.

The human touch and personal service go a long way. From the corner shopkeeper, who is a friend and confidante to many in the local community, to the hairdresser providing an at-home service to the elderly and the housebound, to the local butcher with his ever-helpful serving suggestions, small business has a vital social role to play, as well as an economic one.

I wish small business Saturday every success. Many of the novel initiatives from businesses the

length of breadth of Scotland that I have read about on the internet are testimony to the creativity and imagination in the sector. I join others in the hope that this Saturday, and throughout the year, constituents will value their small businesses and heed the adage that is true for every business: use them or lose them. I urge people to support their local businesses.

17:24

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): First, I thank Ash Denham for the opportunity to talk about small businesses. I was immediately jealous of her access to a sweetie shop. I was six years old before I could go to the sweetie shop without my ration card. [*Laughter.*] There are four of us in the Parliament for whom that would be true.

As other members do, I use small businesses. On my journey down here this week, I travelled from the station at Inverurie in Gillian Martin’s constituency and dropped in at the Coco Works cafe to have my lunch. I had a lovely toastie with salad and a latte: it was absolutely excellent. It is a tiny little business that serves a real local need—if only in terms of my digestion.

There are other wonderful examples in the north-east of Scotland. I have in my constituency a relatively small fish processing business that smokes salmon. There is nothing uncommon about that, but it buys old whisky barrels from the distilleries and uses the wood from them to smoke the salmon. It is actually possible to tell what brand of whisky the barrels contained on tasting the smoked salmon. That is an excellent initiative.

On Monday, I also visited Granny Bakes on Straight Path in Banff, which has opened only in the past few weeks, to buy éclairs for Gary who works for me in my office in Peterhead. The éclairs will be on his desk tomorrow for his birthday. Those are just some examples. Every one of us will have examples of wonderful entrepreneurship and innovation.

Of course, small business Saturday is not just a one-off: this is the fifth year of the initiative. It is the culmination of efforts by the FSB and others to promote small businesses around the UK. Another part of the programme is the small biz 100—a list of 100 small businesses, one of which is featured in each of the 100 days leading up to the main event. There are many examples of such businesses. My assistant has identified a haberdashery and fabric store in Fochabers in Richard Lochhead’s constituency that is participating.

As we have heard, running a small business is a challenge; it is not an easy thing to do, and it is not something that I have ever done or even

contemplated. When I meet small businesspeople, I find that their experience is not such that I would be sucked in. However, small businesses are a vital part of the social and economic infrastructure of many of our communities in the north-east and across Scotland. They are vital cogs in supporting local commerce. The people who work in them are committed to customer service, because if they ain't, it ain't gonna work. In the modern world, where so much of our interaction with businesses is relatively abstract or online—there is no human involved—that commitment to customer service makes a real difference.

That said, small businesses, too, are going online. Granny Bakes might have been started only a few weeks ago, but it will go online in the new year. I wish it every success, just as I wish everyone who participates in small business Saturday every success.

17:27

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I thank Ash Denham for again securing a debate on small business Saturday and for her excellent speech. The debate has provided an opportunity for every member to be very parochial and talk about their local shops, and I will be no different. Small business Saturday shows how important small businesses are to our economy, and I have no doubt that it will be a great success again this year.

Small and medium-sized enterprises account for 99 per cent of all of Scotland's businesses. They provide 1.2 million jobs and make up 55 per cent of private sector employment. Therefore, they are important, not just to our local economies and our high streets but to the Scottish economy more widely. Last year's campaign had a huge impact on small businesses. It certainly encouraged people to shop locally, as around £717 million was spent on small business Saturday alone—I was responsible for a small portion of that—representing, as Ash Denham said, a 15 per cent increase on the previous year. Let us make this year an even greater success.

One of the greatest challenges faced by small businesses in our communities is the fact that our shopping habits are changing. The majority of people shop online—we need only look at what happened on black Friday and cyber Monday to understand the truth of that. People also shop at retail parks outside the town centre. The consequences of those changing habits are clear to see on our high streets. If we care about our high streets—and we do—we need to make more of an effort to reverse that trend. We need to shop local, not just on small business Saturday but all year round, as other members have said.

I am grateful to have so many wonderful small businesses in my constituency. Here comes the advert.

Last year, I had the pleasure of visiting Callaghan, a butcher in Helensburgh; Lily's florist in Alexandria; and Wilkie and Rider in Dumbarton, which is a local optician and jeweller. The year before, I went to Gowns and Crowns, a wedding shop, and Scruples cafe in Dumbarton East. This year, I am excited to visit Ardardan in Cardross. Ardardan is a local farm that has a farm shop and visitors cafe attached. I have to confess that I am a frequent visitor, and I recommend it to all members. It has the most amazing local produce and the cafe is a particular favourite with my staff. Ardardan is just one of the small businesses in my constituency; there are so many more. I am resisting the temptation to do as other members have done and name them all—and even give their website addresses. We would be here all day.

In West Dunbartonshire alone, there are more than 2,000 SMEs, employing more than 10,000 staff. I want every single one of them to do well, because the better they do, the more our local economy will flourish.

I am grateful that West Dunbartonshire Council is taking action to address the visible decline on the High Street in Dumbarton. A decision by the previous Labour administration means that the council headquarters are moving right into the heart of the town centre, bringing more than 600 staff on to our High Street. That footfall will make a difference. We have already seen businesses starting up on the back of that promise, and I hope that, when the offices open in the new year, many more businesses will be encouraged to locate on the High Street.

I pay tribute to the local chambers of commerce and to the many volunteers who sit on town centre forums to support small businesses on our high streets. I also pay tribute to the FSB, which provides vital support to small businesses across Scotland. It is a powerful campaigning voice for business owners throughout country and helps them to flourish, even in the most difficult times.

Let us encourage shoppers to shop local and put those businesses in the spotlight, this Saturday and every day.

17:32

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I also thank Ash Denham for bringing the debate to the chamber.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of Scotland's economy and the backbone of our communities across the country. All too often, multinational

companies and superstores with well-established reputations are the default choice for many consumers, but small businesses are woven into the fabric of our society. They keep our high streets alive and they provide a variety of bespoke and artisan services with which large companies cannot compete. Scottish Government figures show that SMEs account for 55 per cent of private sector employment and 40 per cent of private sector turnover, providing much-needed local jobs and, in turn, economic growth in our communities.

Last year, my Rutherglen constituency was home to around 1,600 registered businesses, the vast majority of which were small businesses of all varieties. From mobile food outlets at funfairs and parks run by the Thomas family, to Evissa hair and beauty, and from the gift shops Sweet P and Pandora's Box to Rysine Joinery Products, a huge variety of small businesses caters to the needs of locals and visitors, but also drives the local economy.

SMEs are local job creators, but the way in which they give back to the communities that they proudly serve can set them apart from some larger companies. One such business in my constituency is the Tea Bay, on Cambuslang's Main Street. Not only does Angeline Coyle, the proprietor, run a first-class tea room but she is a pillar of the community. She does a great deal of work with Cambuslang community council and is one of the strongest voices advocating positive change in the town centre. Along with other local business owners, she has been pushing South Lanarkshire Council to tackle the problem of inadequate parking on Main Street, arguing that customers will frequently shop elsewhere because of the lack of parking spaces.

The Tea Bay was recently the subject of a review by the *Sunday Post*, which highlighted the tea room's community spirit. The review's author noted that, while they were in the tea room, Angeline gave a woman a free coffee. When the reviewer queried that with her, she advised that the woman was known to her from a local homeless centre and that she regularly provides residents with a free hot drink and food should they need it. Regulars and new customers are treated as friends, which is especially welcomed by those who live on their own or who have little social company.

Along with other small business owners in Cambuslang, Angeline has worked closely with Cambuslang in bloom, which has done an incredible job in revamping the appearance of Main Street by adding colour with an assortment of flowers, plants and trees. Urban Alfresco, which is another Cambuslang small business, provided many of the plants and much of the equipment for the project.

I visited the Tea Bay last week and had a chat with Angeline. She said that, in addition to running the cafe, she devotes probably around two full working days a week to serving the community. Many large businesses undertake local work, but personal touches from our small businesses, such as the Tea Bay, keep our communities alive and thriving.

A little under 4 miles away from the Tea Bay, my constituent Brian Calderwood runs a small deli called Stacks in Blantyre. Just like Angeline, Brian is a true community champion. On the morning of new year's day, when many larger stores open late or not at all, Stacks will open and Brian will provide a free breakfast for the homeless and people in need. He would never let anyone go hungry, and he is always conscious of helping locals if they need a helping hand. Stacks is close to local schools, so he has a great rapport with pupils who visit regularly. He keeps an eye out for the kids and watches to see if they have enough money for lunch. If they do not, he will help them out discreetly so that no one else notices.

Angeline and Brian do not openly broadcast their good deeds or look for any recognition. Their help is given without fanfare or announcement, but their communities are well aware of the great work that they do. On behalf of those communities, I thank them. I also thank the many other small businesses that, by giving their time and through their generosity and kindness, make the lives of their fellow citizens a little bit easier.

Our small businesses support local people and local projects, and our communities would be worse off without them. Small business Saturday may be only one day in the calendar year, but it should act as a reminder to shop small and locally all year round.

17:36

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate small business Saturday, and I thank Ash Denham for securing the time to do so.

This weekend will be one of the busiest of the year. Small businesses across the country hope that it will translate into a strong few weeks of sales in the run-up to Christmas. Small business Saturday, which is now in its fifth year, is an excellent initiative to highlight the importance of supporting our local shops, family businesses, small manufacturers and all kinds of other small, independent businesses, not just during this crucial period but all year round, as we have heard.

As Alison Harris said, small business is about much more than business. The chance to have a chat in a small business might be some people's

only opportunity for a chat in the day. Small businesses have know-how about the products. Folk in them get what they are selling and have real expertise. It is important that we get out there and do what we can to support them this Saturday.

To ensure that our small businesses flourish and our high streets benefit from increased footfall and trade, our towns and cities need to be designed in a way that creates really healthy and vibrant high streets that allow pedestrians, cyclists, people on public transport and people with mobility issues to move around freely and safely. It is really important that the Parliament, the Government and local authorities continue to work together with our communities to maximise access to high streets, ensure that people have the bus and rail services that they need, and invest properly in active travel to boost the numbers of people who walk and cycle around our high streets, because business is boosted when that happens—it gets rid of air pollution, too. As members know, my colleague Mark Ruskell is progressing his proposed member's bill for a 20mph limit. Its provisions would have a really positive impact on the atmosphere and environment in our local high streets.

Members have done a very good job in selling local businesses in their areas. It is fair to say that there are many fantastic small businesses in Edinburgh and across Lothian that are vital to our local economy. Big retailers have no incentive to prevent their profits from leaking out of the local economy. We need to do everything that we can to provide small, independent businesses with a level playing field. Money that is spent in a local business will benefit local people and services, not distant shareholders. Let us therefore work to see public bodies using more of their procurement budgets to benefit local firms, and let us have more support for small and microbusinesses, which Gillian Martin mentioned. Let us ensure that we are doing everything that we can so that everyone has access to a good broadband speed and that we reach across Scotland to keep small businesses connected and reaching more customers.

The small business Saturday campaign conducted a United Kingdom bus tour again this year. In October, that tour stopped in Edinburgh and gave people the chance to learn more about the initiative. This year, the small business Saturday mentoring programme was launched on the bus, offering free business mentoring to small businesses at each stop. That programme was launched after feedback from small businesses, and it will continue into next year to encourage communities to develop their own mentoring programmes and to allow experienced small businesses to share with others the knowledge

that they have gathered. That kind of information and knowledge sharing is important. It gives me great hope that our local high streets want to work together in such a positive way.

Let me name a few businesses. I will be heading to my local high streets this Saturday. I hope to drop into Colinton Arts, where local art is at the heart of the business, the stunning Dandelion and Ginger, which is in Tollcross—I urge members to go there; the shop turns small business Saturday into quite an event—and the Edinburgh Bookshop in Bruntsfield, which has won too many awards to name in the time that I have remaining.

I will continue to do all that I can to encourage local businesses in Lothian to register with and take part in the campaign. Let us all shop local this Saturday and every Saturday and do all that we can to publicise efforts to make small business Saturday an important fixture in our calendars.

17:40

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): I congratulate Ash Denham on securing the debate, which provides an excellent opportunity for me to follow members in highlighting the importance of small businesses across Scotland—in particular, in Angus, where about 4,000 SMEs provide employment for in the region of 20,000 people.

This year's small business Saturday will take me to the Sacred Grounds Coffee Company in Arbroath, Angus's only coffee roastery, which sources premium beans from ethical and sustainable sources and roasts them to the highest standard. The company started operating in December 2015 and is building a reputation for quality, excellence and attention to detail. I look forward to meeting Kathryn Baker and her team, although I am working out how to break the news that I am not a coffee drinker without upsetting them.

Like so many SMEs the length and breadth of Angus, the Sacred Grounds Coffee Company has received vital support from the economic development department of Angus Council. In my experience, it is quite rare these days—rightly or wrongly—to hear council departments being proactively and universally praised. That department receives such praise, which reflects well on Alison Smith and her team.

Let me refer to another SME success story from my Angus South constituency, which is outwith the highly successful food and drink sector. Before I do, I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a season ticket holder at Carnoustie Golf Links. That is relevant, because I want to highlight the work of Blair Precision Engineering. The company started manufacturing

Steelmaster tines in 1987, after Carnoustie Golf Links approached it looking for custom shapes and sizes of tine to fit its aeration machines. The firm's tines are now used by greenkeepers and groundsmen all over Europe, on everything from championship golf courses to pitch and putts, premiership football grounds and country parks. Blair Precision Engineering is headed up by managing director Alan Jeans, and until recently its focus was on the domestic market. Now, the company is looking to export its products. It is looking to the southern hemisphere, in particular, because that will help to address the seasonality of its ordering books.

The support that is being provided to small businesses in Angus, which is necessary, is not confined to the support that is on offer from the council's economic development team. I was extremely pleased to see the latest figures on the backing that the Scottish Government provides for local businesses under the small business bonus scheme. Those figures show that the number of businesses in Angus that benefited from rates relief rose from 2,475 in 2016-17 to 2,536 in 2017-18—that compares with 1,854 in 2008-09. All told, the scheme delivered £4.9 million in relief in 2017, which was up from £4.1 million in the previous year and £1.8 million in 2008-09.

Although some small businesses that have benefited from the scheme for many years take it for granted, there is no doubt about the scheme's value and the extent to which it remains appreciated by the majority of beneficiaries. One small business owner described it as making

“the difference between surviving those early years when we were establishing ourselves and failing.”

In the light of how much the small business bonus scheme means to my constituency, I must say in passing that I was amazed to learn that Richard Leonard's manifesto for the Labour leadership questioned its continuation. I hope that, just as he has come to realise that Scottish Water is already publicly owned, he will come to realise how deeply damaging the removal of the SBBS would be to local economies, not to mention our small town high streets such as those we have in Angus.

As members have said, although small business Saturday provides a focal point for highlighting the importance of small businesses, there is a more lasting message to take away from it as we approach Christmas: small businesses are there and deserve our support 365 days a year, not just on small business Saturday.

The Presiding Officer: Due to the high level of interest in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice under rule 8.14.3 to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[Ash Denham]

Motion agreed to.

17:45

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to speak in the debate, and I thank Ash Denham for lodging the motion. I was not meant to be speaking, but I kicked my colleague off because, like Stewart Stevenson, Gillian Martin and Graeme Dey, I am keen to talk up the north-east and the contribution of local enterprises.

I declare an interest, as I run a small business that provides employment law advice and solutions to Aberdeen and beyond under the Law Agency banner, just like Lili Norris of Lili Hunter Consulting and Linda Beedie of First Employment Law in Aberdeen, who do an equally good—and possibly better—job.

According to the FSB, as of 2017 in Angus, Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire, there are 26,190 small businesses that employ fewer than 50 employees and around 800 businesses that employ between 50 and 249 employees. We need to look after them as—again according to the FSB—40 per cent of Scotland's private sector turnover can be attributed to SMEs, which provide four out of five private sector jobs in areas such as rural Angus and Aberdeenshire. Many of those businesses have already visited smallbusinessaturdayuk.com to sign up their businesses—free and without obligation—to promote themselves for this Saturday's big event.

So, how will I spend this Saturday? In the same way as members can if they visit the area. I will start in Montrose, where I shall take breakfast at Rosie's Pavilion Cafe in Melville Gardens. From there, it is a short walk to The Flower Pavilion to pick up a bouquet to congratulate my wife on securing another sale of one of the hats that she makes and sells from her Miss Muirhead millinery Facebook page. I will then go over to Rust, a concept homeware store in the Old Ropeworks that is an extraordinary centre for homeware, upcycled furniture, gifts and interior design—but as art. If members do not know what I mean, they should come up and check it out for themselves.

From there, I will pick up the ScotRail to Stonehaven. That is not a small business, of course, but it is vital for the north-east and it does a good job. The new high-speed trains that are coming in look great, and if Alex Hynes wants to email me and tell me that we are getting the full 20 cycle spaces that we were promised, I promise that I will say even more nice things about ScotRail in the next relevant debate.

So to Stonehaven, where I will go straight to Nikki's cafe on Market Square for a great lunch. I had better sort out my evening—a quick dive round to the Cool Gourmet bakery and Charles McHardy butcher should do the trick. I will need a few drinks for Saturday evening, so I will go up to see my old friend Murray at Dunnottar Wine and Spirits. It is fair to say that his politics are about as far from mine as it is possible to get.

Jackie Baillie: Yay!

Liam Kerr: That is cruel.

Murray's inability to see sense is more than compensated for by his encyclopaedic knowledge of wine and ales.

I will then stop off at Aly Bali to do some early Christmas shopping. The company, which employs 18 people—mostly locals—offers customers a unique array of contemporary and designer jewellery. I have just realised that I have just told my wife what Christmas present she is getting this year.

Finally, it is back to Aberdeen to pick up my car from AW Autotech next to Pittodrie, where Alan Wallace will remind me that I agreed to host the blast from the past vintage car festival for him at Thainstone on 21 July next year. Members can find the festival on Facebook, where they can enter their car or book tickets. I look forward to seeing Gillian Martin there.

I will then have a quick jaunt to Gordon Bell Pianos, to thank Gordon for the excellent Yamaha U3 that he sold me in August and compliment him on the perfect set-up that he delivered.

All of that is why I am delighted to support small business Saturday this weekend. I wish all small businesses a very successful day and urge every member of the Parliament—and everyone outside it who can—to go to smallbusinessaturdayuk.com and to support their local small businesses not just this Saturday but the whole year round.

17:49

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I, too, thank Ash Denham for lodging the motion and allowing us to celebrate the fifth small business Saturday.

We hear a lot in this chamber about big businesses and industries, but small businesses are the engine of the Scottish economy. Four in five private sector jobs in rural areas of Scotland are provided by small and medium-sized businesses. They account for 99 per cent of all businesses in Scotland, with microbusinesses alone accounting for 500,000 jobs. That number is increasing post-devolution, with over 100,000 more businesses now than in 2000. Those figures

highlight the crucial importance of smaller businesses in our economy and society.

Following the economic downturn that the world has faced in the past 10 years, small businesses in Scotland have proven themselves relatively resilient by creating jobs and looking for new markets to expand into while taking on additional employees.

Although the economic potential of smaller businesses is often the topic of discussion, I would like to highlight the importance of small businesses in supporting an inclusive and diverse workforce. The role of smaller businesses in helping to achieve more inclusive employment is often overlooked. Smaller businesses are more likely to facilitate pathways to employment for marginalised groups by creating jobs in disadvantaged communities, where around 50 per cent of them have hired people who were unemployed. In addition, over half of all small businesses in Scotland pay their employees above the living wage. Over 40 per cent of people who work in the private sector work for small businesses, which play a substantial role in creating a more inclusive economy and diversify it to include both rural and urban areas. In addition, the informal and flexible working environment of smaller businesses leads to higher job satisfaction. In fact, employees in smaller businesses are the most satisfied group of workers in the labour market.

The Scottish Government's small business bonus scheme has helped a variety of small businesses to thrive in local high streets by removing many of them from business rates and allowing them to flourish. Local councils can also provide additional relief, and in certain parts of the country that has proved successful at regenerating small local high streets, keeping them in place and supporting them through economic hardships. It is important that we continue to support our local businesses, as over 60 per cent of the money that is spent in local independent businesses stays in the local economy.

I would like specifically to highlight Kirkcaldy4All, the business improvement district that has been helping to support and develop Kirkcaldy town centre since its establishment in 2010. The effects of the economic recession and customers' changing retail habits have undoubtedly impacted on Kirkcaldy town centre, as they have on many other high streets, and the current economic times are challenging and extremely competitive. It is, therefore, vital that town centres and small businesses do not lose out. Kirkcaldy4All gives businesses a voice and provides invaluable guidance and support. It facilitates businesses such as restaurants, shops, cafes, and health and wellbeing centres, as well as specialised services,

working together to identify collective opportunities for investment for their own benefit and for the benefit of the wider area. It has succeeded in creating a well-promoted, lively, diverse and dynamic environment that I am proud to represent.

As a founder member of Growing Kirkcaldy, it has also played a major role in the town's continuing success at both the beautiful Fife awards and the beautiful Scotland awards, as it enhances Kirkcaldy and encourages visitors to the town. Since its inception, Kirkcaldy4All has been instrumental in securing and organising many large-scale events including the Halfords tour series, Fife's first pride festival and the UK's only beach Highland games, all of which have attracted amazing numbers of visitors to the town, increasing business footfall and boosting sales.

Small businesses play an increasingly vital role in high streets and town centres. In many cases, large retailers have abandoned the high streets for retail parks on the outskirts of towns, but that creates opportunities by opening up spaces for small, local businesses. That is why it is crucial to support small businesses—not only on small business Saturday, but throughout the year—and to encourage people to visit our high streets and town centres to support the local economy.

17:53

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

I, too, thank Ash Denham for lodging the motion. As a former independent retailer, I feel that this debate is somewhat made for me. The only issue is that my declaration of interest is something of a large hurdle for me to overcome, as I am a director of a business with interests in independent retailers in the city centre of Edinburgh. I would like to remind members that if for any reason I lead people to think that there are no other options for creative, independent card shops in Edinburgh, that is entirely a misunderstanding. There is a wide range of businesses to which members can take their custom.

This debate is a fantastic opportunity, because independent business is really important and it is really important to my constituency. As a member of the FSB, I thank it for the briefing that it provided to all members. Throughout today the FSB has been both briefing and tweeting, and in its tweets I notice that it asked two questions. First, what is the best high street for independent retail in Scotland? I assume that that is a rhetorical question, because it is obvious that the answer is Morningside Road and Bruntsfield Place—I think that there is no better example of two flourishing high streets full of independent retailers. The second question asked members to single out particular businesses, but because those high streets are so full of fantastic, creative,

independent retail businesses, it would be unfair of me to single out just one. However, I encourage all members, if they have some time in this city, to visit those high streets, as they are fantastic venues for shopping.

Although one in 10 retail units in Scotland lies unlet, units on Morningside Road do not lie empty for any longer than a matter of weeks. It was a surprise to me when I noted from the FSB figures that Edinburgh as a whole has almost 18,000 small businesses, employing 70,000 people, which is higher than any other local authority area in Scotland, including Glasgow. That is quite a testament to the success of the thriving economy of small and independent businesses in Edinburgh.

These are challenging times for retail. The past decade has been particularly difficult for many retail businesses around the country, which is why it is so important that, on small business Saturday, we recognise and celebrate the success of small businesses, and encourage people to shop.

Independent retail provides a much better shopping experience and, as a former small business owner and retailer, I feel that small businesses are businesses with personality. They have a point of view, and a sense of creativity and fun. At this time of year, when we seek to buy presents for our loved ones, people want to buy their gifts in businesses like that, which have a bit of personality. After all, it is the thought that counts. We should not do the unthinking thing and shop in a bland multinational chain retailer; we should use our local high streets and our independent retailers, because that makes for a much more thoughtful present.

I want to make two small political points. First, retail needs to be looked after. In the evidence that the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee received recently, it was striking to hear that the enterprise agencies are not particularly supporting retail and that retail is a very small proportion of what they do. We need a much greater emphasis on supporting those businesses, because they employ so many people. If we want an increase in productivity, that needs to be achieved through businesses such as retail and certainly through SME businesses as a whole.

We must also think about retail workers. As members might be aware, I am introducing a bill to protect retail workers. This time of year is challenging and many retailers will face assault and verbal abuse, which we should not tolerate. If members think that that is important, I urge them to support my forthcoming bill.

17:57

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I congratulate Ash Denham on securing this important members' business debate on small business Saturday, in which I am delighted to take part. I thank the team at the FSB for the information that it has provided.

Small business Saturday has one simple aim: to celebrate and support small businesses and what they do for their communities. As the motion states, small business Saturday started in 2010 in the US and it is now in its fifth year in the UK. Its contribution to the economy has been massively helpful, with 80 per cent of local authorities around the UK actively supporting the campaign last year.

In 2016, £717 million was spent on small business Saturday in the UK, which was up 15 per cent from 2015, and tens of millions of pounds were spent in independent businesses here in Scotland. Small business Saturday has had a positive effect on the economy of Inverclyde in my constituency and on other parts of the country, and we have heard from members about how important it is in their communities. As the member for Greenock and Inverclyde, I whole-heartedly welcome the contribution that small business Saturday makes.

As small and medium-sized companies account for 99 per cent of all Scotland's businesses, small business Saturday reaches millions of customers each year. Those firms provide 1.2 million jobs, which is 55 per cent of private sector employment, and data shows that there were 365,000 private sector businesses operating in Scotland during 2017, which was up 3 per cent from 2016.

In Inverclyde alone, there are 1,710 local small and medium-sized businesses operating and providing employment to approximately 9,610 people, whether it is in Jumbo Card Centre in Port Glasgow, the Cottage coffee shop in Greenock—it makes a fabulous Mac burger, and I encourage anyone who goes to Greenock to pop into the Cottage—or McCaskie Butcher, which is an award-winning butcher in Wemyss Bay.

After heading back up the road into the Inverkip area, where there are plenty of small businesses dealing with the marine tourism sector, the visitor can finish off on Kempock Street and Shore Street in Gourrock. The vast majority of shops in Kempock Street and Shore Street are small, independent traders and there has been a huge amount of investment there in recent years to help to regenerate the town. I can assure Daniel Johnson that Kempock Street could give Morningside Road a huge run for its money when it comes to being the best street in the country for shopping.

Small business Saturday highlights the benefits of going to our towns and villages, as well as our cities, instead of shopping online. As a member who has an Amazon warehouse in his constituency, I genuinely appreciate how important Amazon can be, but I also absolutely and wholeheartedly support our town centres and villages and I encourage people to get out of their houses and actually go and shop in the shops. If they do not, we will lose even more valuable jobs in our high streets.

I am committed to the small business sector in Inverclyde and in Scotland. Alison Johnstone touched on the issue of small businesses and Graeme Dey spoke about the small business bonus. In Inverclyde in 2008, we had 604 businesses benefiting from the small business bonus scheme. That has now increased to 1,063 businesses, contributing an extra £2.6 million to the economy.

I support the small business sector in Greenock and Inverclyde and I would like to encourage everyone to come to Greenock and Inverclyde to do some of their Christmas shopping. They will have a very warm welcome, and they should bring their friends because they will have a day to remember.

18:01

The Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy (Paul Wheelhouse): I add my thanks to Ash Denham for bringing this important debate on small business Saturday to the chamber. I also thank the members of all parties who have taken part. As they have demonstrated, small business Saturday is vital because it shines a light on the needs of the small business community. We do this once a year in this format but, as a number of members have said, this is a debate that applies 365 days of the year, and during the run-up to Christmas it is important for all of us that businesses are supported throughout the year.

Small business Saturday gives us a great glimpse of the fantastic range of small businesses across Scotland. We got a good taste of that today in members' speeches. I have to thank Stewart Stevenson and Stuart McMillan in particular for making me feel extremely hungry with examples that they gave. Sadly, I cannot travel to Banff and Buchan today to get produce from there, but maybe I could order online from Granny Bakes, which sounds promising. Those examples help to demonstrate the variety of local businesses and the vital contribution that they make to our economy. It also reminds us of the importance of supporting small businesses, which are the lifeblood of our economy, with our spending power as consumers, as Ash Denham said.

The Scottish Government welcomes small business Saturday. The campaign encourages people to support their local businesses, which are vital to their communities. It is a great example of partnership working across the public and private sectors within communities, and I warmly welcome the commitment of the Federation of Small Businesses and our local authority partners, including the business gateway, to the campaign. Graeme Dey mentioned the business gateway's services in Angus: I commend the work that he identified there, as I commend all partners in the campaign, including my ministerial colleagues, for promoting small business Saturday this week.

The campaign helps to raise the profile of small businesses, but we hope that it also helps to raise their income. I join Jackie Baillie in confessing that I contributed to beer consumption through small business Saturday last year at the Tempest Brewing Co in the Borders.

Small business Saturday is now in its fifth year, as Alison Johnstone and Stewart Stevenson mentioned, and it continues to grow in impact, with 2016 seeing a 15 per cent increase in sales on the previous year.

The people who are involved in the campaign work tirelessly throughout the year to ensure its success. In some respects, that reflects the tirelessness of people who work in small businesses. As Ash Denham identified, small business owners take great pride in their businesses and work extremely hard. As Alison Harris said, great sacrifices are made by people who run small businesses, and we have to recognise that. In the run-up to the day, small business Saturday highlights a range of small businesses in its small biz 100. Nine Scottish businesses featured this year, from Kelso, Dumfries, Barrhead, Anstruther, Fochabers, Aboyne, Motherwell, South Lanarkshire and Dunbar. Those businesses operated in sectors as diverse as food and drink and the creative industries, and I congratulate them all for making the list.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): Is the minister aware of which constituency, according to a recent FSB report, saw a 43 per cent increase in the number of local businesses—the second highest in the whole of Scotland?

Paul Wheelhouse: I am going to hazard a guess that it is Glasgow Provan. Perhaps Mr McKee will confirm that.

Ivan McKee: Yes, indeed.

Paul Wheelhouse: I congratulate all in Glasgow Provan on that.

Like other members, I plan to be out on small business Saturday visiting small businesses in my

region. At Tartan Plus Tweed, in Galashiels, I hope to top up my kilt accessories. I will also be going to Rebz Ltd motorcycles in Tweedbank, although if my mum is watching this, I confirm that I am not planning to ride a motorbike. She is always telling me not to do that, but you never know—I might get a shot.

I know that the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work plans to visit the Newfangled Glass Company Ltd in Alloa on Friday, and that the Minister for Employability and Training will be out and about visiting Castle Comics and Sparkling Flowers & Events Ltd in Cumbernauld. Other ministers will also be taking part.

I hope that this year builds on the success of previous years in raising the profile of small businesses the length and breadth of Scotland. The debate has made it clear what a vital part of our economy small businesses are.

There are more than 365,000 small businesses operating in Scotland, which is an increase of more than 11,000 since March last year. Small and medium-sized firms account for 99.4 per cent of all Scotland's enterprise, and provide 1.2 million jobs in their local communities.

As other members have said, it is important to emphasise the lower leakage from local businesses. They tend to recycle services and to use local electricians, plumbers and other services for their premises. Those jobs contribute to inclusive growth and to prosperity.

Although we celebrate their success, we know that it is not always plain sailing to run a small business. As Alison Harris rightly said, some businesses do not succeed, sadly, and we need to support those who go through that process. Those people often come back stronger and found new businesses, going on to succeed the second time around.

The Government is committed to helping such businesses to grow. We want to ensure that we nurture them and that Scotland is the best place to do business. Our future economic success lies in the strength of our SME community.

We offer a range of support to small businesses through the business gateway and other enterprise agencies, and we offer support to small businesses and microbusinesses, helping them to start up, survive and grow. Last year, almost 700,000 people visited the business gateway website—an increase of 13 per cent on the previous year. I hope that that is a sign of increased interest in starting businesses. Almost 2.6 million pages of business advice were accessed and business gateway helped almost 11,000 new businesses to start up. I therefore

thank all those who work the length and breadth of the country to provide those vital services.

It is crucial that viable SMEs can access a range of finance to start and grow their businesses. Despite current levels of business support, more is needed, so we are investing in our future through the Scottish growth scheme, targeting over three years high-growth, innovative and export-focused SMEs. Graeme Dey gave a good example of a precision engineering company that is widening its net and is not just servicing Carnoustie golf course, but is now looking to export. We want to support companies in that.

I could spend time talking about business rates, but they have been covered. Suffice it to say that we continue to look at how we can continue to keep the business rates environment as competitive as possible. We had a debate today about one specific aspect of that.

Before closing, I want to touch on the wider work that is being undertaken to promote entrepreneurship. Our prosperity depends on new ideas and successful new businesses being created here in Scotland, so it stands to reason that entrepreneurs will be fundamental to generating jobs and future economic growth. During the past four years, we have worked with partners across the public, private and third sectors to develop and further the "Scotland can do" approach, which sets out our shared ambition for Scotland to be a world leader in enterprise and innovation and aims to ensure that people in every part of Scotland have the confidence and courage, and the support that is needed, to become entrepreneurs. If today's debate shows anything, it shows that there is a huge amount of political support across the parties for small businesses and those who lead them.

I welcome the opportunity to recognise the small business Saturday campaign today, and to celebrate the success of small businesses across Scotland. I am sure that this year will build on the success of previous years, recognising the vibrancy and vitality of our small business community. As almost all members have said, and as I am sure we all agree, everyone should shop local this Saturday and support their local businesses throughout the year.

Meeting closed at 18:09.

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