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Thursday 21 June 2018

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Scottish Parliament

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

General Question Time

Closing the Gender Pay Gap

1. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to close the gender pay gap. (S5O-02259)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government recognises that the gender pay gap is symptomatic of structural inequalities in the workplace, as well as in education and wider society. That is why we are tackling the issue on a number of fronts. We have established a gender pay gap working group that will be chaired by the Minister for Employability and Training. It will identify specific actions to reduce gender pay gaps across sectors, as a key element of the Scottish Government's inclusive growth vision. The Minister for Employability and Training has also written to the chief executives of the public bodies that are subject to the Scottish Government pay settlement to urge them to continue to work toward reducing pay gaps in their organisations.

Gillian Martin: The Scottish Government does not have the levers available to it that the United Kingdom Government has in terms of employment law, but it does procure a lot of services from Scottish companies through contracts that are worth substantial amounts of money. One of the recommendations of the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee's report, "No Small Change: The Economic Potential of Closing the Gender Pay Gap", was that the Government consider including a declaration on the gender pay gap in company tenders to win Government contracts. We also recommended that work be done on improving the gender element of the Scottish business pledge, to encourage businesses to tackle their pay gaps actively. Is the Government doing any work on that, and does the cabinet secretary agree that equally paid women would inject billions into the Scottish economy and that that is a potential that we cannot afford to ignore as we seek to grow the economy?

Keith Brown: I very much agree with that last point, and with Gillian Martin's first point about where employment powers currently lie and the ability of the Scottish Government to take action on that. Those are two important points.

In relation to the other point that Gillian Martin made, I can tell her that we are conducting a full review of the business pledge, with the exception of one of the nine criteria, which is on the living wage, on which we are not changing our position. Every other aspect of the business pledge is being looked at. I have been involved in a number of round-table discussions with businesses to consider the various elements of the business pledge in order to ensure that it achieves the wider aims, including the aims that can be achieved using the Government's powers. Responsibility for procurement lies with my colleague Derek Mackay. Those things are being taken forward.

It is worth pointing out that, although Scotland's gender pay gap is far too high at 6.6 per cent, it remains well below the UK's level of 9.1 per cent. However, we intend to take further action to ensure that we can drive it down further in order to achieve the benefits to which Gillian Martin rightly alluded.

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware that bonuses and partnership benefits are not counted in gender pay gap calculations. I understand that the First Minister is attending the finance sector's gender summit in the summer. I ask the Scottish Government to raise that matter with the finance sector, particularly because when bonuses and benefits are factored in, the pay gap in the finance sector can be 40 per cent, or even as high as 60 per cent, in some companies.

Keith Brown: I am, of course, happy to pass on that suggestion to the First Minister. Dividends and other aspects of remuneration are covered by powers that are reserved to the UK Government, which has the power to take those things into account to a far greater extent. It would be far better if we had those powers, so that we could take direct action.

Challenging Islamophobia (Media Role)

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the media industry regarding the role that it can play in challenging Islamophobia. (S5O-02260)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government is committed to challenging Islamophobia wherever it arises in Scotland. Last year, we supported Interfaith Scotland to host an event for media platforms and Muslim community leaders, to explore how Muslims are represented in the media. Last summer, we published our "Tackling Prejudice and Building Connected Communities" action plan, which is an ambitious programme of work to tackle hate crime and build community cohesion. The action plan contains a

commitment to engage with key stakeholders, including social media platforms, to consider further steps to prevent and tackle online hatred. We will be holding an event later in 2018 to consider those issues more fully.

Anas Sarwar: Last night, the cross-party group on tackling Islamophobia met leading figures of the broadcast and print media for a frank and open conversation. An action plan has been agreed, which is positive and has been welcomed on all sides.

The cabinet secretary mentioned social media platforms: it is clear that they remain a challenge. One of the proposals that was put to the First Minister back in January—I am pleased that she accepted it—was that a social media summit be held to look directly at Islamophobia and other forms of prejudice. When is that summit likely to take place? Which organisations will be included?

Fiona Hyslop: I am very pleased to hear about the event last night. On the commitment for the broadcasting and print media, I would be keen to monitor the action plan with my colleagues who deal with inequalities and communities, in particular.

I will ensure that Anas Sarwar knows about the event that he asked about. I cannot tell members at this point when it will be and who will attend it, but I will be more than happy to share information about it with Anas Sarwar and others who have a particular interest in the matter. The event will be about tackling hate crime and about other representation issues.

On my discussions with Ofcom and media outlets, I assure members that we will ensure that positive portrayals and tackling hate crime are covered as part of our action.

New Housing (Infrastructure)

3. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether lack of initial infrastructure investment is a barrier to new housing developments. (S5O-02261)

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart): The Government is committed to increasing the supply of housing across all tenures. Although the majority of housing sites are able to progress, we recognise that infrastructure provision can delay the delivery of sites in some locations. We are therefore pursuing additional planning and investment measures to improve the delivery of infrastructure that affects housing supply. Reforms to the planning system that are proposed in the Planning (Scotland) Bill are designed to improve co-ordination and delivery of infrastructure with development planning, and our housing

infrastructure fund and building Scotland fund are substantial investment programmes that can provide financing support to help to unlock housing infrastructure blockages for key sites.

Alex Rowley: I know that the minister understands why we need to get every bit of house building moving, and that he understands that opportunities, skills and jobs will come from a national programme of house building. Therefore, I do not for the life of me understand why he has introduced a planning bill that will do nothing to address one of the main barriers. Will he think again and have discussions with the industry and local councils, all of which say that major housing developments are being stalled throughout Scotland because of a lack of front-loaded infrastructure for school education and health in particular? We need to get housing moving. Will the minister have those discussions with the industry?

Kevin Stewart: I regularly have discussions with the industry and local authorities. In the Planning (Scotland) Bill, we have introduced the enabling power for an infrastructure levy, which will go a long way towards helping in some of those regards.

Beyond that, as I have already highlighted, we have the housing infrastructure fund, which has unlocked sites in areas including Grandhome in Aberdeen, Dunbeg in Argyll, and Maryhill Locks in Hamiltonhill in Glasgow. As I have said, I will continue to have discussions, and we will look to improve the situation as we move forward.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Will the minister consider the section 75 process in planning, including, where appropriate, provision for community or health centres?

Kevin Stewart: Historically, caution has been expressed about using obligations to secure provision such as dental practices, community surgeries and general practitioner surgeries, which are often privately owned. In some areas—for example, Forth Valley and Grampian—that has been addressed by requiring that developer contributions for such facilities are transferred to the national health service, and not directly to GP surgeries, in order to address capacity deficiencies that have been identified. If Christine Grahame wants to speak to me further about the matter, I would be more than happy to talk to her about how that is happening in NHS Forth Valley and NHS Grampian.

Moray Council (New Administration)

4. Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to meet

the new administration of Moray Council. (S5O-02262)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): I met the new council leader on Tuesday.

Richard Lochhead: That was an early meeting, which is a very positive sign for a new working relationship.

I am sure that the cabinet secretary will want to reiterate my congratulations to the new leader of Moray Council, Graham Leadbitter, to its first female convener, Councillor Shona Morrison, and to their colleagues. Is the cabinet secretary aware that they have inherited very difficult legacy issues after more than 18 years of other parties being in charge of Moray Council? Those issues have been compounded by Conservative Party austerity—not least the £13 million a year that has been removed from Moray through welfare reform hitting families across the area. Will the cabinet secretary continue to work with the council on the very difficult legacy issues and pledge to do all that he can to help the people of Moray in the difficult times ahead?

Derek Mackay: Yes, I pledge to do so. I met the previous administration—indeed, I met all parties on the council on a cross-party basis. I welcome the fact that the new administration has very much hit the ground running, and I look forward to providing assistance, where the Government can do so. Local government received a very fair settlement, but Moray Council will need to tackle those legacy issues. I look forward to positive co-operation in order that it can do so.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary recognise the figure that was published recently by the Scottish Parliament information centre, setting out that Moray Council has endured a £106 cut in funding for every man, woman and child in Moray over the past five years? When he met his new Scottish National Party colleagues on Moray Council, did they make representations to him about those cuts?

Derek Mackay: Local government has received a fair settlement from the Scottish Government. It has included, in the past two years, real increases to local government. If I had followed Tory advice, there would be tax cuts for the richest, not more investment in Scotland's public services. I recognise that the Tories are changing their tune on taxation, but the Government has properly funded local government, and it will continue to ensure that we support our local services in the transformation that is required. It could be argued that many of the issues in Moray are a consequence of the neglect by some politicians in the area—not least the Conservatives.

Scottish Wildlife (Mammals)

5. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the implications for wildlife in Scotland, what its response is to the joint study by the Mammal Society and Natural England, which states that almost one in five mammal species in Britain is at risk of extinction. (S5O-02263)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): The Scottish Government welcomes the report, which is the first substantive update on the number and range of such species in the United Kingdom in 23 years. It was commissioned jointly by Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales. The report highlights the need for further information and a better understanding of some of our native species. We will consider the results as we work to improve how we protect our native mammals.

John Scott: The cabinet secretary will know that the report has found that a total of nine of Scotland's mammal species have been categorised as "critically endangered", "endangered" or "vulnerable". A further six have been listed as "near threatened". What action is the cabinet secretary taking to halt the decline in the number of those species in Scotland? What measures is she taking to ensure that biodiversity as a whole improves across Scotland?

Roseanna Cunningham: I think that John Scott will welcome some of the action that has already been taken. A total of 11 species are assessed as at risk in Scotland. The Scottish wildcat is categorised as "critically endangered" and the polecat is categorised as "endangered". Four species are categorised as "vulnerable": the Nathusius' pipistrelle—that is a bat, for those whom are not aware—the hedgehog, the Orkney vole and the otter. Five species are categorised as "near threatened".

However, of those species, three—hedgehogs, water voles and polecats—show population increases. The populations of six of those species—mountain hares, otters, water voles, red foxes, red squirrels and hedgehogs—are stable or increasing in range in Scotland. Therefore, we feel that the society's estimate that one in five mammal species is nearing extinction is an overestimate, at least in so far as Scotland is concerned.

I could give much more specific information on individual species, but I fear that I would run afoul of the Presiding Officer's timing rules. However, I will ensure that John Scott gets the more detailed information on individual species that he might wish.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I am sure that the cabinet secretary will agree that we must do all that we can to protect existing mammal species. The number of water voles—*Arvicola amphibius*—has declined by 94 per cent in the UK since the 1950s. However, the discovery of thriving populations of water voles in Glasgow Provan, which is far from their traditional habitat, is considered to be of national significance, and it has been studied by academics from the University of Glasgow. [*Interruption.*] Will the Scottish Government factor that endangered species into any policies that it develops to protect mammal populations?

Roseanna Cunningham: First, I have to say that species loss and biodiversity is not really a matter for joking and laughing. I am just a little concerned that members are not taking the matter seriously.

I thank Ivan McKee for his question about water voles. I have seen a recent report—in fact, I am sure that it was televised—showing the fantastic work being undertaken by Glasgow City Council, SNH and the University of Glasgow. Researchers are still trying to understand why the Glasgow water voles have managed to switch to living in grasslands. The Glasgow water vole project is a three-year partnership between the University of Glasgow, Glasgow City Council, SNH, the People's Trust for Endangered Species and the seven lochs project, and it will carry out further research. Those findings will inform future habitat and population management guidelines and allow developers to regenerate areas of the city in a way that allows water voles to flourish alongside people, which is something that I am sure that everybody in the chamber would want to see.

Secondary Ticket Sales (Events)

6. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding what action can be taken to tackle secondary ticket sales for events. (S5O-02264)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government fully appreciates the concerns expressed about the deliberate resale of tickets for profit—known as touting—and recognises that some events sell out quickly and that ticket touts or online sellers take the opportunity to sell tickets on at significantly higher prices. Powers in relation to secondary ticketing are reserved to Westminster and we cannot introduce any legislation in this area under the current constitutional arrangements. We welcome, however, the provision in the Digital Economy Act 2017 creating a new offence that criminalises the use of ticketing bots to purchase tickets in excess

of a maximum permitted amount. Scottish Government officials are continuing to keep in touch with officials in Whitehall on that to ensure a positive outcome for Scottish consumers.

Claire Baker: Does the cabinet secretary agree that secondary ticket sale websites are exploiting music fans with unjustified and inflated prices? I recognise that consumer protection law is reserved, but has the Scottish Government fully explored all options around using the regulations that stopped ticket touting at the Commonwealth games to tackle ticket touting at music events by employing the argument that the reputation of those events also needs protection?

Fiona Hyslop: There were obviously specific regulations in relation to the Commonwealth games. However, the regulations under the Digital Economy Act 2017 come into force in July 2018 and they will be enforced by the police. Professor Waterson's 2016 report accepted that greater enforcement of existing measures is needed. The Competition and Markets Authority has agreed undertakings for three out of the four main sites and I understand that enforcement action might follow for the outstanding site.

Violent Crime (Inverclyde and Renfrewshire)

7. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to prevent violent crime in Inverclyde and Renfrewshire. (S5O-02265)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Annabelle Ewing): Violent crime is totally unacceptable. Since 2006-07, the number of violent crimes has fallen by 68 per cent in Inverclyde and by 62 per cent in Renfrewshire. Alongside tough enforcement, our approach to violent crime is very firmly focused on prevention. We have invested more than £14 million in violence prevention since 2006-07, including support for the national violence reduction unit and Medics Against Violence, which works to develop and deliver various violence prevention initiatives, including the accelerated delivery of the mentors in violence prevention programme, which is being delivered in schools across Scotland, including in Inverclyde and Renfrewshire. We also continue to invest in our no knives, better lives youth engagement programme, which is being rolled out across Scotland and has been delivered in 24 local authorities and is on track to be delivered in all 32 local authority areas this year.

Neil Bibby: On 5 June, I asked the justice secretary what he would do to ensure that K division of the police in Inverclyde and Renfrewshire has the resources that it needs to tackle an increase in violent crime, including increased knife carrying. He said that that was an operational matter and gave no commitment to

further resources for the division. Violent crime is a very serious issue and people in my region want assurances so that the kind of high-intensity policing that is needed to stamp out violent crime and weapon carrying is maintained. Again, what assurances can the Scottish Government give that sufficient resources are being made available to the police in my area?

Annabelle Ewing: The cabinet secretary is kept apprised of any issues of concern that are raised by Police Scotland. I am not aware of any specific issue having been raised by Police Scotland with regard to the matter to which the member referred, but of course we remain open to approaches in that regard.

Of course, in our budget we proposed increased resources for Police Scotland, across Scotland, which the member voted down—the member did not seem to support that.

On the key issue of prevention of violent crime, I reiterate that violent crime is down—knife crime is down by 68 per cent since 2007—and that we are determined to continue to tackle violent crime and keep people safe.

It might interest the member to know that, in addition to the investment of £14 million by the prevention project, we are seeking to have further detailed analysis carried out of the characteristics of violent crime in places in Scotland where there are still persistent pockets of such crime. The work, which is looking at the factors behind violence, what might be changing and what is needed to secure further reductions, is on-going and will report in due course.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Before we turn to First Minister's question time, I invite members to join me in welcoming to our gallery Joy Burch MLA, speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory. *[Applause.]*

First Minister's Question Time

12:01

Literacy and Numeracy (Standards)

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): This week, the education secretary patted himself on the back and declared that more than 90 per cent of pupils in secondary schools are reaching the required standards in literacy and numeracy. Can the First Minister confirm that under the Scottish National Party's new rules, a pupil is deemed to have met those required standards of attainment even if they fail English and maths?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The statistics that were published this week, of course, were around the Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 5 literacy standard and the similar standard for numeracy. They showed that more than 80 per cent of school leavers in 2016-17 had reached that level in literacy and that 68.8 per cent had reached the standard in numeracy. That is welcome progress, but we are determined to go further.

I should say that that is not the main indicator that the Scottish Government is using. As a result of the introduction of standardised assessment and the new way in which we are monitoring performance, instead of the previous Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy data, we will now have data on every pupil in the country, which will allow us to determine progress in reducing the attainment gap.

Ruth Davidson: That was not an answer to the question that I asked. I asked whether Scottish pupils are deemed to have reached the required standards of literacy and numeracy even if they fail, and the simple answer to that question is yes.

It used to be the case that we could measure literacy and numeracy standards fairly, with accurate surveys, but when it turned out that rates were going down, the SNP cancelled the surveys. We now have a new system in place, and under that system, a pupil can fail their national 4 or their higher English and maths but still be counted as having achieved the right standards in literacy and numeracy. In other words, they are deemed to have passed even when they have failed.

The First Minister keeps saying that she wants to boost standards. How does cancelling surveys, rigging the stats and lowering the bar for literacy and numeracy help to achieve those higher standards?

The First Minister: I think that Ruth Davidson is—perhaps deliberately—mixing up different stages in education. The figures that were

published this week were about attainment against level 5 of the SCQF, for literacy and for numeracy. What those figures show is that for literacy, performance increased from 70.1 per cent in 2013-14 to 80.8 per cent in 2016-17, and that for numeracy, it went from 59.5 per cent in 2013-14 to 68.8 per cent in 2016-17. Ruth Davidson talked about highers and level 4; those statistics are specifically about level 5, therefore we would not compare them to performance against highers or level 4. That is the first point.

Secondly—and this is an issue that has been discussed in this chamber on many occasions—SSLN was a sample survey. As I think that I have said in the chamber before, in some schools that survey could be based on the performance of just a dozen pupils. What we have done now is ensure that we have data on all pupils across our schools. That is based on teacher judgment, of course, but that teacher judgment is now assessed against and informed by pupils' performance on the standardised assessments.

Therefore, we are actually deepening and making much more robust the measures by which we measure pupil performance. I think that that is progress. All the statistics that were published this week show that we are making progress, and I would have thought that members across the chamber would have welcomed that. Yes, there is more to be done, but progress is very much going in the right direction.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister disputes the changes, but let me read from her own document, which was published on 20 June:

“Standard Grade courses were not unit based so a pupil would have to pass the course in order to achieve literacy or numeracy at that level”

and now they do not. This is not a system that parents can trust. It has a complete lack of rigour and it does nothing to help Scotland's children.

If we are talking about rigour, let us look at school inspections. Under this Government, the number of inspections has crashed to its lowest level since devolution. I have asked the First Minister about that repeatedly, and she said that it would all get better, but this week we have learned that some of Scotland's schools are going 16 years without being inspected, and one fifth have not been seen for at least a decade, including one in the First Minister's constituency and two in the education secretary's patch. How can the First Minister defend schools going uninspected for more than a decade?

The First Minister: Ruth Davidson managed to confuse herself with the first part of that question. I was talking specifically about performance against level 5 literacy and numeracy, and those statistics

were published this week. We should welcome the fact that performance is improving.

I know that Ruth Davidson will want to hear the answer about school inspections. Education Scotland has taken action to increase the overall number of school inspections to 250 schools a year in the academic year 2018-19. That amounts to an increase of more than 30 per cent on the number of inspections that have taken place in the current academic year.

As most members will be aware, Education Scotland gathers a range of views and comments on behaviours and performance as part of the pre-inspection questionnaires that are sent out. Education Scotland is in the process of recruiting additional inspectors to support the commitment to enhanced inspection activity.

I would have thought that all of those moves are things that Ruth Davidson and other members across the chamber would welcome. We are seeing progress in the right direction in education. We are seeing performance improving. We are seeing the attainment gap start to narrow. There is more work to be done but I hope that everybody across the chamber and parents across the entire country will welcome that progress.

Ruth Davidson: I think that we have just seen the utter complacency that we have come to expect from this Government when it comes to education reform. This is a Government that deals with slipping standards by cancelling the tests that expose them. It vows to increase the number of inspections—it has done so again today—but it has dropped them to their lowest historical level. It cooks up a new measure of attainment in literacy and numeracy to con parents into believing that things are getting better. That will not restore Scottish education to global excellence; the Government will not do that by massaging the statistics and slapping itself on the back. When will this Government face up to the challenges in Scottish education and not duck them?

The First Minister: It is this Government that is facing up to those challenges. That is why we are seeing the improvements and the progress that I have outlined. Other statistics that were also published this week show record numbers of higher passes. More than 150,000 highers were passed, even though the cohort has been reduced for a couple of years in a row.

Ruth Davidson is just wrong in much of what she said. Nobody is cancelling tests. We have replaced a sample survey with comprehensive data on the performance of pupils right across the country. We have taken a survey that looks at a handful of pupils and replaced it with data on every pupil across Scotland. I would have thought that Ruth Davidson would have welcomed that.

The statistics that Ruth Davidson has sounded confused about measure against the standards of our curriculum. I have also said that we are increasing the number of inspections in our schools.

This is the Government that is investing £750 million to improve attainment. The pupil equity fund is going direct to headteachers, and the headteachers and teachers that I speak to across the country say that that has been transformational in improving standards. Ruth Davidson is saying that it is about standards: yes, it is about standards and that money is helping us to improve them.

We will continue to take action to improve performance in our schools. Even if Ruth Davidson and other members across the chamber do not want to welcome the progress that has been made, parents across the country will welcome it.

Bield Sheltered Housing and Care Homes

2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): In January, I raised the serious concerns of relatives who had family members in Bield sheltered housing and care homes. On 18 January, the First Minister said that there would be no compromise on the continuity and quality of care and that the interests of residents would be protected. Will she provide us with an update?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): As Richard Leonard knows, in October last year, Bield announced the closure of eight of its 12 care homes, which it said would happen in two phases. The remaining four homes are being transferred to new owners, and the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations process applies.

All the residents from the other homes have been re-accommodated since early May, which I understand was ahead of schedule. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport met the save our Bield campaigners on 6 February. I understand that Neil Findlay, Johann Lamont and Unison were present at the meeting.

As I have said before, I know how difficult a matter this is for any affected residents and their families, but it is important that, when such deeply regrettable things happen, the Government works with partners to ensure that residents can be re-accommodated quickly.

I am very happy to ask the health secretary to send further information to Richard Leonard, if there are particular issues on which he still wants more information.

Richard Leonard: One Bield resident who was forced to move was 87-year-old Christina Wilson.

She led an active life and worked in Tesco until she was 74. At the age of 84, she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and moved into what is termed a very sheltered flat, which was provided by Bield in Bonnybridge. Following Bield's decision to walk away from the market, she was forced to move out and into the nearby Bankview care home.

Sadly, Christina Wilson passed away last week. Her granddaughter, Laura Owens, told me what Christina's final weeks were like. She said:

"Within weeks of my gran moving, despite best efforts by the new care home staff, she had stopped eating, broke her shoulder, there was a significant deterioration in her dementia, she became unable to walk, became more confused and agitated, she forgot who people were ... she was tearful a lot of the time, and made claims of no longer wanting to live, fundamentally giving up on life."

First Minister, what does that say about what is happening in our care system?

The First Minister: We have a good care system in this country and our job as the Government is to work with all partners and providers to ensure that it not only continues to be good, but improves in any way that it requires to.

Unfortunately, the Scottish Government was not in control of the decisions that Bield took. However, we worked with Bield to ensure that residents could be re-accommodated and that they have been re-accommodated. Where any former residents—such as Christina, whose case Richard Leonard has outlined today—have died, I convey my deep condolences to their loved ones. Richard Leonard cited Christina's granddaughter. I am very happy to ask the health secretary to meet her granddaughter to discuss the concerns in greater depth.

None of us wants to see such situations happen, but organisations that are independent of Government will, on occasion, take decisions such as the one that we are talking about. Our responsibility is to work as hard as we can to ensure that the impact on individuals is minimised as much as possible. That is what we did in this case, and it is what we will continue to do, if there are future instances like this one.

Richard Leonard: Because the dignity with which we treat our older citizens is a measure of the society that we are, we need to get this right. That is why Labour introduced free personal care for the elderly.

For Christina Wilson, it was not necessarily that there was a compromise in the quality of the care that she received, but that there was a huge breach in the continuity of care that she received. That was all because her care home provider walked away from the market. As a result, this woman in her late 80s, who had dementia, was forced to move home.

I am not sure that any of us can really begin to feel the distress and trauma that has been caused, but we have a duty to understand it. Christina Wilson's family demands a review of the human impact of what they describe as these "forced transitions", and they are right.

Will the First Minister establish a review into what happened at Bield so that all the wider lessons can be learned?

The First Minister: We will continue to look very carefully at all those issues. As I said in my previous answer, I will ask the health secretary to look specifically at the circumstances of the very sad case that Richard Leonard has outlined. The offer to meet family members stands.

Richard Leonard talks about a decision that a provider took to walk away from the market, and he is right about that. That was not a decision of the Scottish Government, and it was not a decision that the Scottish Government was able to stop Bield taking. The Scottish Government's responsibility was to work with all partners to ensure that residents were re-accommodated and that the disruption to individuals was minimised as much as possible. That is exactly what we did and what we will do if such regrettable circumstances arise in future.

We take very seriously our obligations for the continuity and quality of care of our older residents. Richard Leonard mentioned free personal care. This Government has protected free personal care each and every year that we have been in office, and we are now taking steps to extend free personal care to those under 65 in certain circumstances.

These are important issues, and they are often very difficult issues. However, we will continue to discharge our responsibilities with the dignity and respect that we owe our older residents very much at the top of our minds.

Private Rent Levels (Edinburgh)

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): In my constituency of Edinburgh Pentlands, private rented property is being offered at up to £800 for a two-bedroom flat and £1,900 for a three-bedroom house. What is the First Minister's reaction to recent news that Edinburgh's private rent levels, including in the Sighthill area of my constituency, have some of the highest percentage yields in Scotland? What is being done to assist tenants who are struggling to meet ever-increasing rent demands?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am aware of a recent report by Totally Money on rental yields in Edinburgh. The new private residential tenancy that the Scottish Government introduced last year protects tenants against

sudden or excessive rent increases. Under the new tenancy, private sector landlords can increase rents only once every 12 months and are required to give tenants three months' notice of an increase. Tenants can also challenge any increase that they consider unfair by referring it for adjudication by a rent officer.

In addition, all local authorities can apply to ministers to cap rent increases under the tenancy by designating areas of particularly high rent increases as rent pressure zones. The Scottish Government has recently discussed with the City of Edinburgh Council the evidence that the council would need to provide to seek such a designation. I know that the Minister for Local Government and Housing would be happy to share that information with Gordon MacDonald in order that he can further assist his constituents.

Road Equivalent Tariff (Northern Isles)

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): On the eve of the Easter recess, I asked the First Minister when people in Orkney and Shetland could expect to see the benefits of road equivalent tariff on northern isles ferry routes. She was unable to answer the question, although, with remarkable foresight, she predicted that I would bring it back to Parliament if I was not satisfied with the answer.

As we approach the summer recess, with still no confirmation of a start date, can the First Minister assure my constituents that RET will be introduced on our lifeline routes, as promised, before the end of the first half of 2018?

The First Minister: The Minister for Transport and Islands is currently considering the issues that arise here—the legal state aid issues—and will make a further announcement in due course. I hope that that announcement is made sooner rather than later, but as Liam McArthur will be aware, the transport minister and the Government have to satisfy ourselves about a number of issues before we can outline the detail of that announcement. I know that Humza Yousaf will keep Liam McArthur updated on progress.

Stracathro Hospital

Mairi Gougeon (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Last week, a story was published that claimed that Stracathro hospital in my constituency was set to be closed and then sold off by NHS Tayside. Understandably, that has caused a great deal of concern and distress, not just to the staff who work there but to the wider community, who are now in fear that that vital facility is to close. Since then, I have been inundated with correspondence about it.

The closure story was raised at a meeting with NHS Tayside last week, where it gave its

assurances that that is simply not the case. Can the First Minister clarify the situation in relation to Stracathro hospital and offer her categorical assurances that the hospital will not close?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The hospital will not close and the claims that it is facing closure are simply not true. Anybody who is making such claims is doing the public a real disservice.

The chair of NHS Tayside recently met local representatives as a result of the false claims about the future of the hospital and gave MSPs and MPs an unequivocal assurance that Stracathro hospital is not closing. He has said explicitly that NHS Tayside sees the hospital as being key to the future delivery of local healthcare services and any suggestion to the contrary is wholly unfounded.

I take this opportunity to remind the chamber that it was this Government that brought Stracathro hospital back into the national health service after it had been privatised by a previous Administration.

Coul Links (International Obligations)

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I wrote yesterday to the Minister for Local Government and Housing asking that he call in a Highland Council decision to grant approval for a development at Coul Links, which is a site of special scientific interest, a special protected area and a Ramsar site. Will the First Minister confirm that, in or out of the European Union, the Scottish Government will respect all international treaty obligations, including the Ramsar convention?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes. It is our intention to honour obligations that currently arise from EU membership, but we have been clear in our resolve not to see environmental protections or other protections downgraded as a result of Brexit. I hope that that makes the Scottish Government's position extremely clear.

National Testing (Five-year-olds)

3. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The First Minister said earlier that she was making progress in education, but how can we be making progress in education with national testing for five-year-olds? Is it progress when Children in Scotland says that that is a "detrimental ... waste of time"? Is it progress when teachers say that time is being "swallowed up" and that the testing is "actively harmful"? Is it progress when the teaching union the Educational Institute of Scotland says that it is opposed to national testing for five-year-olds? Even her own special adviser, Sir Harry Burns, says that the Government should move away from "nationwide testing". Why does

the First Minister think that all those people are wrong and only she is right?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, the assessments are not high-stakes assessments; there is no pass or fail associated with them. The results are there to help teachers plan for children's progress and to inform teacher judgment about achievement against curriculum for excellence levels. Children's and young people's interests are very much at the heart of the assessments.

Primary 1 assessments are designed around the early level of curriculum for excellence and they are compatible with play-based learning approaches in primary 1. In best practice, the assessments are experienced by children as part of on-going learning and teaching activities in the classroom. They are appropriate to the age of the child, but, to go back to the question from Ruth Davidson that I answered earlier, they are important in making sure that we replace survey data on the performance of children with comprehensive data on the performance of children, which allows us to know the progress that we are making in closing the attainment gap.

Willie Rennie: If what was happening was in the children's interests, the First Minister would stop the national tests right now. Older pupils are being brought in because P1s cannot operate the computer—because they are only five. Parents are concerned about the impact on their children—because they are only five. I listed earlier the concerns that teachers have—because the children are only five. However, the First Minister ignores all those concerns, because all she is interested in is her computer machine, with all her assessments and data to try to drive forward her claim that she is going to improve the education system. Why will she not listen to all the people who have expressed concerns? Why will she not change, and scrap the tests now?

The First Minister: What drives me is the determination to improve standards in our schools in the interests of young people and to close the unacceptable attainment gap in our schools. We need good data to assure not just ourselves but parents that we are doing exactly that.

Willie Rennie said that primary 1 pupils cannot use the computers. I do not know about him, but I have met many primary 1 pupils who are better at using computers than I am. I mentioned being in a school in Largs last week, where young primary school children showed me how to computer code. All the P1 assessment questions have been designed with Education Scotland and with other education professionals; they are aligned to the curriculum for excellence benchmarks for P1, which is the early level.

Willie Rennie might be interested to know, if he is not aware of this already, that we are conducting a user review of the first year of assessments and part of that is about listening to the experiences of teachers. We will publish the user review report in August, at the start of the new school year, and we will set out any changes and enhancements that we will make to the system for next year. We will very much listen to the views of teachers; we will also very much continue to take the action that we consider necessary to improve standards in our schools and to close the attainment gap.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are some further open supplementary questions. The first one is from James Kelly.

Hate Crime

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): My constituent Sam Ross, who has Down's syndrome, was spat at in her face by a stranger as she got on the train home from work in Glasgow. Sam has a job and she was getting the train at Queen Street station, just like thousands of other people. She should not have to face being spat at when all she is doing is travelling independently. Sam will be representing Scotland when the world Down syndrome congress comes to Glasgow next month; hundreds of people with Down's syndrome will travel to the city from around the world for the event.

Will the First Minister join me in condemning that hate crime and will she set out what she will do to make Scotland a safe place for everyone?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, Sam should not have had to face such treatment. It is despicable and unacceptable and all of us should be very clear that behaviour of that kind will never be acceptable in Scotland. I thank James Kelly for raising Sam's experience in the chamber to allow me to say that unequivocally.

We look forward to welcoming the world Down syndrome congress to Glasgow next month. I have recorded a message and I think that the Deputy First Minister may be speaking at the congress. The congress will be an opportunity for us to celebrate the amazing contribution that individuals with Down's syndrome make to our society. We should and we do value them and this is an opportunity to say that loudly and clearly.

The police take such behaviour very seriously and we must all make sure that, in our actions as well as in our rhetoric, we support a zero-tolerance approach to any abuse or discrimination. What I would say to Sam is that she should continue to work and go about her daily life and know that as she does so, as does anybody with Down's

syndrome, she has not just the full support but the admiration of everybody across this chamber.

Donald Trump (United Kingdom Visit)

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Does the First Minister think that it is appropriate for the United Kingdom Government to roll out the red carpet for Donald Trump, given the shocking reports of families being split up and the heartbreaking scenes of children being detained and caged at the US border? Will she relay the serious concerns of the people of Scotland to the UK Government?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I do not think that it is appropriate at this time for the red carpet to be rolled out. Meetings are one thing, perhaps, but red carpet treatment is another. I do not think that there can be anybody—perhaps with the exception of Nigel Farage and his ilk—who has not been appalled. I do not think that there can be any decent person across the UK, across Europe or across the world—including the vast majority of people in America, for that matter—who has not been appalled by the images and the stories from America of young children being separated from their parents and incarcerated in what look, to all intents and purposes, like cages.

I am glad that the President appeared to make a U-turn on that position yesterday when he signed an executive order. However, I think that we all have to be careful not just to assume that the situation is okay now because it appears that, instead of children being detained without their parents, we will still see children being detained with their parents.

I will continue to raise my voice against such instances. Of course, it is not just in America this week that we have seen reasons to be concerned. In Italy, there is the conduct around the Roma community and there are reports today that Hungary has decided to criminalise lawyers and activists who help asylum seekers. That should make us all pause for thought. We should be standing up for the rights and values that all of us hold dear as human beings. The world has a collective responsibility to deal with those who are seeking refuge and asylum. It is important not only that we do that collectively, but that we do that with human dignity at the very forefront of our minds. That is my view and I hope that it is the view of everybody across this chamber.

Fox Hunting

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): In 2015, the Scottish Government asked Lord Bonomy to review the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002, which he did in 2016. The Government consulted on his review in 2017, and the consultation closed in January this year. Five

months on, the Scottish Government has yet to respond.

Just over a year ago, the First Minister told the chamber:

“I have always been an opponent of fox hunting and I remain so.”—[*Official Report*, 18 May 2017; c 19.]

Is that still the case? If so, will the First Minister commit to legislation to introduce a real ban on fox hunting in Scotland?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I oppose fox hunting, and that remains my position. As Alison Johnstone rightly says, Lord Bonomy looked at it in detail for us. It is important to say that he did not find evidence of widespread flouting of the law, but he had comments to make on the need for more clarity in it and for better enforcement and monitoring to deal with illegal practices.

In due course, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform will make a further announcement on the issue, which will set out any further steps that the Scottish Government intends to take.

National Health Service (Barnett Consequentials)

4. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government has received details of the financial implications for Scotland of the United Kingdom Government’s investment in the national health service. (S5F-02503)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The information that we have managed to extract from the UK Government on the potential funding and its sources has been incomplete at best. On Tuesday, two days after its announcement, the UK Government provided a nominal profile of Barnett consequentials but, so far, has refused to confirm that there will be a net benefit to Scotland. In fact, a paper placed by the UK Government in the House of Commons library states:

“The final Barnett consequentials for all three devolved administrations will be confirmed at upcoming Fiscal Events and at the next Spending Review”.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution has requested details from the UK Government as a matter of urgency, to ensure that Scotland is not short changed.

Emma Harper: Has the First Minister had any guarantees at all from the Treasury that the £2 billion increase that is associated with the UK Government’s announcement will be a net increase in funding for Scotland’s budget, or could the money result in there being cuts elsewhere?

The First Minister: I will make a couple of quick points. First, I welcome the fact that the UK Government is now talking about using tax rises to fund the NHS. It is just a pity that, when the Scottish Government increased taxes for those who can afford to pay to fund increases for our health service, the Scottish Conservatives opposed that tooth and nail and submitted tax proposals that would have taken £550 million out of the Scottish budget, which is equivalent to 12,000 nurses.

Secondly, we do not yet know that any consequentials will represent a net increase. We have some experience on that. For example, last year, when there was the promise of consequentials of £33 million from winter funding, we ended up receiving just £8.4 million of that because of the way in which the commitment was funded. Until we know from the UK Government how it intends to fund the commitment, we will not know how much there will be for the Scottish Government in consequentials. We know that none of the money will come from a Brexit dividend, because there is no such thing. However, until we know where it will come from and know that it will not involve cuts in other devolved areas, we will not know the final amount. Therefore the sooner we get that information, the better—and we will continue to press the UK Government for it.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): The First Minister is known for never wanting to seek grievance and division between England and Scotland. However, a key aspect of what she has not mentioned today is the fact that, under the Conservatives in England, health spending has grown at a rate of twice that in Scotland. Does the First Minister not accept that, since 2010, her Government has received £2.46 billion in additional Barnett consequential funding for our health service? As we celebrate the NHS turning 70, can she not find it in her heart to welcome that additional funding?

The First Minister: When we know what the additional funding is, and if it amounts to the kind of sums that have been talked about, of course we will welcome it, but we do not know that right now. I repeat that we were previously promised £33 million but, when we saw the detail of that, it turned into £8.4 million, so forgive me, but I will wait to see the colour of the money first.

On comparisons between Scotland and England, I am not sure whether Miles Briggs is aware of this, but health spending in Scotland is £163 per person higher than it is in England—that is 8 per cent higher per head. Miles Briggs wants us to match the English levels of health spending. If we were to match levels of health spending per head in England, we would have to take £880

million out of the NHS budget. That would be the price of matching spending in England. If Miles Briggs does not mind, we will continue to fund the health service fairly in Scotland and we will continue to do so by being honest with people about the need for modest tax rises instead of pretending, as the Tories do, that there is some mythical unicorn of a Brexit dividend.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): That went well, Miles.

Antidepressants (Accidental Drug Deaths)

5. Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): Let us hope that this goes better, then.

To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the recent report by ISD Scotland, which suggests that antidepressants are detected in nearly half of post-mortems involving accidental drug deaths. (S5F-02497)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The recent report was extremely helpful in allowing us to deepen our understanding of the issue. It is important that our actions are informed not only by which drugs are detected in those who die from drug misuse but by cases in which a drug is assessed as being implicated in the death. This week, ISD analysis showed that antidepressants were implicated in combination with other substances in 10 per cent of accidental drug-related deaths but that they were implicated in combination with other substances in 43 per cent of intentional drug-related deaths. That analysis of already-published data reinforces the point that large numbers of those who are most at risk often suffer from poor mental health. We are already working to develop better dual-diagnosis service arrangements for those suffering from substance misuse and mental health problems, because we know that the use of antidepressants alongside the use of opioids can bring additional risks.

Michelle Ballantyne: The right context to consider the difficult and nuanced question of how prescription drugs and illegal drugs are linked is the Scottish Government's overall strategic approach to drugs. However, it is now almost a year since the Scottish Government promised a refresh of its drug strategy and I cannot find any sign of when it is coming. Can the First Minister give us a guarantee that the refreshed strategy will be published before we come back from summer recess?

The First Minister: The forthcoming substance use strategy will be published shortly. I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to write to the member when the date for that is known. The strategy will look at how services can adapt to find

people most in need and then deliver services that address their specific circumstances. We have been clear that behaviours and culture around substance misuse have changed and that we think that services are not currently meeting the wide range of very complex health and social care needs of those who are most at risk. That is why it is right to take time to develop the strategy. I hope that, when it is published, the member will engage with it and, I hope, will be able to welcome it.

Universal Credit (Roll-out Report)

6. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the National Audit Office report "Rolling out Universal Credit". (S5F-02483)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The National Audit Office report provides further evidence that the United Kingdom Government's shambolic universal credit is failing people and causing debt, rent arrears and hardship across Scotland and the UK as a whole. The report states that there is no evidence that universal credit will provide value for money to the taxpayer or achieve its targets in relation to getting people back into work. Of particular concern is the finding that the Department for Work and Pensions is showing

"a lack of regard in failing to understand the hardship faced by some claimants".

In my view, that is damning, and it is even further evidence to support what the Scottish Government, alongside many others, has long and repeatedly called for: a halt to the roll-out of universal credit so that fundamental flaws with the system can be fixed. The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities has written yet again to Esther McVey, urging the UK Government to do just that.

Mark Griffin: We agree that universal credit must be halted and must be fixed. In my region, 9,500 families with children are suffering the misery and destitution from universal credit that the Tories are wilfully forcing on communities. The Scottish Government has announced plans for an income supplement through the social security system. We proposed a child benefit top-up because it would future proof against means testing, conditionality, sanctions and the destitution of universal credit. The First Minister cannot deliver dignity and respect using universal credit. Will she today rule out using universal credit for her planned income supplement?

The First Minister: We are considering all options for the income supplement. We want to introduce that in the way that is best for those who will be in receipt of it. Angela Constance set out our current thinking around that when the child

poverty strategy was published, and we will continue to inform Parliament as our thinking on that develops. We see that as a very important part of our efforts to reduce child poverty, in particular.

Of course, we are also taking other action to mitigate the impact of some of the welfare cuts that we are seeing coming from Westminster. From its introduction next summer, the best start grant will give additional financial help to new parents in low-income families when a child is born. We will continue to take action across a range of areas to make sure that we are helping those who most need our help.

I hope that all of us, certainly in Mark Griffin's party and in the Government, will join together to call for a halt to universal credit because, even with us using our devolved powers, 85 per cent of the welfare budget and powers still lie with Westminster. I hope that, one day soon, we will see all the powers lying with this Parliament, but until that day comes, I think that it is incumbent on all of us to call on the UK Government to stop policies that we know are doing so much harm to so many people across the country.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The Social Security Committee regularly hears evidence of the devastation that the roll-out of universal credit causes, pushing people into debt and rent arrears. Considering the strikingly different approach that Scotland is taking to social security from that of the UK Government, does the First Minister believe, like me, that the only way to ensure fairness, respect and dignity is for all social security powers to be devolved to this Parliament?

The First Minister: Yes. I believe that the sooner that happens, the better, and I hope that we can get Labour's support for that now in a way that we did not have previously. We have the opportunity to show—and we are already showing—that, where we have powers, we can do things differently and better, and do things in a way that makes sure that fairness, respect and dignity are very much at the heart of all our policies. The more we demonstrate that through the use of our limited powers over social security, the more the argument for having total devolution of social security becomes simply overwhelming. I hope that we will see that happen very soon.

The Great Get Together

7. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to support the Jo Cox Foundation initiative, the great get together. (S5F-02481)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am delighted to say that the Government is supporting

this year's great get together, which of course follows the success of last year's events. I was able to offer my support and encouragement to Jo Cox's sister, Kim Leadbetter, when I met her in May. This year's events will take place this weekend, which would of course have been Jo's birthday, and I am pleased to see that a number of events will take place the length and breadth of Scotland.

Monica Lennon: I thank the First Minister for her response and for her continued support for the Jo Cox Foundation. When Kim Leadbetter, Jo's sister, was in Parliament recently, she said that Jo would want to be remembered for how she lived and not for how she died. Jo's legacy has taught us that being kind and compassionate does not make politicians or communities weak; it is what made her strong.

This weekend, in tribute to Jo on what would have been her birthday, people right across the United Kingdom will come together to celebrate our diverse communities and to demonstrate that, just as Jo once said,

"we are far more united and have far more in common ... than things that divide us."

Will the First Minister join me in encouraging people to take part in the great get together events that are happening across Scotland, where they will be warmly welcomed, including at the coffee morning that I am hosting in Hamilton on Saturday? Does she agree that our communities will be strengthened if we all endeavour to love like Jo?

The First Minister: Yes. I agree with that. I encourage people to take part in events in their communities over the weekend. I think that they help to bring people together. For all our divides and disagreements, which are natural and necessary in any vibrant democracy, I would like to think that we all work hard—although we might not always succeed—to ensure that kindness and compassion are the hallmarks of how we approach politics.

I did not know Jo Cox personally—I wish that I had had that opportunity—but everything that I have read and heard about her says that she was a passionate, vibrant, energetic individual who put those principles and values into practice. Those values were very evident in her sister when I met her a few weeks ago. Many issues, perhaps more so now than has been the case in recent times in our politics, cause deep disagreement. We have talked about some of them today and I have no doubt that we will continue to do so. However, at the end of the day, it is useful always to remind ourselves—and Jo's memory helps us to do it—that there is always more that unites us as human beings than will ever divide us as politicians. This

weekend is a good opportunity to remember that and I encourage everybody to take part in those events very much in that spirit.

12:46

Meeting suspended.

12:50

On resuming—

Motor Neurone Disease Awareness Week

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-12476, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on MND awareness week 2018. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that 18 to 24 June marks MND Awareness Week 2018, which will include Global MND Awareness Day on 21 June; notes that MND Scotland will be raising awareness of the illness and the impact that it has on families throughout Scotland; acknowledges the charity's support services, including its new advocacy service, which seeks to act as a support link between people affected by the condition and the support that is offered by local services and councils; notes that, through the Scottish Government and in partnership with MND Scotland, there is now a legal obligation for NHS boards to provide communications devices to people who need these; recognises the events that are being organised as part of the awareness week, including a fundraising memorial dinner on 21 June for the campaigner, the late Gordon Aikman; congratulates MND Scotland on its first anniversary with its corporate partner the ScotRail Alliance, which has raised at least £71,000 through staff fundraising, customer collections and gifts in kind, and wishes the charity all the best in supporting, caring for and advocating on behalf of people throughout Scotland who MND impacts on.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I thank my colleagues across the Parliament who signed the motion that allowed us to have today's debate.

Presiding Officer, 21 June is the day of global recognition of motor neurone disease. When I hear any mention of motor neurone disease, my ears instantly prick up, because for me it is personal, rather than professional. When I hear the words "motor neurone disease", it recalls for me the pain, fear, grief, loss and shock that comes with an MND diagnosis, not just for the person affected but for their families.

MND has no boundaries; it is not determined by age, lifestyle or wealth. It strikes at any point in a person's life and it has differing degrees of speed and impact. It is a rapidly progressing neurological terminal illness that stops signals from the brain reaching the muscles. The muscles start to waste and weaken and eventually stop working. That may cause someone to lose the ability to walk, talk, eat, drink or breathe unaided. Some people may also experience changes that affect their behaviour and ability to think and plan.

Not everyone will develop all symptoms, and how it affects individuals can vary significantly. That is why the current MND Scotland campaign to bust the myths around MND is so important. It has a brilliant video that people can share to get the message out about MND and what it means, which will help to tackle stigma and end discrimination.

No two people are the same and that is why the MND register is so important. The more data that we have, the better we will be at ensuring better short, medium and long-term care.

I first raised such issues in one of my first speeches in the chamber, 11 years ago, during a debate held by Margaret Mitchell. Eleven years ago, the average life expectancy following diagnosis was 14 months, but it is now 20 months. That is because of better care and more joined-up support. Members may think that that is only six months more, but I know that those six months are incredibly precious to people with motor neurone disease and their families.

When I hear the words “Motor Neurone Disease Scotland” I am filled with another set of emotions: pride, determination and, above all, hope. An amazing thing happens when we find out that a friend, relative or colleague has been diagnosed with MND: we spring into action. Over many years, I have seen those involved with MND Scotland do that so many times. People abseil off buildings, zip slide across rivers, climb into forgotten cities, walk great walls and walk over fire to raise money and awareness. Those actions give us all hope in the darkest of times; they tell us that people care and that people will literally walk over fire to make things better.

That is why when I hear “motor neurone disease”, I also hear hope—hope that we will find routes to better care, through funded specialist MND nurses or ideas for better support and the hope that the research work will bring a cure.

I believe that the work at the Euan MacDonald research centre with Professor Chandran and his team at the University of Edinburgh will make that much-hoped-for breakthrough that will take us to that much-needed cure. That is why the research funding from MND Scotland and the Scottish Government is so vital. PhD students working hard to understand and treat MND, working in conjunction with our best universities, surely give us all the hope of which I speak.

One of the cruellest aspects of motor neurone disease is the likelihood of some people to lose their voice. Our voice is such a distinct part of our personality, and many of us in this place surely like the sound of our own voices, so how would we feel if we could not raise them? We use our voices to raise the concerns that we all have in this

debate today, and we used our voices to add to the voice bank project, which just might give someone back their own voice instead of an electronic voice. How powerful is that?

The MND Scotland let me speak campaign resulted in the Scottish Government giving the right to communication equipment from our national health service, and that came into force in March. It will give those who need it the necessary equipment, such as iPads and eye gaze technology, to enable them to continue to communicate effectively—another reason for hope. If any members heard the amazing speech last night by broadcaster Dennis Dick, using his own electronic voice, they will understand what an amazing commitment it is to provide that equipment to people.

I know that navigating the benefits system can be a daunting task for anyone, but if someone has suddenly lost their job due to their diagnosis, or a family member has had to give up their job to take on a caring role, the last thing they need is impenetrable forms and complicated processes to go through to get what they are entitled to. When those things are mixed with the constant reassessment and appeals, it all seems too hard for people to get anywhere in getting what they need.

When the Social Security (Scotland) Bill went through this Parliament recently, I saw a great opportunity to change the system to one of support, dignity and respect. I supported MND Scotland’s get benefits right campaign and was delighted to hear Jeane Freeman, our Minister for Social Security, announce automatic entitlement and lifetime awards for people with MND. Most people have no idea what an impact that will have on the life of someone with MND. The difference that will make to families is immeasurable and welcome, and I know only too well from what my family went through to get support just how important it is.

With the new two-person MND Scotland advocacy support team—if anyone has not met them, they should—I am sure that no one will wait very long for the help that they need. In the team’s first two months, 40 families have had support from them, bringing much needed hope—again, that word “hope”—to those families.

As I am sure members are well aware, I could go on about this topic at length, but I am keen to hear from my colleagues across the chamber about their experience, and I know that everyone wishes to address different aspects of the issue. However, for those we have lost and those facing life with MND, let us face the future with hope in our hearts, because if we can scale mountains and walk on fire, we can find that cure. I wish MND Scotland, and all MND and amyotrophic lateral

sclerosis organisations around the world, a hope-filled global awareness day.

12:58

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I congratulate Christina McKelvie on a wonderful speech and on her long-standing commitment to talking about and raising awareness of motor neurone disease. She is always full of hope and focused on what the future might deliver.

Later this evening, I will be attending a fundraiser for MND Scotland in the name of my late friend Gordon Aikman, who throughout his life raised £600,000 for motor neurone disease research. That is an absolutely phenomenal amount of money, and we promised that in the event of his death we would keep raising funds for his campaign, with the goal of reaching £1 million as soon as we feasibly could. We hope to make a big step in progressing towards that goal at the dinner tonight, as part of which there will be an auction with a phenomenal range of prizes. I hope that you will not mind, Presiding Officer, if I do a little plug for that auction, because you can bid online right now for some of those prizes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we bid here?

Kezia Dugdale: You can bid here, simply by taking your phone out of your pocket. I am sure that you have always wanted to do shopping from the chair there, Presiding Officer, and you can do that by using your mobile phone. Perhaps you are a “Coronation Street” fan. If you are, there is a guided tour for four people behind the scenes with Jennie McAlpine to be won. We have a signed Scottish rugby shirt, and we even have a wicket from Scotland’s win against England at the cricket just a week or so ago. There is a phenomenal range of prizes and you can bid now, so please do so.

I am delighted to share with members some news from the ScotRail Alliance, which is recognised in Christina McKelvie’s motion and is a fundraising partner for MND Scotland this year. Since the relationship between the charity and ScotRail was established, ScotRail passengers have raised £104,000, and it has been announced in the past hour—I found this out on my phone—that ScotRail intends to name a train after Gordon Aikman. That is the latest development today. The train will be the Gordon Aikman Express. I passed a note about that to Neil Bibby during First Minister’s question time. He is a “Thomas the Tank Engine” fan, and he told me that Gordon is the most powerful engine in the “Thomas the Tank Engine” stories. That is fitting for Gordon Aikman, as he was the most powerful engine behind a lot of campaigning work for motor neurone disease. I

hope that the 7.30 service from Waverley to Queen Street will be served by that train, because he often took that train when he worked in Glasgow and lived in Edinburgh.

That allows me to make a connection between Gordon Aikman and MND awareness week. Using that train made Gordon Aikman aware of other people’s judgments about MND as a disease. He worked for many months after his diagnosis, but his body weakened and he was sometimes unstable on his feet, which meant that he sometimes tripped and fell. The nature of his work meant that he would get a train at half past 7 in the morning and a train very late at night. When people saw him trip and fall, they sometimes assumed that he had had a few too many drinks after work and was drunk. They did not stop to help; they thought that he was a guy who was just causing trouble, and they kept on going. He needed to be helped to his feet. Once he was on his feet, he could make his way home, but far too many people walked by. MND Scotland is doing a tremendous amount of work to break down the stigma around what the disease does to people and how people can respond.

Christina McKelvie said a lot about the need to find a cure. I hope that that cure will be found at the University of Edinburgh, and there is every sign that that could happen. Some 200 of the world’s leading researchers are sharing their data and research at the Euan MacDonald centre, and we need to give them the capacity to bring clinical trials to Scotland. We have not had MND clinical trials in Scotland for 20 years, and we are currently in a race with scientists in Canada and Israel to find a cure. I encourage the Scottish Government to continue its financial commitment to funding research and to continue to press the United Kingdom Government to do its bit alongside the pharmaceutical companies, which are very important in finding a cure.

I appreciate that I am going over my time, Presiding Officer.

Finally, there is a portal across the European Union for researchers to share their research on MND. Access to that portal could be affected by Brexit. I do not mean to make my remarks too directly political, but the issue is political. In leaving the European Union, it is possible that Scotland will no longer be able to be involved in that medical research portal to share research with other European nations. I cannot imagine that that issue is high up on the list of the Prime Minister’s priorities when it comes to Brexit, but I am sure that it can be on the Scottish Government’s list of priorities. Let us ensure that, if we are going to find a cure for MND, we find it in Scotland. I am sure that everybody is committed to that goal.

13:03

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I congratulate Christina McKelvie on securing the debate and on her long-standing campaigning in Scotland on behalf of people and their families who live with MND.

Like Christina McKelvie, I pay tribute to the outstanding work of MND Scotland, which continues to do much to raise awareness of MND and to support more than 450 people in Scotland who live with the condition. Its new “myth-busting MND” animated video campaign is excellent and has the potential to make a real difference in tackling some of the myths and stigma relating to people with MND.

I want to remember and commend my friend Gordon Aikman, as Kezia Dugdale has done. His inspiring fightback campaign achieved much, and his positive legacy lives on in many ways. His family, his husband, Joe Pike, and his friends Lawrence Cowan and Kezia Dugdale have really taken his legacy forward. They are very much in our thoughts today, and I wish the fightback dinner this evening every success.

I also want to praise the work of the My Name’s Doddie Foundation, which has achieved a great deal in the year since Doddie Weir revealed his MND diagnosis. I welcome the close working partnership between that foundation and MND Scotland.

I congratulate those at the ScotRail Alliance, which has already been mentioned, especially the employees who continue to raise funds for MND Scotland. As Kezia Dugdale said, more than £104,000 has been raised so far as part of its three-year charity partnership. The class 170 train, which is branded with the MND Scotland cornflower logo, now serves the Edinburgh to Glasgow Queen Street route and is a great boost to the profile of the charity and the partnership.

One of the most exciting developments that has been taken forward in recent months is the new advocacy service that has been mentioned. It was launched by MND Scotland in April and has already supported 40 families across Scotland. The new service is an important addition that can help to ensure that people who are affected by MND do not have to struggle alone through the bureaucracy and delays that can often occur around accessing social care, home adaptations and accessible housing.

From my work with the Frank’s law campaign since I was elected, I know about the problems that are often associated with people under the age of 65 trying to access vital care. Therefore, I am pleased that there have been changes and that Parliament is listening to people and making a difference. From April 2019, people under the age

of 65 who are assessed as eligible to receive free personal care will get that support, regardless of their condition, age, or means.

As well as making sure that we give the best possible and swiftest support to people who are diagnosed with MND and to their families, all of us will agree that finding a cure for MND must continue to be our ultimate aim. I am delighted that MND Scotland has committed to having a research portfolio worth £2.4 million by 2020, that eight projects are under way and that there is a live call for new research projects.

As Kezia Dugdale said, much of that innovative research is taking place in our region, at the University of Edinburgh. I recently visited the Anne Rowling clinic and was impressed and excited by the ground-breaking research work that is being undertaken by the centre for regenerative medicine. Clinical research, based at the Anne Rowling regenerative neurology clinic, is already delivering collaborative clinical projects, and we must ensure that such projects are protected in the future. As a member of the Health and Sport Committee, I know that we have ensured that that issue is highlighted, particularly with post-Brexit challenges.

That work, as well as the work that I saw with the voice bank initiative, is making such a difference. The voice bank initiative is still looking for key regional voices and I am pleased that many MSPs and Parliament staff have taken up the recent call for more voice donors to come forward.

We should all be rightly proud that Scotland is leading that ground-breaking research and scientific progress. Scotland is at the forefront of international research on MND, and it is brilliant that Glasgow will host this year’s international MND/ALS symposium in December.

I again welcome the debate as part of MND awareness week. I wish all those who are involved a successful week and that we raise even more money to support people with MND and their families. Above all, I hope that we continue to focus on and invest in the research that one day will lead to a cure for this devastating condition.

13:08

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I thank Christina McKelvie for securing debating time and for bringing this important topic to the chamber of our Scottish Parliament. I know that her commitment to ensuring that people who are living with motor neurone disease have access to the best possible care and support is deeply personal and long held.

At the MND reception last night, the chair of MND Scotland, Lawrence Cowan, spoke movingly of all the things that the disease takes from people with the condition and from their families. He also spoke of what it could not take and of the champions of MND Scotland's cause. I am sure that people who are living with MND, and their families, are grateful that Christina McKelvie is one of those champions.

Each year for motor neurone disease awareness week, work is done to highlight in the press the stories of people who are affected by MND. The purpose of that is to spread awareness of MND and to share the physical and emotional challenges faced by those who are affected by this devastating disease.

MND Scotland has had some wonderful campaigning successes. In March, it became a legal right for communication aids to be provided on the NHS, and its campaign helped to change the terminal illness definition in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, in order to help people with MND access the benefits that they need as soon as they need them.

This MND week sees the launch of an important new campaign: the "myth-busting MND" campaign. People with MND deserve to be treated the same way as everyone else is treated; they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. An investigation by MND Scotland earlier this year found that that is not always the case. Responses to the MND survey and feedback from MND Scotland support groups highlighted the stigma and misconceptions faced by people because of their condition. This year, those personal stories will tie into a wider multimedia awareness campaign aimed at highlighting and challenging the stigma and misconception that exists around MND. If I may, I will share a few examples of those stories.

Gemma speaks about when her mother was diagnosed with MND and was pulled into human resources at work because her bosses believed that her slurred speech meant that she was drunk. Ruth went into a bank and felt that she was treated differently because her speech was slow. Another Ruth shares her encounter while trying to book a hair appointment: due to the reaction to her slurred speech, she felt that she had to leave without making an appointment. When Pamela's daughter was diagnosed with MND, people thought that there was something wrong with her brain because her speech was slurred. When Gordon's MND meant that he had to use a wheelchair, he found that people would cross the street to avoid interacting with him.

On top of all the difficulties that the disease brings, those everyday misconceptions and that stigma must have an awful impact on people and

make the challenge that they face even harder. It is therefore really important that we do everything that we can to address the stigma and misconceptions. Those stories will be in the national, regional and local press to try to reach the maximum number of people. They are published online and on the MND Scotland website.

I have a bit of a call to action for colleagues. We all love our social media channels. If we all share those stories with our friends, followers and supporters we can get really wide reach across Scotland and do something positive in this MND awareness week.

13:11

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I do not think that it is possible to do a debate on MND justice after we have had speeches from Christina McKelvie and Kezia Dugdale. I congratulate them both on their excellent contributions, particularly Christina McKelvie, who has been a huge supporter of MND Scotland throughout my time in the Parliament and probably long before that. She has introduced this debate every year, hosts the parliamentary reception and speaks from experience and genuinely from the bottom of her heart in every debate around MND Scotland. I congratulate her on introducing the debate.

I also congratulate my friend Kez Dugdale, who was a huge campaigner alongside Gordon Aikman from when he was diagnosed. I know from the passion that she speaks with that she will be campaigning on MND for the rest of her life, or until we find the cure for MND. I congratulate her also on the auction prizes that she announced. As soon as she mentioned the four tickets to go backstage for "Coronation Street" and the wicket from the cricket match, a particular incident came to my mind. I am perhaps on a sticky wicket when I suggest that all that must be the positive outcome from her eating all the bugs when she was in Australia last year. I congratulate her on that; even then she was thinking of Gordon Aikman and this fantastic cause.

It is 16 months since Gordon Aikman passed away, but his legacy and the campaign that he led live on. His determination, good humour and spirit remain an inspiration to us all. The memorial dinner this evening in Gordon's name will be a chance to celebrate again his life and all the work that he did to raise significant funds to support the work of MND Scotland. Supporting that work means supporting people who have been diagnosed with MND and who need the care of MND specialists, as well as supporting the family of anyone diagnosed with MND. I wish MND Scotland every success. They had huge success in last night's parliamentary event and are having

success through this debate today, and I wish them success tonight and for the global awareness day.

The real prize is finding the cure for MND, which will be the best tribute and the most fitting legacy for Gordon Aikman, all MND patients, all the campaigners and MND Scotland. Every pound raised at the dinner will help to deliver a service for people currently living with MND and their families, and, crucially, it will help to support research into finding a cure. I welcome and applaud the work of MND Scotland and its chair, Lawrence Cowan, and all the organisation's amazing volunteers.

With a spend of around £2.5 million to 2020, there is a real chance to support clinical research and find a cure. Scotland should be proud that we are leading international work in that regard. It will be a proud moment for us when we host the MND international symposium and bring together scientists and clinicians from across the world in my home city of Glasgow, to share their research, knowledge and learning as we hunt for a cure.

I want to ask the minister about specialist MND nurses. Our specialist nurses have experience and understanding of MND and other illnesses, and I thank them for the crucial role that they play, including in signposting patients and families, at various stages, to places where they can find support and access treatment and benefits. Will the minister update the Parliament on the learning from that approach and say whether consideration is being given to widening access to specialist nurses in all NHS health boards in Scotland?

I congratulate Christina McKelvie and MND Scotland, and I wish them all the very best in the future.

13:15

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Christina McKelvie on bringing the debate to the chamber for the second year and I commend her for her continued and tireless support for people with MND.

It is hard to believe that it is a year since we last debated MND global awareness day and MND awareness week in the Parliament. That was a particularly difficult debate for me, coming as it did the day after my friend, the former Lions and Scotland rugby international, Doddie Weir, made public his diagnosis of motor neurone disease. Members will be happy to hear that the "wee jessie" tag has not gone away; it has stuck in the sporting community, and it will probably never go away for the rest of my life.

As we would expect from Doddie, he has chosen, like Gordon Aikman before him, to speak out and raise awareness of the devastation that

this disease brings. That is what it takes to get things done: speaking out, loudly and strongly, about what is wrong and what needs to change. Of course, Doddie speaks louder than most—his fashion sense has given him years of practice in speaking loudly enough to be heard above the noise of his rather exuberant suits.

Doddie has already surpassed medical expectations. He was told that he would not be able to walk by now. He is still on his feet and he is still relentless in driving home the MND message. That is very much due to his sporting heritage: anyone who wants a sportsman to do something should tell him that he cannot do it.

As politicians, we are in a prime position to hear about the impact of conditions such as MND. We receive briefings from charities, we attend receptions and we speak to medical professionals. For me, the biggest insights always come from the people who are living with such conditions. Just yesterday in the chamber, I talked about the experience of one of my constituents who has cystic fibrosis. The words of her mother were far more powerful than anything that I could have written myself.

More often than not in the Parliament, we speak about people with medical conditions in the abstract. We talk about patients and sufferers and their families. Often that is the right thing to do. Difficult decisions have to be made and sometimes that forces us to place the rational above the emotional. However, there are times when the only way to achieve real change is to put a human face on an issue. Doddie Weir has taken up the baton—or picked up the ball, depending on members' sporting preferences—and run with it.

For many members, the most prominent face in our minds today will be that of Gordon Aikman. For many people in Scotland, most of their knowledge of MND's impact comes from the interviews that Gordon gave and his MND diaries in *The Sunday Times*, which should be required reading for anyone who is looking to understand just how much MND affects a person's day-to-day life.

Gordon and now Doddie remind us all that what we do matters. They remind us that the decisions that we make in the Parliament have weight and consequences, and they remind us that who wins and loses politically matters a lot less than who wins or loses in life.

I look forward to attending the Gordon Aikman dinner this evening, at which we will be hearing from Doddie again—I think that he is doing the auction; members should brace themselves.

Raising awareness of conditions such as MND allows us to put ourselves in other people's shoes and helps us to make better decisions. The

number of people with MND at any one time pales into insignificance against the number of people with cancer or heart disease, for example, but how we deal with such conditions is not purely about numbers; it is about people.

I never had the opportunity to meet Gordon Aikman—I was in a room with him once but I never got the chance to speak to him—but I did not need to meet him to know that we should all feel his loss. I see what Gordon and his fightback campaign did in a short space of time, and I cannot help but wonder what he could have achieved given the chance to live a longer and healthier life.

Gordon and Doddie are sources of inspiration, but it takes many more people to turn that inspiration into reality. Everyone who raises funds, campaigns for change and helps to educate us all will, in time, deliver that life-changing treatment or cure for MND that Christina McKelvie talked about.

I have far too much to say but I will try to get to the end of it if I can. Earlier in the week, I spoke to Scott Hastings, who is part of Doddie Weir's foundation, and I asked him what he would ask for. He said that Scotland is a world leader in life sciences, so perhaps the Scottish Government could get behind research, especially MND research. The eyes and ears of the global MND community will be on Glasgow at the end of the year for the annual conference. I believe that the Scottish Government can back MND with unprecedented support for more research. The foundation is trying to put in place Doddie's docs, which is a concept that will look to encourage the brightest minds of the future to commit to life sciences and MND. The ask is that the Scottish Government joins Doddie on that journey.

13:21

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Shona Robison): I am pleased to be able to respond on behalf on the Government as we mark MND awareness week and global MND awareness day. I thank Christina McKelvie for bringing the motion to Parliament and securing another important debate on MND. I recognise her personal commitment and experience on the issue.

I also recognise the importance of MND Scotland's bust the myths campaign. The organisation continues to refresh awareness raising on MND to ensure that the condition is always at the front of our minds. That is an important role.

I join others in paying tribute to the work that MND Scotland does to provide the invaluable emotional and practical support that has made such a positive contribution to so many people's

lives, as well as its support for the relentless drive to find a cure that will minimise the effects of this devastating condition. We will join MND Scotland and others tonight to shine a blue light on some of our buildings to raise awareness of MND.

Much progress has been made in the past couple of years, so it is important to reflect on some of that and recognise the dedication of those who have MND or are affected by the condition who work with us to make a difference. Gordon Aikman's fightback campaign was instrumental in driving change. It was fantastic to hear about the Gordon Aikman Express—he would like that a lot. Kezia Dugdale also gave a good plug for some of the auction prizes; I will certainly have a look and I encourage others to do so too.

One of Gordon Aikman's main achievements was the doubling of the number of MND specialist nurses. We now have an extra £2.5 million a year, ensuring that all specialist nurses are funded by the NHS. That is a really strong legacy from Gordon. His strength of looking beyond himself to strive for others was an inspiring story of courage and tenacity.

Members in the chamber today and others elsewhere this week have shared through MND Scotland's awareness campaign their own stories that emphasise the day-to-day reality of living with MND. One of the most tragic effects of the condition is the loss of the ability to speak. Being able to communicate and having freedom of expression is a basic human right that we take for granted.

We have legislated to place on NHS boards a duty, supported by Scottish Government guidance, to provide communication equipment to people who cannot speak or have difficulty with speaking. Technology such as speak unique is proving to be invaluable in supporting people to continue to communicate. Christina McKelvie told us about how Dennis Dick used such technology at yesterday's parliamentary reception for MND so that he could eloquently share his experiences using his own voice. Dennis and other people who use communication equipment tell us that it is vital that people do not just get a voice but get their own voice back, which can be very powerful indeed.

We have provided £200,000 of funding to the Euan MacDonald centre voice bank research project to pilot voice banking in the NHS. Voice banking enables people's voices to be used to build personalised synthetic voices for communication equipment when speech becomes difficult. That is evidence that innovation remains crucial in supporting people to live with MND and that research is essential for the development of new and effective approaches to the diagnosis and treatment of neuroprogressive conditions.

Kezia Dugdale made an important point about the medical research portal. The chief scientist office has communicated concerns to the UK Government on the potential impact on research mobility, clinical trial regulations and funding shortfalls. I am happy to keep her informed as we continue to raise those issues.

We hosted a research event earlier in the year, as we remain committed to working with partners to attract new clinical trials to Scotland. My response to Brian Whittle is that we will do whatever we can to help in that regard. The work of Doddie Weir and his campaign in that space is fantastic.

Since 2015, we have invested more than £750,000 in MND research, including £240,000 for a second clinical academic fellowship in MND research, which is being delivered in partnership with MND Scotland. Earlier this week, I announced more information about the fellowship. This time last year, we announced the Gordon Aikman scholarship programme, which opens again today for applications.

Beyond the investment that we have made in research and specialist care, we have acted on other pledges that will have great impact on the lives of those with MND and those close to them who are coping with the condition. We have provided funding to support the implementation of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, which is important. Indeed, 1 April saw the extension to carers of new rights to support and information and to be heard in decisions about support for those they look after. As Miles Briggs mentioned, we have also legislated to extend free personal care to those under 65. That will come into effect on 1 April 2019 and will help people with MND.

Christina McKelvie mentioned the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, which the Parliament passed earlier this year. That is the first step in building our own social security system—one that is based on dignity, fairness and respect. The central principle of our approach is to ensure that terminally ill individuals are provided with the support that they need, when they need it. Christina McKelvie spoke about Jeane Freeman's commitments in that area for people with MND.

We also continue to strive for improvements in the delivery of our health and social care services. We challenge healthcare professionals to ask what is important to the person receiving care and to engage in shared decision making about treatment options. Listening to service users and providers is instrumental in getting that right, and that is why our first national action plan on neurological conditions is being co-produced with clinicians, the third sector and those who live with conditions such as MND. I thank everyone for their continued support for that work.

We have gathered evidence in order to understand the prevalence of neurological conditions and the needs of people living with those conditions, and to establish the configuration of services. This week, we are holding three events to share our findings so far and to discuss priorities for inclusion in the draft action plan, which we will consult on later this year.

We have also been working closely with Healthcare Improvement Scotland as it reviews its standards of care for neurological conditions so that people will know what to expect when it comes to the quality of care that they should receive in healthcare settings.

I thank those who have allowed their personal stories to be shared. MND touches the lives of many families across the country. This year's awareness campaign highlights progress but is also about culture change and building on what our society does to understand the condition and support others to live their lives well. As a Government, we will continue to work with partners across areas such as health, social care, welfare and housing to enact that transformation for people with neurological conditions such as MND.

13:29

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Provisional Outturn 2017-18

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. The next item of business is a statement by Derek Mackay on the provisional budget outturn for 2017-18. The cabinet secretary will take questions after his statement.

14:30

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution (Derek Mackay): I welcome the opportunity to update Parliament on the provisional budget outturn for the 2017-18 financial year. The provisional figures that I am announcing today are set against a backdrop of unprecedented change in Scotland's fiscal landscape. The Scotland Act 2012, the Scotland Act 2016 and the fiscal framework have fundamentally changed the sources of funding that underpin our spending, and have introduced significant new devolved financial powers.

One example of the changes is the new Scotland reserve arrangements, which were brought in by the Scotland Act 2016 to replace the previous budget exchange mechanism and cash reserve facilities. The new reserve supports the Scottish Government in smoothing all types of spending across financial years, thereby assisting management of tax volatility and determining the timing of expenditure. The Scotland Act 2016 also increased our borrowing limits to £450 million a year: we have made full use of that facility in 2017-18.

Looking forward, the Scottish Government's "Scotland's Fiscal Outlook: The Scottish Government's Five Year Financial Strategy", which is its first medium-term financial strategy, was published on 31 May. The MTFS explains the fiscal framework and funding arrangements that the Scottish Government now operates within. It outlines our approach to financial management and fiscal rules, and sets out a range of possible funding scenarios for the Scottish budget over the next five years. It also details our key policy priorities and approach to supporting Scotland's economy. The MTFS does not provide detailed budget allocations—that will form part of our annual budget process—but I have set out in the strategy our responsible approach to financial planning and fiscal rules, which will allow us to invest in the economy and protect essential public services.

Alongside the MTFS publication, the Scottish Fiscal Commission published an updated set of economic and fiscal forecasts, which were used to

underpin the modelling in the MTFS. Those forecasts show little change from those that were published by the SFC in February 2018 as part of the Budget (Scotland) (No 2) Bill process, but they show a downgrading of the SFC's income tax forecasts across the period that the MTFS covers.

The new national performance framework, which has been launched, sets out our vision for a more successful and inclusive Scotland. The framework was developed following consultation of the public, trade unions, business organisations, local government and civic and voluntary sector organisations. The framework includes 11 key outcomes that we want to achieve for Scotland.

I turn to the 2017-18 provisional outturn. Under the current devolution settlement, the Scottish Parliament is not permitted to overspend its budget. As a consequence, we have consistently adopted a position of controlling public expenditure to ensure that we live within the budget control limits that apply. I can report that the provisional expenditure outturn for 2017-18 is £30.9 billion against a fiscal budget of £31.4 billion, which will result in an overall cash variance of £453 million. Of that variance, £358 million relates to fiscal resource expenditure and £84 million to fiscal capital. The remaining £11 million relates to financial transactions funding, which is ring-fenced to meet the costs of loans or equity investment to private entities outside the public sector.

I have already notified Parliament of my plans to generate underspends of £235 million to carry forward to 2018-19 as part of the budget that was approved by Parliament earlier this year. The total variance also includes £100 million that was allocated to the Scottish Government by Her Majesty's Treasury one year earlier than expected. That relates to the new social security agency set-up costs and is carried forward to 2018-19 in full through the Scotland reserve. Taken together, the items that are already committed in the 2018-19 spending plans account for £335 million of the overall £453 million cash variance.

I turn to devolved taxes. I am pleased to inform Parliament that, for the second year running, income has increased. Total provisional income from land and buildings transaction tax and Scottish landfill tax is £706 million, which is £50 million above initial budget forecasts and represents an increase of £73 million, or 12 per cent, year on year. The £50 million surplus income from devolved taxes again forms part of the overall £453 million variance and will be added to and set aside in the Scotland reserve.

I am also taking a prudent approach to ensuring that, when the Government provides guarantees, the annual fees are set aside in the Scotland reserve as a contingency measure against calls

being made on them. In 2017-18, the total was £2 million.

After taking into account social security funding, the planned carry forward for the 2018-19 budget, surplus tax receipts and fees for guarantees, there is a remaining underspend of £66 million that is not yet committed to expenditure. That modest sum, which represents just 0.2 per cent of the overall fiscal budget, will also be carried through the Scotland reserve and will be available to support management of future budget volatility, which is a key feature of the new world that we live in with the devolution of powers as set out in the Scotland Acts.

Finally, and in addition to that, there is a provisional non-cash underspend of £123 million. The non-cash budget is used for technical accounting adjustments such as depreciation and impairments, and cannot be used to fund public services. Of course, that represents no loss of spending power to the Government.

I move on to Scotland's economic outlook. The potential economic impact of Brexit will be a factor in the tax revenues that are likely to be raised in Scotland, and in future spending decisions. The uncertainties surrounding what the final Brexit deal will look like, specifically in areas such as future access to European Union funding programmes, are hampering economic growth and further investment in Scotland. The Scottish Fiscal Commission is clear that Brexit will have a negative impact on the Scottish economy by reducing productivity, trade and migration. According to all independent forecasters, Brexit uncertainty is the key factor affecting economic growth forecasts. The pace of growth over the next five years is expected to be below historical trends, with gross domestic product growth of between 0.7 per cent and 1.4 per cent in 2018, although it is expected to increase in 2019.

However, Scotland leads the way on many key economic indicators, having the fastest productivity growth in the United Kingdom, more foreign direct investment than the rest of the UK outside London, and growth in research and development spending and international exports. Scotland also has the highest proportion of employees being paid at least the living wage, and it outperforms the rest of the UK on female and youth employment.

There is also good news regarding future tax revenues, with the Scottish Fiscal Commission forecasting that land and buildings transaction tax revenues will be £26 million higher in 2018-19, at £614 million, and that they will increase over the life of the medium-term financial strategy. Landfill tax income is forecast to rise next year by £8 million, but it will fall over the next five years due to

our commitment to move waste from going to landfill to being incinerated.

Despite the challenging economic environment, we have more than £4 billion of infrastructure investment planned for 2018-19, which will support 22,000 jobs directly and up to 40,000 in total, and we have an ambitious programme worth £20 billion for the current session of Parliament. We will use that funding to invest in key infrastructure projects, including £1 billion on city region deals across the country, £340 million of initial capitalisation for the Scottish national investment bank, superfast broadband being brought to every home and business by 2021, and a 70 per cent increase in research and development investment.

The annual Scottish Government consolidated accounts and a statement of total outturn for the financial year 2017-18 against the final budget for the Scottish Administration as a whole will be provided to the Scottish Parliament later this year. All the figures that I am reporting to Parliament today remain provisional, as they are subject to change pending completion of the 2017-18 audit.

In conclusion, the 2017-18 provisional outturn results show that, once again, this Government has prudently and competently managed Scotland's finances. The prudent management of our 2017-18 budget and the new financial powers have been delivered against the backdrop of uncertainty around the UK's exit from the EU and the UK Government's continued austerity measures. I commend the figures to Parliament.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement, which shows an overall underspend of £453 million. The finance secretary is, of course, anxious to stress what an insignificant sum that is, but it is worth noting that it is higher than the total cost of setting up a new independent state, according to his party's growth commission report.

The Office for National Statistics has today advised that the UK deficit for 2017-18 was just 1.9 per cent of GDP, which is the lowest level since 2001-02. That is testament to the success of the UK Government's fiscal policy, which has been opposed at every turn by the Scottish National Party, which said that the policy would never work. It has been proved wrong.

Moreover, that record at UK level stands in stark contrast to the situation in Scotland, in which the Scottish Fiscal Commission has downgraded its forecast for tax revenues by £1.7 billion over the next four years, and by nearly £400 million in the current year. Unless the situation improves, that will leave a black hole in the current year's budget that will have to be filled in the financial year 2021-22. In that context, the finance secretary's decision

to transfer £66 million to the Scotland reserve against that contingency is prudent, but it comes nowhere near filling the gap that is forecast by the commission.

What additional steps will the cabinet secretary take to ensure that his successor in office in three years does not have to carry the can for this Government's failings? Does he accept that, if the economy were to grow at even the same rate as the rest of the United Kingdom's, there would be hundreds of millions of pounds extra to spend this year instead of resources being diverted to fill up reserves as the cabinet secretary is having to do?

Derek Mackay: I thank Murdo Fraser for his vote of confidence that I will at least get through the next three years and the next three budgets, and continue in office. I welcome that vote of confidence, which is the nicest thing that Murdo Fraser has ever said about me.

To answer his specific questions in all seriousness, I say that we will watch the Scottish Fiscal Commission forecast. The commission will have more data and will revisit its forecast as we approach the next big fiscal event, which will be the Scottish budget following the UK budget. It is right to be prudent with our resources and it is right to invest in our reserves. There are limitations on use of reserves, but considering the volatility that we all now understand and the constraints in the fiscal framework, it is right to ensure that we have reserves to draw on in the event of forecast errors or negative effects.

Murdo Fraser also touched on efforts to stimulate the economy in my budget for 2018-19. That is what I have tried to do with investment in the economy, including the 64 per cent uplift for the economy brief and a range of interventions to try to stimulate economic growth. All forecasters and economists are pointing to Brexit uncertainty as being the main challenge to the UK's and Scotland's economies. The UK Government could remedy that, of course, by giving us greater certainty on the Brexit question; our respective positions are well rehearsed in that regard.

As to the further measures that I will take, prudent financial planning will ensure that we have the necessary resources, and I will consider what other levers we might require in the future, for example the borrowing powers, if there is such a requirement, through the fiscal framework, from forecast error. The Office for Budget Responsibility will revisit the forecasts, as will the SFC, based on the latest data and information, which should put us in a stronger and more informed position as we approach the next budget.

When going through the budget process, I was clear on what the overall underspend would be. Some matters came late in the financial year,

including some Barnett consequentials, and there are other elements of budget-spend prudence, such as the request by HM Treasury to take the £100 million for social security implementation early in the financial year but not to spend it until it is required, which would not be in the previous financial year but in this and future financial years. I have taken all my financial decisions in a prudent and balanced way and will continue to do so.

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement.

The £453 million underspend that was announced today in the outturn statement is nothing short of a scandal. The outturn statement shows a gross mismanagement of the budget by Derek Mackay. It is Mr Mackay's job to spend Scotland's budget to support Scotland's communities. It is not his job to hold the money in the St Andrew's house bank account. It is totally unacceptable that, just yards from the Scottish Parliament, homeless people are sleeping in doorways while nearly £500 million of available cash lies dormant in the Scottish National Party Government slush fund. Will the cabinet secretary apologise to the 30 local communities that have had their libraries closed this year, the many patients abandoned on waiting lists awaiting hospital treatment and the thousands of local government workers who have lost their jobs?

Derek Mackay: There are a few key points there. I appreciate James Kelly's attempts to put some colour into the outturn report. Unfortunately for Mr Kelly, while it is true to say that every penny of the underspend that is planned to be carried into the next financial year will not be lost to Scotland, that was not the case under previous Labour Administrations, which handed money back to the Treasury. I am not handing money back to the Treasury.

The statement shows prudent management of our finances. Mr Kelly made poor choices in the examples that he gave. There is no underspend in the homelessness budget. Local government had an enhanced settlement, in part because of the negotiations that other parties—specifically, the Greens—engaged in constructively. Similarly, the national health service had an uplift in the settlement, taking it to record amounts.

I have been very clear about the managed underspend. I am surprised that James Kelly did not welcome the fact that we have collected more tax than we were forecast to do, and so were able to apply that to the Scotland reserve, too.

All of that represents the strong budget for which I got approval in Parliament. That is in sharp contrast to the incompetent, incoherent Labour proposition that could barely be called a budget,

which unravelled before Mr Kelly had barely found his feet.

The Presiding Officer: I have 11 more members wishing to ask a question on the statement.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Given the way in which the fiscal framework operates, and the tax reconciliation process in particular, we need to stop viewing the annual outturn statement as a stand-alone snapshot of one year in isolation and start to view it as showing the picture in the context of the years ahead. Given that and given the cabinet secretary's emphasis on the tax policy generating more revenue than was predicted, we will have to ensure that, as more use is made of devolved tax policy, we are identifying and mitigating the risk of tax avoidance, particularly if we are to ensure that future annual outturn statements show tax policy generating the revenue that is needed for public services. What action is the Government taking to identify the risks of tax avoidance and to prevent it?

Derek Mackay: We require Revenue Scotland to do that in relation to the devolved taxes and we work closely with Revenue Scotland on that. Revenue Scotland has particular policies and enforcement action in respect of tax avoidance and has been very proactive in relation to land and buildings transaction tax and landfill tax.

We rely on Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs for income tax. That has been discussed in committee. We have a service level agreement. There is also a general avoidance rule. I would like to see that rolled out to domestic rates, too, and we will be making proposals on that.

I agree with the spirit of Patrick Harvie's comments. We have plans in place to tackle the issue, although we continue to rely on HMRC.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission's latest analysis of tax behaviours shows that its understanding was pretty accurate. We have to look closely at the advice on tax behaviours when setting tax policy. Enforcement and compliance are critical.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The Scottish Fiscal Commission's £1.7 billion downgrade must be causing the finance secretary sleepless nights, which is probably why he mentioned the reserve five times in his statement without telling us how much is in the reserve. I think that the Parliament will want to make a judgment as to whether purposely holding back £235 million is wise, so can he tell us how much is in the reserve?

Derek Mackay: It is £192 million unallocated.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I can say with greater confidence today

than I could yesterday that I am the relevant parliamentary liaison officer. There has been much fanfare from the Tories about the £2 billion increase to the Scottish budget. Has the cabinet secretary had any confirmation from the Treasury that that is a net increase in funding, or might it be offset by cuts elsewhere?

Derek Mackay: This is further to the question that was asked at First Minister's questions. On seeing the announcements, I have sought the figures from the Treasury. I have some indication of a number for the consequential for NHS spending, but anyone who understands the fiscal framework will also understand that how the money is raised is a key factor, so I need to understand how that money is being raised. If it is being raised through income tax that relates to us, the increase may not be the £2 billion that has been announced. That is why I have sought more information from the Treasury. I have not yet got a commitment that there is £2 billion net for the NHS in Scotland, but I continue to pursue the matter.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): The cabinet secretary talks as if Brexit is the biggest single drag on economic growth in Scotland, but Brexit is happening to the whole of the UK, not just to Scotland, so why is the Scottish economy continuing to underperform that of the UK as a whole? Just today, this Parliament's Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee said in its new report that, in the SNP's Scotland, GDP growth rates are marginal, productivity is low and wages are stagnant. How much of that is the cabinet secretary going to accept responsibility for?

Derek Mackay: The UK Government does not get to walk away from responsibility for macroeconomic policy. It has conceded the point recently, and after that concession it would be nice to see some actions on its part. I have outlined a range of actions in the medium-term financial strategy and in the Government's economic policies on what we want to do to stimulate the economy. It is not just my opinion. The Fraser of Allander institute, the Scottish Fiscal Commission and many others—indeed all others—have said that Brexit is a huge issue.

On the point about disproportionate impact and subdued growth in Scotland, the oil and gas downturn was in large measure responsible for some of the effects on productivity and GDP. The forward look on productivity relates to working-age population and participation, and the critical issue is ensuring that we have appropriate numbers of people of working age to be able to contribute by way of output and taxation. That is why migration is so important.

There are many factors on which the UK Government can engage. On those for which the Scottish Government is responsible, we are taking

action, but there is a range of factors that mean that the UK and Scotland need to do more on productivity. We are only seeking the powers so to do. I look forward to further economic forecasts that I think will show a more optimistic picture of the economy, as the Fraser of Allander institute has done just this week.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): What measures is the Scottish Government taking to provide certainty for our vital public services during the turbulent and uncertain times ahead as a result of leaving the European Union?

Derek Mackay: We are doing a lot of work in preparation. The Scottish Government has a clear position on staying in the single market and the customs union, and we are working on our own preparedness in relation to that. For me, stability, stimulus and sustainability for our public services all go hand in hand, to ensure that people can expect the best possible services in what has been, and will continue to be, a turbulent time, until the UK Government gets its act together on Brexit.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Independent analysis this week shows that, in real terms, the SNP's spending on education has fallen by 7.5 per cent since 2010, even when pupil equity funding is included, although it is supposed to be additional to core provision. How can the cabinet secretary justify hoarding an underspend on this scale when our schools are struggling for resources right now and our teachers are so demoralised by pay erosion that they are considering strike action?

Derek Mackay: I tried to explain the situation with the figures that I outlined. Some of the underspend was a planned underspend, some of it was the result of an increase in tax revenues and some of it was from other matters such as transfers between capital and resource. However, we have approved budgets that have allocated more to local government and more to education specifically. The most recent figures that I have seen show that education budgets are up because of the budgets that I have delivered in the Scottish Government. All those budgets were, of course, opposed by the Labour Party. That includes the £0.75 billion commitment to tackle the attainment gap. That was also opposed by Iain Gray and his colleagues in the Labour Party.

We are delivering competent, balanced and responsible budgets that will stimulate our economy and protect our valued public services.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Mr Kelly and Mr Gray seem to misunderstand what an underspend means. Will the cabinet secretary clarify whether he is free to spend the £100 million to which he referred on anything that he wants to

spend it on or whether it is very much tied down and, in effect, ring fenced by the Treasury?

Derek Mackay: The Labour Party is now asking me to spend the £100 million on other things, but it would be interesting to see how we would equip a social security agency if the Labour Party wants me to spend that money on anything but a social security agency. I thought that I heard Labour members asking about social security payments at First Minister's question time earlier. We need the infrastructure to be able to make the payments. The Treasury gave the Scottish Government the money early, and we are carrying it over to spend it in the year that it is required to establish the agency. That is prudent, responsible and within the agreement that I have with the Treasury. It adds to the underspend number, but the purpose has been clearly expressed.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The report that was published earlier today by the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee, which looks at the Scottish economy over a six-month inquiry period, concludes that economic growth in Scotland is trailing behind that of the rest of the UK and historical growth trends in Scotland, and that it has done so for a decade, since well before Brexit and the drop in oil prices. Will the finance secretary follow the committee's central recommendation and revise his economic strategy as a matter of urgency?

Derek Mackay: I am sure that Dean Lockhart, being a fair man, will give me time to read the report and reflect on it. I have not read it yet, but I will do so and I will consider its cross-party findings. Of course I will have a look at it and reflect on our economic policy.

We are making a range of economic interventions to support and stimulate economic growth. Unfortunately, most of those interventions were opposed by the Conservative Party in the last Scottish budget. When I asked the Conservatives which strategy they would like me to change, Mr Lockhart said that "inclusive" should be removed from "inclusive growth". I suspect that that recommendation is not in the committee's report, and I will not make that change.

Of course I will read and reflect on the report, and I will take forward what I think can assist our financial and economic strategy.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): To help the Labour Party to understand the issue, will the cabinet secretary confirm that no money is lost to the Scottish budget as a result of any underspend?

Derek Mackay: I again confirm that, unlike what happened in the years in which the Labour Party was in office and handed money back to the Treasury, not a single penny will be lost to the

Scottish exchequer, the Scottish finance minister or the Scottish budget as a consequence of the actions that I have taken.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Today, with the SNP in power, we have learned that Derek Mackay has underspent the Scottish budget for 2017-18 by close to £500 million. That is a staggering figure. We often hear SNP ministers taking pride in having balanced the books, but the reality is that the SNP Government is mismanaging public finances and underfunding public services.

Earlier, Mr Mackay said that the NHS and local services are getting enough cash, but he is well aware of the effect that a lack of resources is having on hospitals such as the Royal Alexandra hospital and councils such as Renfrewshire Council, which are having to roll out parking charges and cut grey bin collections because of a lack of funding. How can Mr Mackay justify that major underspend when services are being underfunded? What lessons will he learn in order to manage our finances properly so that our services get the resources that they need when they need them?

Derek Mackay: Mr Bibby is of course scaremongering, as usual, so I will take what he says with a pinch of salt. The underspend is a fraction of the overall fiscal resource. By law, I cannot overspend, so we have to manage our resources very carefully. Not a penny will be lost to Scotland. Over the course of the budget negotiations, we discussed how the underspend would be spent in the current financial year. In addition, under the budget that the Government voted for but which the Labour Party voted against there is more money for local government and the health service. The budget also lifted the pay cap and included many other interventions. Renfrewshire Council, under SNP leadership, is delivering new and improved local government services. I am sure that Neil Bibby will reflect on his negative scaremongering once again.

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary outline what measures the Scottish Government is taking to support economic growth and to weather the economic disaster of being dragged out of the European Union?

Derek Mackay: The Scottish Government has expressed to the UK Government, with considerable vindication, the impact that Brexit will have on Scotland's economy. The actions that we are taking include creating the most comprehensive package of business rates relief anywhere in the United Kingdom, increasing spending in the economy portfolio by 64 per cent, increasing investment in business research by 70 per cent, establishing a new national

manufacturing institute for Scotland, capitalisation of the national investment bank and spending £4 billion on infrastructure. Those are just some examples of how the Government is investing to grow our economy in an inclusive way.

World Refugee Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Time is tight, so we will move straight on. The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-12891, in the name of Angela Constance, on world refugee day: supporting people to settle in Scotland.

15:02

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Angela Constance): Yesterday was world refugee day—a day when people around the world gather to acknowledge and pay tribute to all those who have been forced to flee their homes. It is an opportunity for us all to remember the plight of refugees and people who are seeking asylum, and to show them our solidarity, support and understanding.

Yesterday, I had the pleasure of hosting a round-table discussion to mark the first meeting of the new Scots leadership board, along with Councillor Elena Whitham, Sabir Zazai of the Scottish Refugee Council and Professor Alison Phipps of the University of Glasgow. We heard from people from across Scotland who have welcomed and supported refugees over many years. Some of them came to Scotland as refugees themselves and were able to offer the lived experience that is so vital for our learning of the best ways that we can support people. All of them have worked tirelessly to help people to settle in a new country. During the round-table discussion, there was real commitment and real compassion, coupled with an honest reflection on what has worked well and what could be done better. Absolutely no quarter is given to complacency, as we consider how we work together collectively with our partners to do more.

The creation of the leadership board is a new innovation of the second new Scots refugee integration strategy, which I was delighted to launch in January. The strategy continues Scotland's ground-breaking approach to integration and is the product of partnership working between the Scottish Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Refugee Council and many other organisations across the public and third sectors, as well as communities and individuals.

A year ago, I launched an engagement process to inform the development of the second new Scots strategy. Our aim was to ensure that the new strategy kept at its heart refugees and people who are seeking asylum. We sought the help of community groups and other organisations across Scotland to hold engagement events, and we

asked them to talk about what is important in helping people to settle into their new communities and to provide feedback to inform the strategy.

The response to the new Scots engagement exceeded all our expectations. Over three months last summer, more than 2,000 people took part, including over 700 refugees and people seeking asylum, in over 90 engagement events. I thank everyone who gave of their time and talents to organise and participate in events and to contribute their ideas and experience. The engagement feedback was crucial to ensuring that the new Scots strategy reflects lived experience.

I am pleased that we will publish an in-depth analysis of the engagement feedback. That report provides a rich source of evidence for those who are working to implement the new Scots strategy and for anyone else with an interest in integration. One of the responses quoted in the new Scots engagement document comes directly from someone with lived experience. They said:

"We don't simply seek food and shelter but a full life and a proper identity beyond the label of asylum seeker or refugee."

The report highlights in particular the importance of language and how fundamental it is for communication and understanding. That is why language is a new theme for the second new Scots strategy.

Over many years, refugees have made their homes in Scotland through two world wars and then from Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s and, more recently, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Syria, to name just a few. Like anyone else coming to Scotland, they have brought their skills, expertise and cultures. They have shared them with us and we are all richer for that.

We believe that integration begins from day 1 of arrival. For many refugees, employment is a crucial part of the process of settling in a new country. However, refugees often face barriers in accessing employment, especially employment that matches their skills. I am delighted to be working with the Bridges Programmes and other partners on the refugee doctors project, which supports people who were qualified doctors in their countries of origin to achieve the necessary registration to progress to working in the national health service in Scotland. I am equally pleased that we have been able to expand the project this year to include dentists. There is a real appetite among the new Scots partners to engage more with the world of work and the economic players, so that we can work collectively to ensure that there are more real and lasting opportunities for people who come to make a new life in Scotland.

Getting to know people and building social connections are also an important part of settling in a new country. Initiatives such as the cup of tea with a refugee campaign, which is led by the Scottish Refugee Council, give people the chance to get together, share their experiences and build friendships. Yesterday, I had the pleasure of attending a cup of tea event with young people who have been supported by the Scottish Guardianship Service. I was delighted to hear from the young people about their lives and experiences and their hopes and aspirations, which are very much looking to the future.

Some of the young people even shared with me their favourite Scots words. I am not quite sure, Presiding Officer, whether I am allowed to say the word “bahookie” in the chamber, but I have said it now. I had never thought of phrases such as “going for the messages” or “awright pal” as particularly Scottish or Glaswegian, so that shows that learning is always a two-way process. I look forward to meeting some of those incredible young people again at a great event that is planned for Rothesay this Saturday.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angela Constance: Yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Greene, I hope that you are not intervening to ask for an explanation of that word. I think that we all know it.

Jamie Greene: I warmly welcome the excellent projects that the cabinet secretary has talked about. What English language training is available to people in a more formal setting that will help them make that move to new careers?

Angela Constance: Scotland has a strategy to teach English to speakers of other languages that goes as far as 2020. In the most recent financial year, £1.4 million was invested in community planning partnerships and, moving forward, that resource has been placed in the college sector to ensure greater stability and to enhance opportunities and the recognition of qualifications. For by that, we have funded interesting pilots on peer learning. Such an approach is proposed not to replace English lessons in a more formalised education sector, but in recognition of the importance of offering more community-based or peer-led English language opportunities, which reach into communities.

Young people are at the heart of refugee festival Scotland this year. That is highly appropriate during this year of young people but, of course, refugee festival is a festival for everyone. The festival showcases the vibrancy, creativity and passion of refugees who live in Scotland and it gives people a platform from which to speak, perform and share their talents. Not only are the

celebrations great fun but many events challenge us to think about the experiences of refugees. Above all, the festival provides a chance for people to get to know one another better and to break down barriers, which is crucial.

I know that many people, particularly those in the asylum process, continue to face big challenges. Poverty and destitution are far too prevalent and are a barrier to integration. Last year, the Equalities and Human Rights Committee brought much-needed focus to the issues of destitution, asylum and insecure immigration status in Scotland.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am grateful that the minister has moved on to talk about people who are still in the asylum system, which matters just as much as integration for refugees. The Scottish Government has offered support to my constituent, Duc Nguyen, who in recent days was subject to detention and the threat of deportation. Will the minister join me in congratulating the many, many campaigners who worked hard to ensure that—we hope later today—we will be able to welcome him back to Glasgow? Will she continue to offer support to people in such situations?

Angela Constance: I will indeed offer Mr Harvie, his constituent and all the campaigners who were involved my continued support and my congratulations on what has been achieved thus far. It is imperative that we challenge the notion of a two-tier asylum system, which is absolutely unacceptable.

The Scottish Government is working with partners to develop a strategy that involves practical actions to mitigate some of the worst impacts on people who are at the highest risk. However, it remains the case that we are unable to tackle the root cause of the issue, which is United Kingdom asylum and immigration legislation and policies that seem to have destitution built into them.

The provision of accommodation and advice services for asylum seekers continues to cause me deep concern. I have made the case to Home Office ministers for public or third sector provision, where profit is not a motive, and I am extremely disappointed that the procurement processes for new contracts have not supported that option. We will try to ensure that the new contractors, whoever they might be, understand the Scottish context and legislation and deliver services that support people as they rebuild their lives.

The success of the Syrian resettlement programme shows what can be achieved when programmes are well co-ordinated and funded, with a focus on integration support. Scotland has received around 2,300 refugees under the

programme and we remain committed to welcoming people.

The Scottish Government will continue to do what it can to take a holistic approach to all refugees and people who seek asylum, but the tailored support that is part of the resettlement programme is in stark contrast to the complete lack of support for people in the asylum system. Hence, as I said to Mr Harvie, we have a two-tier system, which is utterly unacceptable.

People who have been forced to seek protection in Scotland should feel welcome, safe and able to participate in our society. As the new Scots strategy has shown, there are opportunities to take positive steps when we co-ordinate action, informed first and foremost by the experience of refugees and communities.

I end by quoting the United Nations secretary general, António Guterres, who said:

“This is not about sharing a burden. It is about sharing a global responsibility, based not only on the broad idea of our common humanity but also on the very specific obligations of international law. The root problems are war and hatred”.

The root problems are most certainly not those people who flee war, hatred and violence.

I move,

That the Parliament commemorates World Refugee Day; welcomes people who have sought refuge in Scotland from war and persecution; celebrates the contribution that refugees and asylum seekers have made to Scotland; agrees with the key principle of the New Scots strategy that integration begins from day one of arrival; calls for a more humane asylum system that treats people with dignity and respect at all times and enables them to rebuild their lives and fulfil their potential, and thanks the local authorities, third sector, community and faith organisations and the many people across Scotland who are supporting refugees and asylum seekers as they settle into their new lives.

15:15

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to open the debate for the Scottish Conservatives in support of world refugee day, and I welcome and echo much of what the cabinet secretary said in her opening remarks.

Every minute of every day, 20 people leave everything behind to escape war, persecution or terror. By the time we have finished this debate, 2,400 people will have fled their homes. I thank our armed forces for the humanitarian role that they play in rescuing and protecting refugees, particularly the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, who continue to patrol the Mediterranean, rescuing migrants and refugees while targeting the human traffickers who profit from their misery.

For refugees, leaving home is not a choice. Many have to leave behind everything but what

they can carry, and sometimes they run without even the chance to say goodbye to the people whom they love. World refugee day honours the strength and courage of refugees and encourages public awareness and support.

On their journeys to find safety, refugees will endure cold, hunger, trauma, despair, disease, violence and loss. The only thing that many carry with them is the hope that they will find peace and safety once more. With that hope comes great sadness and the reminder that they have left their homes—and many will never return. It is our role to provide that hope.

As a national Government, local authority, or small community, it is our duty to offer the hand of friendship to those who have lost their homes and possibly their families. Indeed, family plays a major role in all this. Material things can be replaced, but the people whom we love are essential to our wellbeing and we should do everything that we can to ensure that families stay together.

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): Will Michelle Ballantyne's party be supporting Angus MacNeil MP's Refugees (Family Reunion) (No 2) Bill, which will bring families back together and bring unaccompanied children back together with their parents?

Michelle Ballantyne: I have not seen the wording of that bill yet, but we will certainly look at it very carefully. That leads me nicely into saying that I am pleased to hear that the UK Government will continue its mandate resettlement scheme post-Brexit. Under that project, children who are recognised as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees can join close family members in the UK. The UK Government is a strong supporter of that, having issued more than 24,000 family reunion visas in the past five years, as well as granting asylum or some other form of leave to more than 9,000 children in the past year alone.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Michelle Ballantyne: I would rather not at the moment, because I am going to run out of time.

Earlier this year, the UK's vulnerable person resettlement programme reached the halfway point in its commitment to resettle 20,000 people, including 3,000 children, by 2020, with 10,538 refugees already settled in the UK.

As the cabinet secretary indicated, arriving in an unfamiliar country, not speaking the language, having no belongings and having been potentially traumatised from their experiences is not the end of the journey for families. Integrating into a new

society is challenging, and we show our humanity and care by recognising that challenge and ensuring that there is support for every step of the journey until the families have found their feet in our communities. I am therefore delighted that, on Monday, the Home Office awarded the promised £1 million fund to the civil society organisation Reset to provide training and support to help communities across the UK that want to welcome refugees through the community sponsorship resettlement initiative.

I am proud of the role that the United Kingdom is playing here. Contributions are being made at all levels of society, whether it is the work of the UK Government, the welcome new Scots strategy to help integrate refugees, or the acts of individual communities.

Right now, in Galashiels in the Scottish Borders, an event called "Reach Out 2018" is taking place, which is where I would be if I had been playing hockey. The event, organised by TD1 Youth Hub in Galashiels, the Scottish Refugee Council and Volunteer Centre Borders, is showcasing the fabulous work that has been taking place to bring together young people through a project that is led by TD1 Youth Hub, which started in September 2017. The project has grown in success through the confidence building and skills that the young people have gained from each other on a weekly basis. It brings together Syrian and local Galashiels young people, who regularly attend other TD1 activities, to share experiences and learn together. For many, what started as volunteering support for refugee families has become real, deep friendships.

The Scottish Borders has welcomed five Syrian refugee families to the area, all of whom are making considerable efforts to integrate into their new communities and are overcoming cultural and language barriers to do so. Support for them has been on a truly multipartnership level, involving council services, local schools, health services, partner agencies, registered social landlords, Borders College, the Department for Work and Pensions, jobcentres, Skills Development Scotland, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, voluntary bodies and local communities and volunteers.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): At the start of her speech, Michelle Ballantyne mentioned that, by the end of this debate, there will be 2,400 more refugees in the world. As she comes to the end of her speech, will she reflect on that figure being about the same as the number of children whom the UK Government abandoned when it ended its commitment early to the Dubs scheme?

Michelle Ballantyne: I hear the member's point, but the point is that, if we are to bring people here, we have to be able to support them

effectively and make sure that this is a journey and not an end. Most people who are made refugees do not want to leave their countries or homes. We also have to work hard abroad to make sure that they can return to their homes.

I want to mention two people who I know have done a huge amount of work in this area: Hamed and Abdul. Their contributions to Volunteer Centre Borders and their work with refugees have been immense, and they have helped tremendously in the resettlement process. Many people consider that, without them, the whole system in the Borders would struggle. Their work has not only improved the lives of the refugees coming to the Borders, but served to enrich the lives of those who have been involved in the process. It has prepared the Scottish Borders to take up to 10 refugee families. I know that, when they arrive, they will be immensely heartened to see how the families who have gone before them have integrated and settled into the community. I hope that that will make their transition much easier.

Groups such as Volunteer Centre Borders help to reduce the risk of social isolation and allow refugees to connect with people in the communities in which they are settling, which is particularly important for children and young people.

We must ensure that all those welcomed into communities in Scotland are able to live free from persecution and as valued members of our communities. Our job is to make sure that they have new homes; our job is also to make sure that, if they want to return to their own homes in the countries where they came from, we do everything that we can to enable that.

I move amendment S5M-12891.2, to insert at end:

"; recognises the great efforts that Scotland and the rest of the UK have undertaken in providing funding and support to refugees; acknowledges the Scottish Government on meeting its refugee housing target three years early; understands that the UK has committed to taking in 20,000 refugees fleeing war-torn Syria, including 900 unaccompanied children from Europe; further understands that the UK remains the second largest bilateral donor in humanitarian assistance in the world; notes that the UK Government has pledged over £2.3 billion in aid to Syria alone; further notes that the UK Government has allocated funding of over £420 million through its Official Development Assistance budget and the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme; underlines that the Home Office provides per capita funding to Scottish local authorities to assist with refugee resettlement, and pledges to use its power to ensure that both the Scottish and UK governments continue to maintain their high standards in welcoming refugees and providing funding support to Syria refugees."

15:23

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for holding this debate to celebrate world refugee day. I also thank the Scottish Refugee Council and Oxfam Scotland for their briefings, as well as the tireless work that they and others do to support people in crisis. In addition, I acknowledge the work of our local authorities and third sector partners across Scotland for their part in supporting refugee and asylum seekers to settle in the community. I am sure that we will hear lots more from members about that work throughout the debate.

In Parliament today, we join millions of people around the world who, on world refugee day yesterday, showed support to people displaced by conflict, violence and persecution. At a time when record numbers of people are being displaced, when we see countless photographs in the media of the horrific conditions that asylum seekers endure in their quest for safety, when there is headline after headline about hostile policies—from turning away rescue boats to separating children from their parents—from Governments across the world, we must come together and say that refugees are welcome here. We must show unity and ensure that that message is heard by all displaced people living in Scotland.

Scotland has a strong record of welcoming refugees and asylum seekers, and around 10 per cent of the UK's dispersed asylum population lives in Glasgow. I am proud of the on-going work in my region, Central Scotland, to settle Syrian refugees, as part of the Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement programme. As a councillor in Hamilton, I assisted with the resettlement activities in the early part of the programme. Thirty-two families have been resettled in South Lanarkshire between 2015 and 2018, but more must be done, so I was pleased to hear the council commit to resettling a further 120 Syrian refugees this year.

There has also been some amazing grass-roots community work in Lanarkshire, such as the work of the wonderful volunteers behind the from Wishaw to Calais project, who gather supplies and fundraise to transport those supplies to refugees who were encamped at the so-called jungle camp in France. A lot of positive work is going on in Scotland to show that we are a nation that welcomes refugees.

It is important to celebrate and share the good news stories and ensure that they are known because, although there is undoubtedly an abundance of good will towards settling refugees, it would be wrong to deny that those who seek refuge and attempt to rebuild their lives here do not still face prejudice and challenge. For example, just last month Syrian refugee Shahbaz Ali was left fighting for his life after a suspected

racially motivated attack just two miles from where we are now. It is shameful and disgusting that that should happen to someone who sought refuge here after fleeing violence in Syria. The violent actions of the perpetrator were quickly condemned by the community, which came together to show their support and raise thousands of pounds for Shahbaz to help him to rebuild his life during his recovery.

The good will of our communities is no doubt remarkable, but we cannot rely on good will alone. Integration requires proper resourcing: for the language courses for refugees who want to learn or improve their English and for the housing and education needs of resettled families. The Scottish Government's contribution via the equality fund is welcome, but local authorities are undoubtedly under increasing financial pressure. The funding crisis must be addressed if we are to ensure that the vital role of local authorities in supporting community cohesion is fulfilled. COSLA reflected that in its briefing to members today.

Earlier this week, I met Sabir Zazai, who is the chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council. The cabinet secretary has already mentioned him. I was also fortunate to get along to Serenity cafe yesterday as part of the cup of tea with a refugee celebrations. I pay tribute to Aberlour for its work on that. When I went in I was asked to come up with a favourite Scottish word—I tried to think of something positive, because there are a few interesting choices. I went for bonnie, which I thought captured the mood of the day. I sat down with two young men who were chatting about their mobile phones—just a normal conversation that we would expect between young people. One of the young men was anxious about his phone and it emerged that he had been separated from his father and the rest of his family in Iran. His friend, who is now settled in Glasgow, was translating for him. It made me realise how important their mobile phones were to those two young men. It is really important that we hear those personal stories, because the scale and depth of the horror, and the human cost of the persecution faced by those seeking refuge, cannot really be conveyed by numbers and statistics.

Although we accept a lot of the Conservative amendment, and although I appreciate the tone that Michelle Ballantyne has taken, we cannot support the amendment, because it fails to recognise that the UK asylum system lacks compassion and humanity. I am reminded of the report that the Equalities and Human Rights Committee published last year—Christina McKelvie has bought a copy along—which talked about driving people in Scotland with insecure immigration status into destitution. The amendment does not reflect that reality, which is why the Scottish Labour Party is unable to support

it. However, we are content to fully support the Government motion and the amendment in the name of Ross Greer.

Scotland has a big role to play in offsetting the worst effects of those damaging policies, some of which we have heard about. Joining up the resources of the public sector and the third sector on devolved competences, including health, education, legal services and some elements of housing, is an important step forward. Provision of accommodation options and advocacy is vital in enabling people to rebuild their lives here. That is why we have lodged our amendment today.

Evaluation is important, because we need to identify and build on good practice. For example, we know that some stuff in South Lanarkshire has worked well, but we need to know what is working well around the rest of the country.

Sabir Zazai, an Afghan refugee who is now, as I said, the chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council, said that the mark of a nation is how it treats the most vulnerable in difficult times. I agree. I would like to celebrate his achievements and the work of everyone working to support refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I am loth to cut members off, but there is no time in hand. I have to be quite cruel at times—not that that is my normal modus operandi. I do not think that you moved your amendment, by the way, Ms Lennon.

Monica Lennon: I move amendment S5M-12891.3, to insert at end:

“; recognises the importance of national and local evaluation of all refugee programmes to identify good practice, and agrees that adequately resourced local authorities play a vital role in supporting community cohesion.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I call Ross Greer to speak to and move amendment S5M-12891.1. Mr Greer, you have six minutes.

15:31

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): It is difficult to comprehend the true scale of the tragedy of someone being forced from their home and having to flee to another country or even another continent to seek help.

The United Nations Refugee Agency estimates that there are more than 28 million refugees and asylum seekers across the world today and an additional 40 million people who are internally displaced. The number of displaced Syrians alone exceeds our total population in Scotland.

For many, the journey to safety is too often a deadly one. Yesterday, *The Guardian* published

the names of 34,361 refugees who have died trying to reach Europe since 1993—and that is only those whose deaths have been reported; we know that many more go unreported. I have stood by the unmarked graves of those whose stories we will never know, who could not even be buried with the dignity of their own names. I have spoken to the rescuers who see wreckage and debris scattered across the Mediterranean and know that they were too late for however many people were lost in tragedies that we were not even aware of.

We are talking about those who drowned after boats capsized; those who suffocated during journeys while they were crammed with hundreds of other desperate people into the holds of vessels that were not even remotely seaworthy; those who were murdered by racists, criminals and slave traders; or those who took their own lives after losing hope. It is all too easy, even for those here, to lose hope in the face of this monumental human misery, but it is our responsibility not to lose hope but to give it.

As the Government motion acknowledges, there are individuals, groups and public bodies across Scotland and the UK who are giving their all to provide that hope. The “New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022” rightly recognises the importance of integration starting from day 1. Every effort must be made to ensure that refugees are welcome here and have the opportunities and support to integrate into Scottish society.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Does the member agree that the best policy is to try to help people to stay in their own country or, if they have to come, to travel the shortest distance possible, so that they are not caught up with smugglers and others who seek to cause them damage?

Ross Greer: I am grateful for the intervention. Many people across the world, such as the many millions suffering in Yemen at the moment, would love the opportunity to stay in their own home, but, because of weapons that the UK Government sold to the Saudi Arabian Government, they do not have the opportunity to do that.

I return to the point about integration. The right to vote is an essential component of that. The ability to choose those who make decisions on our behalf is at the core of who we are as a free democracy. For as long as someone who is a refugee or an asylum seeker is resident here, this is their home, and the decisions that we take in this place, at Westminster and in our council chambers affect them just as much as they affect everyone else—in fact, in many cases they affect them more. If refugees are to be able to integrate fully into Scottish society and if we are to demonstrate that they are truly welcome, they must have the right to vote. That is what the Green

amendment proposes and I sincerely hope that members will support it.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitments, including that made to me in the chamber just a few weeks ago: that it is its intention to propose, in the coming reforms of our electoral system, that we enfranchise all legally resident refugees and asylum seekers as part of broader electoral reform towards residency-based voting. I believe that Richard Leonard made similar commitments for the Labour Party yesterday, and I appreciate Monica Lennon's note of support today. I am also glad that the Labour amendment makes clear the importance of evaluating national and local refugee settlement and integration programmes. We will all be aware of brilliant local work going on that should be shared widely as best practice. I am sure that we are all equally well aware of local councils that could do so much more to dramatically improve the support that they offer if they were better resourced.

Of course, there is only so much that can be done at Scottish or local levels. For the most part, asylum policies remain reserved to Westminster and, under Westminster, British asylum policy has been nothing short of disgraceful. The UK has one of the largest detention centre estates in Europe, with almost half of those detained being asylum seekers facing deportation.

We are not short of reports of instances of human rights abuse in UK detention centres. The situation is so bad that detainees have often resorted to hunger strikes to protest against the inhumane conditions that they are held in. The Conservative Government even blocked a UN special rapporteur from investigating Yarl's Wood detention centre, which predominantly houses women, despite substantial allegations of sexual abuse there. Perhaps a Conservative speaker in today's debate might want to explain that decision.

This is not an issue that is limited to one detention centre. There have been reports of abuse at detention centres all over the country, including at Dungavel in Scotland. The Westminster Home Affairs Select Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into Brook house detention centre over reports of racial abuse, bullying, suicide and self-harm, and detainees going on hunger strike.

The UK continues to detain children, despite pledging to end that in 2010. The numbers are not as high as they were at their peak under Tony Blair, but as we condemn the barbarity of US detention policy, let us not forget that there is little difference in how the UK Government operates in practice and let us not pretend that, as a society, we can call ourselves civilised while detaining children, deporting them back to situations where

their lives are in danger or denying them sanctuary in the first place.

As a bare minimum, a civilised society is one that never abandons children in need. The Tory amendment claims that the UK Government has committed to take in 900 unaccompanied child refugees who are currently in mainland Europe. I would be grateful if Tory members could tell me how many child refugees have actually been resettled or why we should believe in that new target.

This is the same Government that, as I mentioned, made a commitment to take in 3,000 unaccompanied children who were already in Europe, under the Dubs scheme but then, in December 2017, reduced the target to 500 and failed to meet even that target. Thousands of children were abandoned and lost when the UK could have taken them in.

The Conservative amendment refers to the high standard of welcome provided by the UK Government to refugees. Those who have been, or today face being, deported back to their deaths would disagree. The children detained by the UK Government would disagree. The many thousands denied sanctuary in the first place would disagree.

I will not pretend that there is some cosy consensus in this Parliament today when one party here is the party of the very Government that is causing unimaginable suffering to some of the world's most vulnerable people. When the Greens—and many others in this Parliament—say that refugees are welcome here, we mean it. In our struggle in this country to show refugees and asylum seekers the basic and inalienable dignity that they deserve, we are far from finished.

I move amendment S5M-12981.1, to insert at end:

“, and believes that the right to vote is an important component of integration into Scottish society and that refugees and asylum seekers legally resident in Scotland should have the right to vote in all elections and referenda.”

15:37

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful to the Government for the motion for debate. Before I address Scotland's response to the refugee crisis in the world—and it is a crisis; more people are displaced today than at any time since world war two—I want to make reference to something that has come up a couple of times in this debate. That is the treatment of refugees in the United States.

There is an inscription at the base of the statue of liberty which is a poem by Emma Lazarus. It says at one point:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free".

Those words spoke to the American dream of sanctuary, protection and opportunity. The dream was dreamed in more than 6,000 languages in every corner of this planet and, over the past century, it saw the movement of people from all kinds of situations to the United States. It is a dream that was also followed by many Scots.

I think that it is fair to say that that dream has been utterly shattered by Trump's America, with its Muslim ban and its images of law students filing habeas corpus petitions for immigrants at points of entry, and of child refugees from Honduras and El Salvador crying in cages. The flame of liberty is guttering in America right now; the "golden door" that Emma Lazarus described in her poem has been replaced with a prison and a detention centre. We are hearing right-wing commentators such as Ann Coulter refer to those child refugees as child actors coached for the cameras; if there are devils that walk among us, she is one of them.

All told, 68.5 million people are on the move right now, displaced from their countries of origin against their will and for reasons beyond their control. As I said, the number of displaced people is at its highest since world war two. Those people are displaced by dint of politics and persecution, war, poverty, and climate change. We should remember that more and more people are being forced to leave their communities because of the changing weather systems on our planet—changes caused by man.

We need to see the humanity behind those numbers. Each of those numbers is a story and a tragic story at that. That is why the response of our country is so fundamentally important.

We have a proud tradition and history of responding well to crises of that kind—for example, in the Kindertransport in the second world war and in our response to Biafra and, to some degree, Syria. There is justifiable pride in the response of our communities to such situations. However, we do ourselves—and the refugees—a disservice if we are too self-congratulatory. We should remember that for every 10,000 citizens in Germany and Sweden they took in 70 Syrian refugees, yet for every 10,000 citizens in Scotland we took in only four.

We talk about having a hostile environment policy on immigration—that was exemplified in the Windrush scandal—but we are dangling false hope for refugees if they think that they are coming to anything less than a hostile environment. In the debate, a number of points have been made about the UK Government's reversal of the Dubs commitment to bring in 3,000

refugees, which is the main reason for our voting against the Conservative amendment tonight.

As many members will know, I used to work with Aberlour Child Care Trust and in the guardianship service of which we have heard something today. I worked with unaccompanied asylum seekers who were children, and also with child refugees and victims of trafficking. I saw that hostile environment at first hand in the attitude of the UK Border Agency, which said that it started from a presumption of disbelief and set a very high bar on matters such as people proving their age or that they had been victims of rape or torture in their countries of origin.

That insidious reality is particularly damaging to women who come to this country with uncertain immigration status and who are married to abusive spouses, flee those abusive relationships and then find themselves having to raise children without recourse to public funds, which is an absolute outrage. There are also those who are forced to attend for interview in Croydon, without the resources to get there. For children who are victims of trafficking or who are seeking asylum there is no consistency in the application of social work assessments when they get here.

However, it is in the reaction of the right-wing press that we see so much of UK Government policy forged. There are distortions of populism that create fear in our community, and an othering of refugees. Refugees are not here to steal our jobs or to seduce our daughters: they are fleeing the worst places and circumstances on this planet, and they bring with them culture, resilience and skills. If we give them sanctuary, they will repay that a hundredfold.

I close in the same way as I started, with an extract from a poem. "What They did Yesterday Afternoon" is a poem by Warsan Shire, who is British but was born in Kenya to Somali parents. At the end of it she says:

i come from two countries
one is thirsty
the other is on fire
both need water.

later that night
i held an atlas in my lap
ran my fingers across the whole world
and whispered
where does it hurt?

it answered
everywhere
everywhere
everywhere.

That pain is visible on our television screens, in our streets and communities and at points of entry all around the British isles. If compassion is the most important pillar of our human condition, our response, as a country, to this crisis will be the

measure by which our generation is judged. I support the Government's motion. We need to do far more for the refugees we should be looking after.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate, with speeches of six minutes.

15:43

Christina McKelvie (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I normally like to start a debate such as this with an outward-looking and positive tone. I will come on to that soon, but first I simply cannot ignore the inhumanity that the world has witnessed this week in Trump's America, and in the proposals in Italy to round up the Roma. Imagine—although we do not have to, because we can see it on our TV screens—children, toddlers and babies being ripped from the loving arms of their parents and forced into cages. If they happen to be the youngest children, they are put into what are called “tender age shelters”. They are cages, Presiding Officer: let that ring out in this Parliament. The US Government—but not its people, who are calling it out—that once-great bastion and defender of liberty, has been caging children. It is an inhumane and repugnant policy, and one that is mirrored too closely in the UK Government detention centres that I know of.

That “hostile environment” leaves people destitute, as is evidenced in the Equalities and Human Rights Committee's report “Hidden Lives—New Beginnings: Destitution, asylum and insecure immigration status in Scotland”, which the committee published last year and which we are now following up to see whether progress is being made. Theresa May might roll out the red carpet for a right-wing supremacist demagogue who bans Muslims from entry to the US, derides Mexicans, mocks people who have a disability, exploits executive privilege, disregards human rights and now unashamedly dehumanises children—young, defenceless children whose only crime was to seek refuge and shelter—but Scotland is proudly different, and I hope that it will be forever. I hope that the message that will ring loud and clear in Mr Trump's ears when he makes his unwelcome visit is, “Scotland does not agree with you, Mr Trump.” Indeed, I ask our Prime Minister to rescind the invitation because—I am sorry—I do not want that man walking about in any of the countries of the United Kingdom.

To seek asylum is absolutely not a crime. At the committee this morning, we heard from a representative of the United Nations, who said that about 63 million people are currently displaced, either around the world or in their own countries, which is the highest figure since the second world war. That is a startling figure. However, those who seek shelter in Scotland will be welcomed. Those

who cry out for sanctuary in Scotland will be heard. Those who travel across land and sea will be safe in Scotland. We can be their sanctuary.

On world refugee day, we celebrate the progressive and positive steps that unite us in our difference and our diversity. The “New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022”, which is the second such strategy, recognises the strength in our differences and the value in our diversity—that intrinsic colourful bond between human beings that helps us on our way towards equality. The culture that refugees bring to Scotland makes our tartan that little bit brighter—a bit like the cabinet secretary's jacket today.

The strategy is already working. Two of the principles that underpin the new Scots strategy are refugee involvement and inclusive communities, both of which were on clear display at an event that I attended with colleagues yesterday at the Serenity cafe. The event, which was hosted by Aberlour and the Scottish Refugee Council, was called a cup of tea with a young refugee, although, actually, I did not get a chance to have a cup of tea because I was so interested in hearing their stories that I missed it. The event gave our refugee community exactly the sense of belonging and empowerment that they need in order to settle in Scotland. What is more, I heard at first hand from those amazing young refugees how safe and secure they now feel in our country. When I asked what the best things are, they said that they are health and education services, but that feeling safe is by far the most important aspect of being in Scotland. That is a real testament to our award-winning guardianship service: it makes people feel safe.

Those youngsters told me that no longer do they face persecution or threats and no longer must they flee from danger or scramble for shelter. They have been welcomed into a country that stands in solidarity with their plight and which pledges to ensure that they become fully active and empowered citizens. Those citizens are the here and now of Scotland: they are not “foreigners” in a strange land and nor are they “shirkers” or “skivers”; they are Scots, who are as welcome in this country as you and I are, Presiding Officer.

A testament to the Scottish Government's progress in welcoming refugees has been our leading role under the Syrian refugee resettlement programme, which we have heard a lot about in the debate. Thanks to leadership from local authorities and the Scottish Government as well as civic Scotland—churches, charities and other organisations—we have ensured that well over 2,000 Syrian refugees have been welcomed to Scotland. To put that in context, Scottish councils have met their goal to resettle 10 per cent of

refugees who are brought to the UK just two years into the five-year programme.

Let me be clear that although we congratulate the Scottish Government on its work and what it has achieved, we call on the UK Government to do more. A goal of 20,000 refugees over five years is a shocking dereliction of duty and an abdication of human morality, and it should be immediately revised. I urge the UK Government to do that. In Scotland, we can stand on our record. We stand by our principle that refugees are welcome here. We work with them, educate them, empower them and, most important, we learn from and listen to them.

The Scottish Government, in partnership with our charities, the third sector, local authorities, volunteers and everyone else who values the contribution that refugees make to our society, pledges to ensure safety and security for those who call Scotland their home. We want a compassionate Scotland where what matters is not where people come from but where we are going together.

15:49

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I welcome the debate and the fact that the Government has brought it to the chamber. I congratulate the Scottish Refugee Council, which has organised the 10-day refugee festival across Scotland, and I hope that the events highlight some of the good stories that have been told here today and can be told in other places.

As other members have pointed out, we are at a unique place in our world at this moment. There are now more refugees in the world than there have been since the second world war and, sadly, half of all refugees are children who have had individual experiences that most of us could never even imagine. We can talk about policy, which is important, but ultimately we need to say what is best for individuals, and particularly for children.

As Christina McKelvie mentioned, we can be proud of how we have dealt with the Syrian refugees who have come to this country. When the scheme was announced, I was a local councillor here in Edinburgh, and I saw at first hand how it should work. At its best, the UK and Scottish Governments, local authorities and the third sector have put aside political differences and worked together to best effect for the people who have come to our country. The scheme has worked well. When I look, I see the people who have come here under the scheme being integrated into Edinburgh life. They have not all been put in one part of the city, but have been spread across it, and schools have been working

with the children so that they can understand what is going on.

The difficulty that Edinburgh faced, and continues to face, is the shortage of suitable housing. I am working with a constituent who is a refugee and is living in a flat that probably none of us would want to live in because it has heavy damp. Their child has health conditions, but it is proving impossible to find another house for that individual, simply because there are so few available in Edinburgh.

I was a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee when it published its report last year, and a question that we need to come back to as a Parliament, and which the Government needs to come back to, is whether we keep refugees only in central Scotland or do wider dispersal across Scotland. When we took evidence on that, we heard that there are pluses and minuses on both sides. However, if we are to continue with the policies that the Scottish Government has progressed, which we support, we will need to consider dispersal.

We also need to look not just at the support that is provided when a refugee arrives, but at the ongoing support that they will require, particularly people who do not have English as their first language.

The point that I made to Mr Greer is an important one. Refugees do not want to leave their countries, so where possible we should stop the journey at the earliest part. Why?

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Balfour: I think that my time is about up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have just under two minutes left.

Jeremy Balfour: In that case, I will take the intervention.

Ross Greer: I am grateful. I am sure that every refugee in Scotland would agree that they did not want to have to flee their home. Does Jeremy Balfour agree that the UK Government, as the world's second-largest arms dealer, massively contributes to the need for people to flee their homes?

Jeremy Balfour: With respect, I think that Ross Greer has already made that point, and the argument is a big oversimplification.

I support what the UK Government is doing through international development in helping countries such as Turkey to help people who are refugees there in order to save them from having to come to Germany, France, Britain or other parts

of Europe, where they are often smuggled and put in danger and end up in prostitution.

We need to look at how we help as many people to stay as close—

Angela Constance: As a point of information, I note that one in six people in Lebanon is a refugee, in Jordan the figure is one in 14, and in Turkey the figure is one in 23. Most refugees are currently close to their home countries. Surely Mr Balfour will agree that it is a global responsibility that those countries should not be left to cope alone?

Jeremy Balfour: That is the point that I am trying to make to the cabinet secretary. It is far better for us to put support into the countries where the people are than to have them trek across the whole of Europe, with the danger. I support more money being given to Jordan and other countries for that support—it must be one of our key priorities going forward.

15:50

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I welcome the Parliament's recognition of world refugee day, which has taken place every June for the past 18 years. It first took place in the aftermath of the Kosovo refugee crisis, and I am saddened that, since then, several more global refugee crises have occurred.

A UN report noted that, in 2017, every two seconds, someone was displaced from their home. More than 68 million refugees around the world currently outnumber the UK's population. In recent weeks and days, we have seen tension on the US-Mexican border. Like Christina McKelvie, I think that it is impossible not to mention the heartbreaking situation that we have all seen on our screens over the past couple of days of people involuntarily fleeing their homes due to extraordinary unchecked violence including murder, rape, abduction and forced recruitment of children into gangs. Those families have been seeking protection in countries throughout the region. Although I welcome President Trump's executive order to reverse his Administration's policy of separating migrant children from their parents, following the world community's outrage, we must still be critical of the whole detention system, as the First Minister said today. That children will now be detained with their parents rather than separately is not much of a plus. The United States has removed itself from the UN Human Rights Council in the face of such a tense situation.

We are all familiar with the tragic situation in Syria. A UN projection has stated that the Syrian crisis has created more than 6 million refugees. In addition, the conflict has lasted longer than world

war two and is showing few signs of de-escalating. Many members will remember the don't bomb Syria campaign of a few years ago, when the UK Government decided to get involved. Every month, boats of refugees sink in the Mediterranean, killing entire families. The desperation that people must have to escape their homes and endanger their families is unfathomable. When we realise that placing their families in an overcrowded dinghy is a preferable option to remaining at home, the turmoil that those refugees are fleeing from starts to become a bit clearer. We must all take note.

Those stories take place hundreds of miles away, so it may be easy to put them to the back of our mind, but refugees are truly a global issue. Scotland has done much for refugees in recent years, and the Parliament needs to recognise the hard work that has gone into welcoming those many vulnerable people. For local authorities, the decision to participate in international humanitarian protection schemes is completely voluntary. I am proud to say, as others have, that every single local authority willingly committed to supporting the scheme. Last December, the 2,000th Syrian refugee was successfully resettled in Scotland, three years ahead of target. Since then, 500 more refugees now call Scotland home.

Several local authorities are looking after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who have arrived in Scotland with no parent or carer to support them. As tragic as those situations are, they are made a bit easier by those authorities providing a wide range of services to ensure that the young people have every opportunity to prosper in Scotland. So far, local authorities have cared for almost 40 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. I echo COSLA's recommendation that the Scottish Parliament should recognise and applaud in today's debate the hard work and dedication of local authority staff and their community partners. I will do just that, and I am proud that my local authority of North Lanarkshire is among them.

In February 2017, I lodged a motion to recognise the work of Kay Smith and the charity Help Refugees. She successfully raised funds in my constituency for 24 refugee camps in northern Greece. The hard work of Kay and the generosity of the people of Coatbridge and further afield ensured that the camps provided food, water, warm clothing and shelter to those who were forced to use them.

On St Andrew's day last year, I was delighted to welcome a group of young Syrian refugees to the Parliament. The families had arrived in Scotland in November 2015, so their visit to the Parliament coincided with the anniversary of their arrival in our country. As well as local councils, the Scottish Refugee Council, Oxfam, Amnesty International

and many other charities have been invaluable in helping refugees to adjust to life here in Scotland as well as in educating the general population about the issue.

Although all those achievements are noteworthy and should be commended, there is always more to be done. We must never become complacent. Local authorities are unanimously willing to help, but the issue of funding is holding them back. COSLA recently undertook a review of the costs of delivering support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. It showed that the UK Government is significantly underfunding its humanitarian protection schemes. The funding gap is as much as £100,000 in some councils. The significant funding gap that councils face in seeking to accommodate and support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children needs to be highlighted. I urge the UK Government to work with local councils, the Scottish Parliament and others to investigate how that can be remedied.

The Home Office needs to reconsider its policy regarding refugees coming to Scotland. As we all know, at present, asylum is a reserved issue whereas areas that are critical for refugees coming here, such as health and education, are not. Westminster's policies are directly affecting the work of our Government, Parliament, local government and the third sector. Those organisations are left to deal with the results of the UK Government's draconian immigration and asylum policies, and that is not acceptable.

I am running out of time, so I will end on the point that asylum and immigration should be devolved to Scotland. It is by upholding our values that Scotland will continue to be seen as a welcoming and safe place that everyone can call home.

16:02

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I commend Ross Greer for making an excellent and thought-provoking speech at the start of the debate. In that speech, he informed us that, every three seconds, somewhere in the world, someone becomes a refugee. I started to do a little bit of maths: that means that there are 20 new refugees a minute, which means that, in the two hours of our debate on the issue up to decision time at 5 o'clock, every single refugee that we have welcomed to Scotland—all 2,500 of them—will have been replaced by someone else in the world seeking sanctuary. I mention that in order to give important context to the immensity of the challenge that we face and the limited degree to which we, in Scotland, can do something about it.

I have spent the past week or so watching the news bulletins on the ship *Aquarius*, which has

been going back and forth across the Mediterranean, being turned away by countries when it reaches their ports. I cannot help but feel that every country that makes that ship travel a little further is complicit in the pain and suffering of the people on board. I only wish that the ship could land on Scottish shores, because I know that our response would be very different.

I want to talk about the contribution that three organisations in Edinburgh make to addressing the plight of refugees who have settled in Scotland and another organisation that does much to support refugees overseas. The first organisation is one that I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware of: the Welcoming Association, which is based in Dalry. I have had the great pleasure of visiting the Welcoming Association and speaking to many Syrian refugees—mostly young men—who have found new homes in Edinburgh. They rely heavily on the services of the Welcoming Association to find new skills and make their life here.

The second contribution that I want to mention is the guardianship service that is provided by Aberlour and the Scottish Refugee Council, which has already been mentioned. At the cross-party group on children and young people, Alex Cole-Hamilton and Fulton MacGregor heard from three young women from the guardianship service. Around 10 days ago, the cross-party group had a young people's takeover, and we heard passionate, incredible stories from two young Syrian women and another woman from Albania, who shared their views on the importance of the welcome that they received when they came to Scotland and told us about what they are doing to pay it forward by supporting other refugees. They asked us all to attend the refugee festival and, in particular, to travel to the Isle of Bute for the refugee festival events that will take place later this month.

The final person I will mention is a young Syrian boy whom I met at Liberton high school last week, at the prize giving. He is one of a number of Syrian refugees at the school, and he received a prize that night, alongside many other pupils. I have no doubt that it was one of the proudest days of his life, and I was hugely impressed by the leadership of the school, how inclusive the school is and how well supported that young man is.

We are served by refugees in this Parliament. Nejra Hasanica, who works in our canteen, had to flee Bosnia in the early 1990s. She fled for Croatia just as the war was breaking out there. Her hometown, Prijedor, was the first town in Bosnia that forced the Muslims within it to hang white sheets on their doors so that Serbian forces knew who to slaughter and who to take away. She has made her life here and her kids go to Scottish

schools. We should be aware that this is very much a live issue for all of us working in this building.

Looking around the chamber, I see many people who have travelled to Bosnia, including Gail Ross and James Dornan. With others, they have had the privilege of travelling to Srebrenica with Remembering Srebrenica Scotland. As Alex Cole-Hamilton said, we should be careful not to pat ourselves too cleverly on the back about our contribution overseas, because those who have studied what happened in Bosnia know that the refugee camp in Potočari was filled up with men, women and children and that, when the number reached 5,000—the limit that could fit in one hangar—the UN soldiers asked the men from that refugee camp to leave and actually passed them into the hands of the Serbian soldiers, who then forced them through the hills over Tuzla, where they were slaughtered by mortars and gunfire. It is a complex issue, but our armed forces are not always the good thing that we think they are in areas of conflict.

Talking about Bosnia allows me to come on to the final thing that I want to recognise, which is the contribution of Scottish organisations to on-going conflicts overseas. One incredible organisation is Edinburgh Direct Aid, which has been operating since 1992 and which started in Bosnia with Alan and Christine Witcutt. Christine Witcutt, famously, was shot and killed in Sarajevo on sniper alley, and one might have thought that the charity's contribution would have ended there. However, for the past 25 years or so, it has continued to do incredible work in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Kenya and Gaza. Now, most of its work is in Lebanon. In fact, it is currently building schools in Lebanon with money that was raised in Scotland. It has already built two primary schools and is starting work on a third school, on the Syrian border, which will specifically support Syrian children who desperately need an education, just as they desperately need a home.

Edinburgh Direct Aid has a summer campaign and a summer plea for sanitary products. That is the one thing that it is desperately short of, and it will be looking for people to donate as much as they can, to be packed into containers that will travel to the Lebanon before Christmas. I encourage all colleagues to look at the work of Edinburgh Direct Aid and to continue to support everything that it does to make our world a safer, fairer, better place for people in direct conflict.

16:07

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I see that some of the Tories have left the chamber. I did not want to bring up this point, and I mean absolutely no disrespect to Michelle Ballantyne

and others, but I really felt as if I was living in a parallel universe when I heard the speeches. We must remember that it is the wars that we took part in that created refugees and asylum seekers, so of course we have to welcome them here. The Tories seem to have a short memory, although their present Prime Minister was the one who sent vans round saying, "Go home." They should not be allowed to get away with it. There are dawn raids and vans telling people to go home, and then we have the sweet Scottish Conservatives. I felt that I had to say that.

Something else that I feel I have to say is that the largest number of refugees are Palestinian, and yet we have not been able to welcome anyone here. They are in camps and have been there since 1948. They are in Gaza, the West Bank, east Jerusalem, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Egypt. I just wanted to put that on the record. I know that the motion does not talk about certain aspects of that, but it has to be said.

I want to move on to something a wee bit more positive, but first I want to say that I am eternally grateful to all the groups and individuals who do all the work on the ground supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Some of them have already been named, but there are too many to name them all. We all owe them an enormous debt for the work that they do.

I am incredibly proud of the Scottish Government's approach, which is humane, empathising, supportive and welcoming. The second new Scots strategy builds on the work that has gone before with a foundation of dignity and respect at its heart. That is really important. We are talking about human beings, not people who have just been shipped from one place to another. The strategy will ensure that Scotland is a safe place for everyone to be able to live free from persecution and become valued members of communities.

We have seen it all. Lots of us have constituents whom we have helped throughout the years. In fact, they have helped us by letting us know about their culture, education, employment and leisure activities. We all have to work together, and we all do so.

The strategy calls for strong and resilient communities. I represent the Glasgow Kelvin constituency, and I was involved at the very beginning when we took the first influx of 3,000 refugees. I must admit that it was not easy at first but, as a result of talking to the people, getting local communities in Sighthill involved, and even getting the police involved, everyone was protective of one another within a couple of months. I am reminded of the dawn raids and the Glasgow girls; we all know about them. The key was working with communities. Everyone rallied

round so much that—this is history now—people were defended against dawn raids. That is what it is all about. It is about being able to work together, share culture, skills and experiences, and build strong relationships. I am meeting Amal Azzudin on Monday with another couple of people who are here now. They went to university and are working now, and they are an absolute credit to our country and to themselves.

The new chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council, Sabir Zazai, has been mentioned in the chamber before—I think that the cabinet secretary and Monica Lennon also mentioned him. I was very proud to meet him and hear his story at the Scottish Afghan Society's annual grand Eid party, at which Scottish Afghans come together to celebrate Eid after a full month of fasting. That was a fantastic night. I must admit that I really wanted to join in the dancing, but the people were too fast for me. However, they were absolutely wonderful.

I had the pleasure of sitting and chatting to Sabir Zazai, who is also a partner in the new Scots strategy. He was a refugee in 1999. He was brought to the shores of the UK and dispersed to Coventry, and he now lives in Scotland. It is fantastic that he is the chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council. That shows what can be done and what has been done. I wish him well in his future role. He has certainly been through the whole gamut of refugee integration. He has gone through the asylum system, which we all know about, and he has a research and campaigning background that is grass-roots based. What better person could there be for that role? We have been able to bring him to Scotland to be the chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council, which is absolutely wonderful.

As I said, I cannot thank enough the people and the various agencies involved. When we are out there rallying and marching in Glasgow, we always say—I am sure that this is said throughout Scotland—that refugees are welcome here.

16:13

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I am very pleased that this debate is taking place to mark world refugee day. A number of contributions have been sobering and have reminded us all of the serious challenges that we face not just in Scotland and the United Kingdom, but as global citizens. However, there have also been a number of disappointing attempts to oversimplify some of the issues.

Sandra White: Will the member take an intervention?

Oliver Mundell: Not just yet; perhaps later.

There have also been a number of disappointing attempts to mischaracterise the very good work that the United Kingdom does. I say politely to Kezia Dugdale and Ross Greer that the UK's efforts abroad go far beyond military matters. A huge amount of humanitarian support comes from the people of this country, and I am very proud of our record on that.

Kezia Dugdale: I pay tribute to the armed forces and much of the work that the UN does with regard to humanitarian aid. All that I was doing in my speech was pointing to one example of UN humanitarian forces getting it very badly wrong in Bosnia. Oliver Mundell would do them a service if he acknowledged that, too.

Oliver Mundell: I acknowledge that some of the things that happened in Bosnia, which Kezia Dugdale rightly outlined in her speech, are truly appalling and unforgivable. Absolutely nothing can be said to make up for that. However, it is wrong to ignore the good work that takes place. I apologise if that is not the point that Kezia Dugdale is trying to make, but others have certainly suggested that the UK's international efforts are only around the military, which is not the case. I do not think that anyone is denying that there are challenges, but we can be proud of much of our work.

Long may that work continue, because never has the need been greater. The world's population of forcibly displaced people has reached a record high, as we have already heard. As Fulton MacGregor pointed out poignantly, the number of displaced people in the world in 2017 was the equivalent of the UK's whole population. About half of all refugees are children and, as we have heard, many of them are separated from their families.

In what seems to be an increasingly complicated and difficult world, in which famine, war, exploitation and hatred continue to be rife, meeting the needs of the most vulnerable often seems like an impossible task. However, that makes it all the more vital that we do what we can to assist both at home and abroad. I recognise that there is more that we can do; there is always more that we can do. At decision time, Parliament will send out that message.

At the heart of this, as members have touched on, we must not forget our common humanity. We must never be complacent, however proud we are of the good work that is taking place.

Christina McKelvie: I believe Oliver Mundell when he talks about humanity and compassion. Will he join me in calling for the UK Government to stop detention without time limit? It is time that people have a time limit to their detention.

Oliver Mundell: I recognise, as anyone would, the point that Christina McKelvie has made. I am sure that the Home Office will be listening to what is said today, but I am not here to speak on behalf of the UK Government. Our immigration and asylum system is imperfect in places, but we must recognise that there are no easy answers or solutions to many of the challenges.

Rather than using the debate to get into deep-rooted political points, it is important that we use it as a chance to celebrate what is happening in Scotland and to recognise the courage of refugees, many of whom have gone through appalling experiences. As members have pointed out, it is right that we remember that they did not choose to come here. For many refugees, it is not a choice at all. We must be mindful of the painful experiences that people have been through in losing their home, leaving their country behind and coming to terms with the reality that they are unlikely ever to be able to return home. The strength of our welcome and the quality of the support that is on offer can go a long way, but they cannot make everything right.

Although it is not the answer in itself, we have to ensure that we continue to play an active role in trying to solve some of the geopolitical issues that lead to people becoming refugees in the first place.

I recognise that I am about to run out of time, but I want to make a final brief point. We need to look at Scotland as a whole. Often, there is a perception that Scotland's cities are the only place in which refugees can be settled successfully, but we have seen recently that that is not true. Rural communities are often equally well placed to do so and wish to help.

16:19

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): On Sunday, I had the delight of being the manager—I use the word in its loosest sense—of a football team in a tournament during the refugee Scotland festival at the wonderful facility in Toryglen on the south side of Glasgow. I had a team full of star talent, with the captain being Alison Thewliss MP and Gavin Newlands MP, Ronnie Cowan MP, Stuart McDonald MP and Councillor Allan Casey all being part of the line-up, although I think that they will be sticking to politics in future. However, the real stars were Abdul Bostani, one of my constituents in the Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituency, Glasgow Afghan United, the Scottish unity football league and the many footballers, refugees and others who made the event such a success.

The men and women who are involved in that success come from various corners of the globe. They wear their multilayered identities well as Glaswegians and Scots, with a strong national identity from their country of origin as well. They are proud of their culture and upbringing and they are also proud to be Scots. I am very lucky that, in my constituency, Glasgow Afghan United has an annual Burns and Mawlana Jalal-ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi supper—apologies for the pronunciation—that celebrates both Burns and the international bard of Afghanistan. I have attended that wonderful event and it is one of many that are held throughout the year.

I also have in my constituency Ronier Deumeni, originally from Cameroon, who runs African Challenge Scotland, based in Springburn, which holds an annual festival that runs for up to a fortnight celebrating both Scottish and African cultures. There is also the wonderful and renowned Maryhill Integration Network. I have a vast amount of refugees and new Scots in my constituency who make it a wonderful, vibrant place—I have not even scratched the surface of that. However, the vast majority of refugees and asylum seekers thirst to be part of such vibrant communities and call them home. Integration is what happens when we give refugee families the space, respect, opportunity, dignity and friendship that we would give anyone else, because it is the default position of the most positive aspects of human nature.

I do not want to paint a false or rosy picture. Are all refugees angels? Of course they are not. Are the communities that they seek refuge in completely racism free? Of course they are not. However, there are amazing stories out there every day of the week that we just do not get to hear—that is the point of putting them on the record today. Parts of the media have a lot to answer for in relation to that. False pictures and negative stereotypes of refugees are a common occurrence in some parts of the media. I do not want to give them any more publicity than they deserve, but we know what parts we are talking about.

I want to talk about some positive aspects of those who seek refuge in my constituency. I missed Patrick Harvie's earlier intervention about Duc Nguyen, who was trafficked to the UK from Vietnam. He was forced to work on an illegal cannabis farm, spent six months in jail and one and a half years in detention and then was whisked off for deportation after making a home in my constituency in Glasgow. I pay tribute to Councillor Kim Long, who has been very active in the campaign for Duc to return to Glasgow. I saw on Facebook earlier that Duc's bail has been granted and that he will return to Glasgow shortly. That is a positive story that I want to put on the

record. However, Duc should not have had to go through that process in the first place.

I made a comment at First Minister's question time previously about my constituent Giorgi Kakava, the 10-year-old Georgian lad who has been here since he was three years old. His mum passed away in February when they were still going through the asylum process, which left uncertainty about him. I do not want to oversimplify for Oliver Mundell what I am about to say, but I would not talk about an "imperfect" asylum system.

The Rev Brian Casey, a Church of Scotland minister in Springburn who has been leading the campaign to keep Giorgi in Scotland, says that Giorgi was detained—I think today—for several hours on his own and separated from Ketino, his gran, at a Home Office centre in London. I do not have any more information on that, but people are deeply worried. I hope that there is an explanation for what has happened and that it involves moving quickly to guarantee young Giorgi the stability and security that he needs so that he can continue his life at home in Springburn with his gran, but if he was detained and separated from his gran, that is no way to run an asylum system.

In a debate about world refugee day, I want to put on record the great contribution that refugees make to the constituency that I represent. When I lodged a motion in the Parliament to congratulate young Somer Bakhsh on winning awards at Springburn academy, I did not know that Somer was a refugee. It was drawn to my attention that Somer, his brother, his mother and his father fear deportation to Pakistan, where they would be subject to religious persecution. They have spent six years in Scotland. Why would I have known that that young man is an asylum seeker? He is just a member of my community.

I see vibrant communities in my Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituency, which people make their home. The UK's hostile environment is just that; I have seen the sharp end of its impact on my communities. I celebrate the refugees in my constituency who make Scotland their home.

16:26

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, and to other members for missing some of the opening speeches. I gave you advance notice that I had an important meeting to support a young constituent of mine who was meeting the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport.

My constituent's name is Dami Samuel. She is 20 years old and she has aspirations to be a midwife. Indeed, she had a place to study

midwifery when she left school a couple of years ago, but she was unable to take up her place because of the actions of the UK Home Office.

Dami and her family live in Dumfries. Earlier this year, they featured in a documentary entitled "Breadline Kids", which showed what it is like to be completely and utterly destitute, with no income whatever. Dami and her mum, who was a nursing assistant before her visa was revoked, cannot work and cannot study. They have been entirely dependent on charity as a result of the situation that the Home Office's actions have put them in.

Dami is completely in limbo. I found it very poignant today when she told me that she regularly talks to a friend who she was at school with who is now in her second year of university. That girl's life is moving on, while Dami is stuck, waiting and waiting to find out the result of her application.

This week, Dami was up in Glasgow to collect an award on behalf of the "Breadline Kids" film makers at the refugee Scotland festival media awards. I wanted to mention that to show members that there are journalists out there who are doing a great job of exposing the treatment of refugees and migrants. Dami is not a refugee, but her invitation from the Scottish Refugee Council and refugee festival Scotland to collect the award reflects the fact that she is the victim of the hostile environment that also affects refugees. I wanted to draw attention to Dami's case, because what is happening is a terrible waste of talent and a terrible waste of someone who really wants to make a contribution to society in Scotland.

Dami and her family have had fantastic support from the community in Dumfries and Galloway, and I want to talk more broadly about how the community has been helping refugees. In Dumfries we have an organisation called Massive Outpouring of Love, which is known affectionately as MOOL. The charity came out of a humanitarian movement that began in September 2015. The idea was to humanise the refugee crisis through writing and distributing notes of support and hope. It soon became much bigger than that. Between September 2015 and February 2016, MOOL collected and sorted more than 40 tonnes of donations and sent them on to refugees around the globe. The organisation raised money to fund three caravans, one of which was used as a dental clinic in the Calais camp, while the remaining two housed vulnerable families. More money went overseas to buy supplies for community kitchens in Calais and paid for volunteers to travel to Calais, Dunkirk and Lesbos.

Closer to home, MOOL volunteers have been galvanising people to take action by visiting schools to talk to children and offering training to multi-agency groups. They have also welcomed a

number of refugee families to Dumfries and Galloway, where they are assigned befrienders to offer support and to act as a buffer between the families and the bureaucracy that they will inevitably face on their arrival. Refugee women and children from Glasgow have also been welcomed to heal in the countryside.

Making the transition from a war-torn country to life in rural Scotland cannot be easy, but the goal is to help it to happen as gently as possible. MOOL wants people who have been displaced to be welcomed everywhere and have consistent access to resources and support that they need to feel safe, be healthy and thrive. It is an important force in Dumfries and Galloway and it encourages communities and helps people in need.

I will end by mentioning the fact that Dumfries and Galloway's first refugee and migrant film festival, the incomers festival, is taking place this week to mark the 20th anniversary of refugee week. The film festival acts as a springboard for conversations about migration, refugees and asylum seekers across the region. It is a fantastic way to celebrate the fact that, as Dumfries welcomes more people from around the globe, it becomes all the more progressive, diverse and exciting. How the people in the community have reached out to the Samuel family in its time of need is a fantastic illustration of that.

16:32

Ross Greer: A number of the speeches today have reflected not just on the situation in Scotland and the UK, but on the situations across the rest of Europe and in North America. It is important that we take an international perspective on an international crisis.

It is disappointing to look at the world and to see so many western nations turning their backs on refugees and embracing the politics of the far right. Just this week, a ship carrying more than 600 refugees was refused port in Italy. That happened after the far-right Lega Nord party entered government there. The First Minister referred to that same party for the threats that it is now making from Government office against Italy's already persecuted Roma community. Its leader, who is now the Minister of the Interior for Italy, has just called for

"mass purification. Street by street, quarter by quarter".

That is what we are facing. The Aquarius was eventually able to dock in Spain, but there are other ships and there will be more. Italy's turning its back on refugees follows a trend that has been seen in other European countries, including Hungary and Poland. The rhetoric might be different, but we should not pretend that the UK is that much different.

There has been a marked increase in hostile policies and dehumanising language across our continent, and the creation of a "Fortress Europe" that has sought to heavily police and militarise our external borders while facilitating free movement within them. In the United States, policies that have been enacted by the Trump Administration have gone to further depths of barbarity and callousness by forcibly separating children from their parents at the border and detaining them in camps. They have constructed what are called, as Christina McKelvie said, "tender age" camps for the detention of babies and toddlers. They have refused those children the basic dignity that any children in any corner of the earth deserve.

Reports have come out about older children being forced to change the nappies of babies they do not know because guards would not enter the cages in which they are being held. Recordings have surfaced of traumatised toddlers screaming for their parents as guards mock them. These are not care facilities: they are not "summer camps", as the tinpot fascists on Fox News have called them. They are detention camps for children and babies.

Now, using the well-practised fascist tactic of implementing something so appalling that even the smallest rollback can be seen as a compromise, the US Government will no longer separate families. It will detain them in cages together. What progress.

To make matters worse, the former director of US immigration enforcement has predicted that many of the children who have already been forcibly separated from their families will never be reunited with them. He stated yesterday:

"You could be creating thousands of immigrant orphans".

In this Parliament, we should stand in solidarity with the people who are resisting those actions.

Yesterday, I spoke to a friend from my church's sister church in the US, who mentioned the wonderful work of organisations such as the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services in Texas, which would welcome donations to its family reunification fund, and that of churches and other bodies that have literally been going out into the desert to give water to people who have been arriving via those dangerous routes. They also told me of families being offered sanctuary in church buildings. In one case, a family has been trapped for nine months. If they leave, they will be arrested, sent to detention camps and then deported.

Many churches have been forced to go underground with the support that they are offering after threats from the US Government to revoke their status. More than 150 years ago, brave people ran what was known as the underground

railroad, for slaves to escape the southern United States to freedom in the north. Today, I am proud to know people who are supporting another underground network for refugees who arrive at the Mexico-US border.

I have seen the reality of disastrous, cruel and inhumane border policy. Last year, I visited Lampedusa, which is the tiny Italian island 200 kilometres from the Libyan coast that is known as the door of Europe. I will briefly share some of the stories of people whom I met. A 17-year-old young man told me of how hundreds of people were crammed into the hold of a ship. When that ship began to list to one side, there were so many people with so little room to move that those who were unfortunate enough to be on that side simply drowned; there was nowhere for them to go.

A 16-year-old, who was brave enough to share her deeply painful story, had been kidnapped in Libya, held as a sex slave and was, when I met her, pregnant by rape.

There were also those whom we could not meet but whose graves we stood beside—for example, Walala, who was an 18-year-old woman from Eritrea. When gas canisters exploded at the warehouse that she was being held in, the human traffickers did not take her to a hospital but put her on a boat to die in agony in the Mediterranean.

It is their stories that I think of and the pain on their faces that I remember when I hear members here congratulating the UK Government on its record. Leaving aside the points that Sandra White and I have made in response to Jeremy Balfour about the UK's role in funding, supplying or directly taking part in the conflicts that force people to flee, it is the UK Government's absolute inability to live up to our moral responsibility and take in those whom we can help that I simply cannot tolerate.

I am privileged to know Alf Dubs, the Kindertransport survivor, who has kept the issue of child refugees on the agenda when the UK Government would rather it went away. Last week, Christina McKelvie and I were with him. As I sat with him, I could not help but think of the 2,500 unaccompanied child refugees that the UK Government committed to take in before abandoning that commitment, never mind the 160,000 more who are scattered across mainland Europe.

When I hear of the "high standards" of the UK asylum policy that is referred to in the Conservative amendment, I can think only of the cases from just the past fortnight in which members of this Parliament—alongside many others—have had to fight desperately to keep members of our communities off deportation flights. Bob Doris mentioned 10-year-old orphan

Giorgi Kakava. He does not speak Georgian and left that country under threats to his family when he was three years old, but the Home Office is seriously considering deporting him.

Human trafficking victim Duc Nguyen, who has been detained pending deportation to Vietnam, has fortunately made bail today, as Patrick Harvie mentioned, but still faces that threat.

Bob Doris mentioned the Bakhsh family from Pakistan. Their children are terrified that they will be murdered because of their faith, if they return. Their asylum claims have been repeatedly turned down and they yet again face deportation.

I am proud that this Parliament will join communities across the country in standing not just for, but with those whose life is here now here, after being forced to seek refuge and asylum. I am proud of the people in my community who, last weekend, hosted a wonderful dinner on father's day for the Syrian families who are now settled in East Dunbartonshire, with the food kindly being provided by the families themselves. I am proud that, as darkness appears to be once again falling across much of Europe and the west, we will today insist on keeping here a light that they cannot put out. Today, I am very proud to say I am a member of this Parliament.

16:38

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Presiding Officer, 34,361 is the number of people seeking refuge and asylum who have died since 1993. All credit goes to *The Guardian* newspaper, which today reported that an organisation has sought the name of every single one of those people. It has not been able to identify all the names, but they are people, not numbers.

Two years ago, I invited a Syrian family who were part of the refugee programme to Christmas dinner. Rana, Sami, Firaz and Sarah had been in Scotland only a few months. I did not know how my own family would react to complete strangers and halal turkey at the dinner table, but to my surprise they arrived with presents for the children and it was one of the best Christmas days that we have had. We have since had a second Christmas with them.

Sarah, who is eight, and Firaz, who is nine, are still traumatised by the bombs that they heard going off at night as they tried to sleep. They are scared of my two large dogs, as they had been used to seeing dogs eating dead bodies in the streets of Damascus. We are working on that. The family loves Scotland. There is no doubt that anyone who settles here loves Scotland, but they are still very much adjusting to what happened in their own country, where they have left family behind.

We live in the darkest of times, as other members have said. Oxfam says that more than 65 million people have been forced to flee their homes by deadly conflict and violence. Recent political events across Europe show what a dangerous point we have reached in dealing with human tragedy.

I agree whole-heartedly with Ross Greer that Scotland and the rest of Britain must be a shining example, ahead of other European countries, of how refugees should be treated.

Jeremy Balfour and Oliver Mundell said that the causes of the refugee crisis have been oversimplified. There is no doubt that there is some complexity in war and conflict, but the US-led invasion alone displaced some 4 million people in Iraq, and Iraqis still flee the country, which is now one of the most miserable places on earth. A decade of murderous sanctions and ISIS—a product of the Iraq war—have created a disaster in Syria, adding to the existing internal strife. The French and British bombing of Libya is also the cause of many people becoming refugees. There are complexities, but it is quite easy to understand why refugees are coming to all of Europe's borders. In fact, half the global refugee population comes from just three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan—although Sandra White is right to point out that Palestinian refugees are still the largest group.

I am ashamed of the antics of the Tories and their denial of the Dubs scheme, from which 3,000 children would have benefited; instead 350 did. A freedom of information request has shown that councils were prepared to take far more.

Excellent speeches from Alex Cole-Hamilton, Christina McKelvie, Kezia Dugdale and Monica Lennon have highlighted the problems that we face in Europe, so I will not rehearse them. I do not know whether Jeremy Balfour knows this, but 80 per cent of refugees are in countries that are neighbours to their own. In Lebanon, one in four people is a refugee. I was there in 2016, and that was confirmed by politicians there. We need a global response to the crisis.

The Refugee Council points out that some of the poorest children who live in our country are refugee and asylum-seeking children. The advocacy service receives only £50,000 a year, so I wonder whether the cabinet secretary will, in her summing up, say what more can be done to ensure that we have additional resources.

I have a special plea about Dungavel, which was mentioned by Christina McKelvie, and with whom I agree that there should be a time limit on detention. I believe that MSPs—elected members—should have the right to make an annual visit to Dungavel to see whether the

conditions that refugees and asylum seekers live in are to our satisfaction. I know that there is support for that. I have been writing to David Mundell for the past year and invite him to back us on that.

Forty-five countries have given refugees the right to vote, mainly in local elections. That is a way of making refugees feel more involved in a country, especially given that they will not have been democratically involved in the country that they left, which many will have fled because of violence or persecution.

Refugees are welcome here—we must be leaders in that—and the strategy gives us a good start. I whole-heartedly support the strategy and am pleased to have contributed to the debate.

16:43

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I welcome the debate. It is right that Parliament uses its time not only to celebrate the immense contribution that refugees have made to our country but to acknowledge, as many members have done, that there is quite a substantial problem out there in the world. One source estimated that nearly 70 million people across the world are either displaced, refugees or seeking asylum. The picture is grim in every part of the world, from Myanmar to Somalia.

Amid such worldwide misery, pain and political turbulence, we find days such as world refugee day. It is right that world refugee day is aimed at Governments and Parliaments such as ours, to widen awareness of the sheer scale of the problem. We have heard examples today from various countries. Members have shared horror stories and have outlined cases that they are working on related to people coming from those places.

Here in Scotland and across the UK, we have provided support to refugees through various schemes involving rehousing, integration, language, schooling and education.

Our amendment acknowledges that the Scottish Government met its refugee housing target nearly three years early, which is to be warmly welcomed. Indeed, the Government is to be congratulated on it, as are the local authorities that helped deliver much of it, notwithstanding many of the housing shortages that exist in different parts of Scotland.

I thank the cabinet secretary for detailing some of the good work that her Government is doing on this. Important points have been made today about how people integrate once they arrive in Scotland. Many who have come from Iran, Syria or Iraq were doctors or dentists. We spend a lot of

time in this chamber complaining about the lack of people with such skills, and getting those people back into the careers that they had in their normal environment might help them regain some sort of normality as they start a new life here in our country.

Oliver Mundell summed it up by saying that we are happy to celebrate the successes of the system here in Scotland; we do not have any political points to make in that respect. I appreciate that there are members here who want to make political points—and have made them valiantly. That is fine, but it is a fact that the UK is the world's second-largest donor of bilateral aid in the world, through choice.

I know that members are perhaps reluctant to hear that. Facts are often overlooked in the emotion of these subjects and the emotion of individual cases and, indeed, individual failures of the system. However, it is right that Scotland—and the UK—spends substantial amounts of gross domestic product on international aid. The UK is among just six countries to meet the 0.7 per cent of GDP UN aid spending target—not France, not Spain, not Italy—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Excuse me, Mr Greene. Could the private conversations at the back of the chamber be quieter please? Thank you.

Jamie Greene: I restate that I know that some members do not want to hear those facts, but they are correct. It is the people on the ground, to whom that money matters, who are thankful. The figures are not just figures on briefing papers; every penny goes directly to an important cause.

Oxfam recently said:

“Those who are critical of UK aid spending should remember the incredible impact that it has around the world, such as supporting 11 million children through school over the past five years.”

It continued—these are Oxfam's words, not mine:

“Britain is helping to lead the way in global aid spending, by hitting the UN's development spending target.”

Save the Children said:

“We should be proud that Britain stands up for the world's poorest people, and our aid budget helps save lives and expand opportunity.”

Christina McKelvie: Jamie Greene was on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee for a long time. We carried out an inquiry into destitution, asylum and insecure immigration status and we heard many of the facts of the impact of the UK's asylum policies. Does he think that it is fair that the Scottish Government, local authorities and the charity sector in Scotland have to pick up the pieces of those policies, and does he agree that

£37.75 a week is not enough for anyone—never mind an asylum seeker—to live on?

Jamie Greene: For the record, I was not on the committee when it took that evidence and I was not privy to the writing of its report, although I acknowledge its contents. However, I will respond to the point. As Oliver Mundell said, has the system got it right all the time? No—absolutely not. That is why we have these debates, so that people can make their political points as they wish. Should the Home Office be listening to debates such as this? Absolutely it should. That is why we are here today, in Government time, having this debate.

On the point about who picks up the pieces, Monica Lennon and others said that local authorities are doing much of the day-to-day work. They are at the coalface or the front line, delivering many of the services. They are under huge financial pressures, making budgetary decisions about the provision of services when there are difficulties with housing stocks, with getting people registered with general practitioners and with getting the children of refugees or asylum seekers a place in school. It takes people from different political backgrounds, councils, the third sector, the charitable sector and even community volunteers to make the system work. In that respect, I agree with Ms McKelvie.

There is a lot to be positive about in how Scotland contributes to supporting refugees from right across the world. It is easy to miss the bigger picture about how welcoming we have been over the generations—I have many examples of that, but that was then and today there is a very different picture.

Fulton MacGregor said that this is a global issue and the cabinet secretary said that there is a global responsibility. She is right, but things are far from perfect on the continent. We rarely talk about the grim reality of what a Europe-wide problem this is. Just a few days ago, a boat was refused entry to Italy and Malta. It took another member state to step in to take in the boat. The Schengen area is a shadow of its former self when it comes to allowing safe passage for refugees.

All this costs money. The money that I am talking about is not just headline figures, but real cash paying for real help. The programmes and schemes cost money, and the people who implement the schemes deserve some respect for the work that they do. It is those efforts that our amendment sought to recognise, and it is a shame that others are not able to join us in the recognition of that good work.

No amount of political point scoring in this chamber will address or tackle any of the complex, deep-rooted causes of international refugee

problems. Perhaps the next time that we have a debate in this chamber about this issue, we ought to bear that in mind.

16:51

Angela Constance: This has been a good debate; it has been feisty in parts, and rightly so. We have heard excellent contributions from Christina McKelvie, Ross Greer and Alex Cole-Hamilton, among many others, and we have heard the outright condemnation of the detention of children, with or without their parents.

I want to quote Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, who is the UNHCR representative to the UK. When he was speaking at the launch of the new Scots strategy on 10 January this year, he said:

“In my 26 years in UNHCR, I have worked with many refugee-hosting countries and have rarely seen such a professional and comprehensive piece of work. I believe that the New Scots strategy could be used as an example and a model not just UK-wide but in many countries around the world which host refugees. You should be proud of what you have achieved.”

I quote that, not for one minute to pat ourselves on the back; Kezia Dugdale and Alex Cole-Hamilton rightly said that we have to guard against being too self-congratulatory or in any way complacent. I share that quotation to pay tribute to and congratulate—as other members have done—the many voluntary organisations, charities, and faith organisations, all our local authorities, and the Scottish Refugee Council, which are all at the front line, day in, day out, doing what they can to support refugees and asylum seekers who have come to Scotland. Also, like Michelle Ballantyne, I pay tribute to the armed forces for the humanitarian work that they carry out.

The facts of the matter are that the scale of the challenge is beyond anything that we have seen historically. The UNHCR submitted over 75,000 refugees for resettlement in 2017, to all states worldwide. However, that figure was a 54 per cent reduction from 2016, due to the decline in resettlement places. We need to be helping other countries to deal with the challenges that they face within their own borders, but we should not for a minute avoid our responsibilities in stepping up to the plate here and now and saying loudly and clearly that Scotland welcomes refugees and asylum seekers.

I am very pleased to be able to support the Green amendment. We do indeed believe that people who have been welcomed here as refugees or asylum seekers should have the right to vote in elections. I met a young man yesterday who reminded me that he raised this issue with me two years ago; he is absolutely thrilled about the prospect of getting the vote.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, cabinet secretary. Could members stop having private conversations at the back of the chamber, please? It is very rude and very annoying.

Angela Constance: I say to Christina McKelvie and Ross Greer that the Scottish Government also supports calls to limit immigration detention to 28 days, and to move towards alternative community-based approaches that are actually far more effective. That is based on the fact that 62 per cent of people who are held at Dungavel are released back into our community.

I am also pleased to say that the Scottish Government will support the Labour Party amendment too. We agree on the importance of evaluation to ensure that we know what works and what does not. We also agree that the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in host communities must be adequately resourced. I point to the investment that we make in Scotland, through the family reunion crisis fund, the equalities budget, ESOL, legal aid and to the commitment that I have given to develop a destitution strategy. While I will not make promises that I cannot keep, I will always approach the issue with a can-do attitude and will never demur from my responsibilities to look at the art of the possible.

Monica Lennon rightly said that the UK immigration and asylum system lacks compassion. In endorsing that, I say that it also lacks resourcing. We have seen what has been possible with the Syrian refugee resettlement programme because it has been funded and well co-ordinated. It is high time that our asylum seekers received the same support.

We get to the heart of the matter when we talk about widening asylum dispersal. It is a great success, which should be celebrated, that 31 of our 32 local authorities have received refugees via the Syrian resettlement programme because of how it was co-ordinated and funded. That is in both urban and rural Scotland, as was touched upon by Oliver Mundell. As a Government, we support the widening of asylum dispersal in principle. However, it has to be voluntary. Over 15 years or so, Glasgow City Council has done a great job in accommodating and supporting asylum seekers. We recognise the need to seek new asylum dispersal areas elsewhere.

We also have to recognise that asylum dispersal is a big commitment for local authorities, as the Home Office does not provide funding to support their participation in it. The Home Office needs to support and fund the integration of asylum seekers as it does for refugees arriving for resettlement in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK. It needs to end the two-tier system. That, in itself, would help with the issues around dispersal. For the Scottish

Government's part, we will continue to work with COSLA and the Scottish Refugee Council and will always seek to step up to the plate, particularly when it comes to unaccompanied children. Others have also mentioned the £10,000 per child funding gap.

Pauline McNeill: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angela Constance: My time is running out, and I am trying to answer as many points as possible.

Pauline McNeill: Will she answer my point about additional resources?

Angela Constance: I will indeed.

At surface level, the Conservative Party's amendment may appear to be factual, but when we scratch beneath that surface we find that, although 900 unaccompanied children were transferred from Europe to the UK in 2016, the figure in the Tory amendment is very old and does not tell the whole story. Only 480 children are being transferred to the UK under the Dubs amendment, as I had confirmed to me in correspondence from Caroline Nokes only last Friday. That is a far cry from the commitment to support 3,000 unaccompanied children. That latest position is despite the work of Lord Dubs and the many organisations that have highlighted the perils, dangers and risks of exploitation that are faced by children who travel on their own.

I have also met women who have had to leave behind their 19-year-old children, who cannot be reunited with their parents in Scotland due to restrictions in current UK Government family reunion policy, under which only dependent children under the age of 18 qualify.

As we approach 5 o'clock tonight, I hope that the chamber will unite around the calls for a more humane asylum system that treats people with dignity and respect at all times and enables them to rebuild their lives and fulfil their potential. Jamie Greene and Oliver Mundell said that they were sure that the Home Office would be listening.

I hope that the Home Office is indeed listening to our support for calls to end the two-tier asylum process, that it will support Angus McNeil's Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill, that it will end the hostile environment policy and that it will fund integration from day 1. I really hope that it will revisit its disgraceful U-turn on the Dubs amendment.

No one chooses to be a refugee or to flee, leaving behind everything that they have built up over their lifetime—a home, work, school or university and, most heartbreakingly of all, family and friends. It takes courage and perseverance beyond anything that most of us can imagine to leave everything behind and to start again from

nothing. That is why the Scottish Government is committed to supporting refugees and people seeking asylum as they rebuild their lives. It is a moral responsibility, but it is also always an enormous privilege. To respond directly to Pauline McNeill's point, I am happy to consider what more we can do to help people who, at the end of the day, are only trying to find what we all want and need, which is a safe place to call home.

Business Motion

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-12932, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for Wednesday 27 June.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business on Wednesday 27 June 2018—

after

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Prescription (Scotland) Bill

insert

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Complaint against Mark McDonald MSP—[*Joe FitzPatrick*].

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-12891.2, in the name of Michelle Ballantyne, which seeks to amend motion S5M-12891, in the name of Angela Constance, on world refugee day: supporting people to settle in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and

Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 20, Against 81, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-12891.3, in the name of Monica Lennon, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Angela Constance, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-12891.1, in the name of Ross Greer, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Angela Constance, 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)

Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 81, Against 0, Abstentions 20.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-12891, in the name of Angela Constance, on world refugee day, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament commemorates World Refugee Day; welcomes people who have sought refuge in Scotland from war and persecution; celebrates the contribution that refugees and asylum seekers have made to Scotland; agrees with the key principle of the New Scots strategy that integration begins from day one of arrival; calls for a more humane asylum system that treats people with dignity and respect at all times and enables them to rebuild their lives and fulfil their potential; thanks the local authorities, third sector, community and faith organisations and the many people across Scotland who are supporting refugees and asylum seekers as they settle into their new lives; recognises the importance of national and local evaluation of all refugee programmes to identify good practice; agrees that adequately resourced local authorities play a vital role in supporting community cohesion, and believes that the right to vote is an important component of integration into Scottish society and that refugees and asylum seekers legally resident in Scotland should have the right to vote in all elections and referenda.

Meeting closed at 17:04.

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