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Thursday 1 November 2018

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 1 November 2018

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

General Question Time

Transvaginal Mesh Implants

1. **Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent contact it has had with women affected by transvaginal mesh implants. (S5O-02499)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): In recent weeks, the Scottish Government has received correspondence from a number of women and, as the member is aware, I have also recently met the family of Mrs Baxter.

Neil Findlay: It is my understanding that neither the cabinet secretary nor the First Minister has met any of the Scottish mesh survivors. Given that this is the biggest healthcare scandal since thalidomide and that it affects thousands of women—and now men, too—will the cabinet secretary and the First Minister agree to meet me and a delegation of Scottish mesh survivors? Given the stark findings of Professor Britton's report, will the cabinet secretary instruct a new, truly independent report on the use of mesh in Scotland?

Jeane Freeman: I am very content to accept the member's invitation to meet Scottish mesh survivors, although I cannot speak for the First Minister's diary.

On the request for a new inquiry, I point out that Professor Britton's report is primarily about how the Government organises, sets up and oversees independent inquiries and therefore it is not exclusively for me. However, I have written to John Wilkinson, who is the director of devices at the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, asking him to provide me with the evidence on which that body has judged that mesh products are safe for use in clinical practice. The chief medical officer has written to the chief executive of the MHRA in similar terms. When we receive that response, we will be able to make a decision on other matters that concern the use of mesh in clinical practice across Scotland.

Marine and Fisheries Protection Vessels

2. **John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government how many vessels are in its marine and fisheries protection fleet. (S5O-02500)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Marine Scotland compliance owns and operates three ships that provide a dedicated enforcement capacity. Those are the Jura, the Hirta and the Minna, the last of which I visited in June this year in Oban. We also have access to five rigid-hulled inflatable boats on a daily basis to enhance the enforcement activity.

John Finnie: Will the cabinet secretary provide an update to Parliament on the findings of the review that she told me was on-going in a letter dated 16 April 2018 and to which the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy alluded at the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee meeting on 6 June 2018? There is a challenge with the growing number of marine protected areas and with Brexit. The Welsh Government is responsible for a considerably smaller marine area, but it has recently commissioned and is building five marine compliance vessels. Is it right that Wales has a bigger fleet than Scotland does?

Roseanna Cunningham: There are a number of things there that I could pick up on. First, the review that my colleague Fergus Ewing and I referred to is the constant review under which we keep such issues. I think that the member will also recall that, in my reply, I mentioned that we have two surveillance aircraft and also make regular use of unmanned aerial vehicles or drones, which adds considerably to our surveillance capacity.

As I understand it, the Welsh Government is indeed in the process of buying new boats, but they are considerably smaller than the boats that are in the Marine Scotland fleet and are of a very different order of technology, so it is not a like-for-like comparison.

Public Sector Catering (Local Sourcing)

3. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to encourage local sourcing across public sector catering. (S5O-02501)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): The Scottish Government is committed to encouraging and increasing the local sourcing of food and drink across the public sector. Good progress has been made and we know that around 48 per cent of the food and drink that is sourced in the public sector is Scottish—a 41 per cent increase since 2007. We believe that we can do more and we have put in place a range of measures and support to try to increase levels further.

Bill Kidd: I welcome all movement towards local sourcing. Does the minister agree that consumption shifts, such as buying locally and

seasonally, are important in moving Scotland along a sustainable path?

Fergus Ewing: I agree, and I welcome the progress that has been made by 11 local authorities and the food for life programme. Local procurement is desirable for our schools, hospitals, prisons and the whole public sector and also for our food producers—our farmers and suppliers. We are doing many things to make yet further progress.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): East Ayrshire Council has a great reputation for sourcing food for schools locally—I think that more than 75 per cent of its food is sourced locally. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that the Scottish Government could use the central Scotland Excel contract to ensure that all Scotland's schoolchildren get the same opportunity to access quality locally produced food?

Fergus Ewing: I am aware of East Ayrshire Council's good work and I know that Corrie Mains farm in East Ayrshire supplies all the eggs to primary schools there. We are a wee bit ahead of Brian Whittle, because we are already doing what he has urged me to do, and have been for some time. Following the good work in 11 Scottish local authorities, I am pleased that we are expanding the programme to reach more schools by investing £400,000 over the next three years to target all 32 local authorities. I am sure that the member will be delighted to hear that positive news.

FreeStyle Libre Flash Glucose Monitoring System

4. **Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Scottish health technologies group's advice statement regarding the use of the FreeStyle Libre flash glucose monitoring system. (S5O-02502)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): We welcome the advice statement from the Scottish health technologies group about the flash glucose monitoring system. The advice statement has provided information on the clinical and cost effectiveness of this technology and has supported national health service boards in determining the place of the technology for local use.

Stewart Stevenson: I welcome the decision of NHS Grampian, in particular, to act on the advice. Has the statement had any further impact on the uptake of this life-transforming technology by other health boards across Scotland?

Jeane Freeman: It is important to note that the device is used for self-monitoring of glucose levels via a sensor that is worn but, as with many other

drugs and devices, it is not suitable for all patients, and that is a clinical judgment that requires to be performed. The FreeStyle Libre sensor is now available for prescription in 13 of the 14 NHS board areas, and NHS Highland is working with the local diabetes service to become the 14th, which I am delighted about. Mr Stevenson's point about life-transforming technologies is well made. As our leading clinicians and clinical researchers work with companies that are involved in precision medicine and technologies, we are very mindful of the new demands that will come with regard to how we determine what is clinically suitable either in drugs or in devices and technologies such as this, and we will adapt our processes accordingly.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): As co-chair of the cross-party group on diabetes, I have had very positive feedback about FreeStyle Libre, particularly the benefits of reducing the need for frequent finger prick blood tests and of well-maintained HbA1c levels—the blood glucose levels. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that the technology is being dispensed throughout Scotland according to the prescribed guidelines without caveats?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful for the work of the cross-party group that David Stewart chairs. My expectation is that the device will be prescribed according to the guidance—that is my absolute expectation of all the territorial health boards. I would want to know if that was not the case, so that I could take action accordingly.

Arnish Fabrication Yard

5. **Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in securing work for the Arnish fabrication yard on the Isle of Lewis. (S5O-02503)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work (Derek Mackay): We continue to press developers to use Scottish contractors when building projects off our coastline and we encourage our supply chain to be as competitive as possible when bidding for those contracts. We have confidence that the new owners of Burntisland Fabrications are doing everything possible to secure new contracts and restore employment to the yards at Arnish as well as Burntisland and Methil.

Dr Allan: I thank the cabinet secretary for his reply and welcome that progress. Given their obvious interest in the matter, will the cabinet secretary undertake to keep representatives of the former workforce at Arnish updated directly, particularly on any news about new contracts?

Derek Mackay: Yes—I will commit to do that. I have engaged with the trade unions and there is

good partnership working with the local authority and engagement with DF Barnes and BiFab. It is really important that we have a united, team Scotland approach to trying to secure work for the yards.

In addition to that, I will arrange a briefing for elected members, who will also be interested, so that we can discuss further actions to secure work for the yards and ensure that people can return to that fruitful employment.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Is the equipment in the yard being kept up to date and maintained? That very expensive equipment is owned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and is crucial to the yard's future.

Derek Mackay: I do not have that detail to hand. I am happy to supply further information to the member, but there has been substantial investment in the technology. The important thing right now is to secure the contracts, the work and the benefits to the supply chain, and that is absolutely what I am focused on in working with the new owners. There is also a financial support package to try to preserve the ability to secure work. We are working very hard to get those contracts, and therefore every element that ensures that the yards are attractive, including the infrastructure, is vital. However, the key critical issue right now is the ability to win contracts and I am absolutely focused on that.

I say again that I am happy to arrange a private briefing for interested elected members to see the efforts that we are undertaking to achieve that outcome.

Life Sciences Sector

6. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to help grow the life sciences sector. (S5O-02504)

The Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation (Ivan McKee): Life sciences is a growth sector for the Scottish economy. We are increasing innovation in the sector through the procurement of public services, and the chief scientist office is investing £3 million from 2018-19 to support collaborative working between the national health service, industry and academia. Another recent investment includes a £15 million contribution to the new medicines manufacturing innovation centre, which will support the efficient and safe production of new medicines. We are also working with the life sciences Scotland industry leadership group to ensure that we have the right policy environment to support sectoral growth.

Miles Briggs: Will the minister confirm that the Scottish Government is not on course to meet its original target, which was set in 2011, to double

the turnover of the life sciences sector in Scotland to £6.2 billion by 2020, and that the Government has now extended that target to 2025? Does he agree that Scotland's dynamic pharmaceutical sector, whose importance was demonstrated this week in the Fraser of Allander institute report, is key to meeting that future target? What specific action will the Scottish Government take to improve data capturing capabilities and to link primary and secondary care data to allow more investment in clinical trials and actually realise the potential of Scotland's life sciences sector?

Ivan McKee: The target is for the sector to grow from £4 billion to £8 billion. We will see what the data that will come out shortly says, but I believe that it will confirm that we are on target to meet that growth target.

On what the sector is doing, the member will be aware that the First Minister recently opened the £54 million GlaxoSmithKline pharmaceutical production centre in Montrose. On what is happening with the increase in innovation in the sector, the Scottish Government continues to work with the industry leadership group, the stratified medicine Scotland innovation centre and the industrial biotechnology innovation centre to support innovation in the sector.

On what is happening specifically with the NHS, the Scottish Government continues to support the health innovation partnerships and to work with Scottish Health Innovations Ltd and the Golden Jubilee hospital to increase the co-operation between the NHS and the life sciences sector, grow innovation in the sector and increase its turnover and its exports.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Question 7 has not been lodged.

Doctors (Rural Areas)

8. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what action it is taking to encourage doctors to relocate to rural practices. (S5O-02506)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): Our strategy to recruit and retain general practitioners underpins our commitment to recruit 800 additional practising GPs by 2027, which is backed by a £7.5 million investment in this financial year. A sum of £2 million has been invested in a rural package that includes the Scottish rural medicine collaborative, golden hellos and a relocation package.

We have also committed an additional £30 million by 2021 to support all GPs with premises-related liabilities, to reduce the risk to practices.

I have launched our first graduate medicine programme, which will lead to an additional 330 medical graduates by 2028, primarily focused on remote and rural GP practices.

Alexander Burnett: I am well aware of those programmes, as are GPs in my constituency, but they are simply not working for the rural community. I ask the Government to review the programmes to ensure that they are effective in encouraging GPs to relocate to rural practices.

Jeane Freeman: I would be very interested to see the evidence on which Mr Burnett bases such a wide-ranging assertion. That is certainly not my experience, nor that of the remote and rural general practice working group or the rural collaborative, which are made up of GPs with experience in remote and rural areas. None of us said that this would be easy or without challenge, but I have yet to hear any additional constructive suggestions from the member or any of the Opposition parties about what we might do to add to the successful work of the actions that I have outlined.

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on what progress has been made by the remote and rural general practice working group on how the new GP contract will work for rural areas?

Jeane Freeman: The remote and rural general practice working group has commenced a programme of engagement with GPs, multidisciplinary clinicians and healthcare service providers, not only to listen to their concerns but to hear from them—based on their experience—about what more we can do.

One of the additional propositions that will come our way is dispensing practice training. I had a very productive discussion this morning with one of our royal colleges to look at how we can add to the multidisciplinary teams, not only in our acute setting but in primary care and, in particular, in remote and rural practices.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): Deveron medical practice in Banff will close shortly because it has been impossible to recruit a new GP. The critical shortage of GPs is due to workforce planning mismanagement and an underfund of £658 million to the GP service over the past four years. This will be the 11th practice to close in Grampian in the past 11 years and will leave nearly 6,300 patients without a GP practice. When will the Scottish National Party Government act to solve this desperate crisis in the national health service?

Jeane Freeman: As I have consistently made clear, I do not underestimate the challenges of GP numbers and GP practices in rural

constituencies—as an MSP from a rural constituency, I am well aware of those challenges. However, I find it beyond impertinence that a member from those benches should argue with us about underfunding when his party is part of a United Kingdom Government that has short-changed the NHS by failing to meet its promises. It made those promises in June and a few short months later it has undercut us yet again.

Culture and Tourism (Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire)

9. Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it supports culture and tourism in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire. (S5O-02507)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government continues to support cultural activities across Scotland, with an increase of almost 10 per cent in culture funding this year, despite United Kingdom Government cuts. Creative Scotland is the lead public body supporting the arts and funds a range of cultural activities across Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire. Through our funding of VisitScotland, we continue to market the fantastic tourism assets of the area, while the youth music initiative and the cashback for creativity programme support culture for young people in communities there.

Tom Arthur: My constituency, Renfrewshire South, is home to Elderslie, the birthplace of Sir William Wallace. Two of my Scottish National Party local government colleagues—Councillor Andy Steel and Councillor Jacqueline Cameron—have recently secured support from the council to explore ways in which Elderslie can capitalise on that status. Would the cabinet secretary be willing to meet me and Councillors Steel and Cameron to discuss how the Scottish Government can support the project?

Fiona Hyslop: I understand that the “Renfrewshire Visitor Plan 2018-2021” looks at marketing the region in lots of different ways, including through promoting its rich history, not least the Wallace connections to Elderslie. I am more than happy to find out more about that tourism offer and to meet Tom Arthur to discuss it further.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Public Spending

1. Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): Which plan delivers higher public spending in real terms over the coming years—the United Kingdom Government's budget plan or the Scottish National Party's growth commission?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Let me be very clear: as a result of the UK Government's budget on Monday, the Scottish Government's budget will have been cut in real terms by almost £2 billion between the Tories coming to office in 2010 and the end of this decade. That highlights that austerity under the Tories is far from over; they continue to deliver tax cuts for the richest and just cuts for everybody else. By contrast, the growth commission recommends real-terms increases in spending in order to protect our vital public services.

Jackson Carlaw: If that is austerity, the First Minister will need to think of a new word to describe life under her miserable plans, because it will be quite something. Whatever else the First Minister said, it was not an answer to the simple question that I asked.

On Sunday, Derek Mackay swaggered around the television studios saying, "Show me the money." On Monday, the chancellor did. The First Minister will not admit that the UK budget has now set a course for UK public spending to increase at 1.4 per cent in real terms up to 2023-24, whereas the SNP's growth commission—its evangelical bible of economic misery—forecasts public spending in an independent Scotland to increase by just 0.5 per cent.

Those are the facts, so I ask the First Minister again: which plan proposes to increase spending in Scotland by more—the UK Government's bold proposals or the SNP's miserable growth commission?

The First Minister: Through independence and having control over our own resources, we can ensure a real-terms increase in public spending. That is the prize of independence.

I go back to the Tory UK Government's budget that was announced on Monday. It will result in cuts to the Scottish Government's budget of £2 billion over the decade that the Tories have been in power. Most of next year's consequentials are earmarked for the national health service, and we will pass them on to the national health service. I should say, as an aside, that the Tories have even managed to short-change us on that. We were

meant to get £600 million in consequentials next year, but only £550 million will be delivered. If that shortfall continues over the planning period, the Tories will short-change the Scottish people to the tune of more than £0.25 billion. That is absolutely shameful.

If Jackson Carlaw does not want to take my word for it, perhaps he will listen to the think tanks and experts, who have all had their say on the budget over the past few days. The Resolution Foundation said:

"it is not ... the end of austerity ... Existing promises of extra spending in some areas ... mean the Chancellor's numbers imply ongoing cuts in other day-to-day public services".

We know what the Tories stand for. The mask has well and truly slipped—it slipped before we even got to Halloween this year. The reality of Tory Government is tax cuts for the wealthiest and cuts for everybody else. This Government stands for something very different indeed.

Jackson Carlaw: That was miserably predictable. Here is the reality: the Scottish Government will receive £0.5 billion more in real terms next year—that is what the independent researcher, the Scottish Parliament information centre, has declared. However, the SNP is so focused on finding the cloud in every silver lining that it cannot even bring itself to welcome a single penny of that money, let alone all £0.5 billion of it. Worse still, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work has indicated that he will refuse to pass on tax cuts that will benefit middle-income families elsewhere in the UK.

Will the First Minister offer any hope of tax relief to people such as senior teachers, nurses and police officers, who, without such relief, face paying a bill of £1,000 extra in income tax compared with those doing exactly the same job elsewhere in the UK?

The First Minister: However Jackson Carlaw tries to spin it, the reality is that there are cuts to the Scottish Government's budget as a result of decisions taken by the Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer. I have the figures here—£2 billion over the decade is the real-terms cut in the Scottish Government's budget. That amounts to almost 7 per cent in real terms. The Tories should be utterly ashamed of that.

I turn to tax, on which we are seeing the true colours of the Tories highlighted today. When we set our budget on 12 December, the decisions that we take will be driven by our determination to protect our national health service and our other public services, to tackle poverty and low pay, and to ensure that those who earn the most in our society make a fair and reasonable contribution to our public services. It will be a balanced,

progressive and fair budget, and it will stand in stark contrast to the one that we had on Monday.

I want to look at tax in more detail. I am really surprised that Jackson Carlaw is prepared to defend the reality of the situation. I will again cite the Resolution Foundation. These are not Scottish Government figures: 84 per cent of the benefit from the Tory tax cut for the richest goes to the top half of the income spectrum, and 37 per cent of that goes to the top 10 per cent of income earners.

Looking ahead, the Resolution Foundation has stated:

“the overall impact of tax and benefit policies put in place”

by the Tory Government

“since 2015 will, on average, have made richer households better off by £390 a year—and left the poorest fifth of households £400 a year worse off.”

That is absolutely damning and shameful, and I would be interested to hear whether Jackson Carlaw is prepared to defend that.

Jackson Carlaw: I will tell the First Minister something: Audit Scotland is not very impressed with her efforts to protect the NHS; it thinks that the current forecast is completely unsustainable. What we have had from the First Minister is the usual basket of clichés.

The chancellor’s budget is one that froze fuel duty and delivered a tax cut of £132 to the record number of Scots in work. It delivered a freeze on the duty on whisky, which has been welcomed by the industry, and help for the oil and gas sector, which has been welcomed by those in it. It delivered more than £0.5 billion for Scotland’s NHS, as well as help for our high streets and investment in our roads.

What has the SNP’s response been? An all-too-predictable whinge. How tired, lacklustre and miserable. The SNP wanted a freeze on whisky duty—it got it. It wanted support for oil and gas—it got it. It wanted to see the money—it got £950 million-worth of it. If ever Scotland wanted evidence that the SNP Government is a grudge-and-grievance Government led by a grudge-and-grievance First Minister, this was it. Why cannot the First Minister for once—just once—welcome it?

The First Minister: It is interesting and extremely illuminating that, when I quoted what the Resolution Foundation said about how the Tories are cutting tax for the richest in our society while continuing to punish the poor and asked Jackson Carlaw to have a go at defending that, he just changed the subject. Lots of people will have listened to Jackson Carlaw and realised that he is completely unable to defend the policies of his own party at Westminster.

I turn back to the NHS and tax. Let us not forget that, as a result of our budget decisions last year, 55 per cent of taxpayers in Scotland pay less tax than their counterparts across the UK because of our new starter rate. We are helping those at the bottom of the income scale, not those at the top. That is a progressive change.

When it comes to the NHS, for weeks now, the Tories have been challenging the Scottish Government to say what it is going to do with the £600 million of Barnett consequential that we were going to get in the budget for the health service. We will pass on every penny of consequential for the health service to the health service. Interestingly, however, it is not £600 million that is being delivered—it is only £550 million, and that shortfall will cost the Scottish people more than a quarter of a billion pounds over the period.

My final point—the Tories might want to listen to it—is that the figure of £550 million has another significance, does it not? It is also the figure that would have been taken out of the Scottish budget if we had followed Tory calls to cut tax for the richest in this financial year. That would have been the equivalent of taking 13,000 nurses out of our health service.

This Government stands for public services. It stands for helping the poorest in our society. It stands for fairness and progressive principles. What we have seen today is that the Tories stand for tax cuts for the rich and just cuts for everybody else, and Jackson Carlaw cannot even try to defend that. That is utterly shameful.

Student Debt

2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): The First Minister once pledged that, in government, the Scottish National Party would

“not force students into deeper and deeper debt”

and would further

“meet the debt repayments of Scottish graduates living in Scotland.”—[*Official Report*, 29 March 2007; c 33698-9.]

When the First Minister made that promise, the average debt for a Scottish graduate was £6,070. What is the average debt today?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Debt for students in Scotland is the lowest of any such debt in any country in the United Kingdom. It is significantly lower than in England, significantly lower than in Northern Ireland and significantly lower than in Labour-run Wales. That is because we do not have tuition fees—we protect students from having to pay tuition fees—and we have one of the best student support systems anywhere in the UK. In recent months, we have also

announced increases to the support that we give students.

We will continue to give Scottish students the best deal anywhere in the UK and will continue to be proud to do so.

Richard Leonard: I will give the chamber what the First Minister did not. Figures published this week show that the average debt for a Scottish graduate now stands at £13,200—that is more than double; yet Nicola Sturgeon promised Scottish students not only that they would not be forced into deeper debt but that their debts would be written off—they would be cancelled.

An SNP election leaflet from the time said:

“We will write off the accumulated debt still owed to the Student Loans Company by Scottish domiciled students”.

However, we now know that Nicola Sturgeon did not dump the debt; she dumped the promise. We know that because, this week, the Student Awards Agency for Scotland also confirmed that the SNP has cut student grants and bursaries by a third since 2012 and has increased student loans by a staggering 182 per cent over the past decade.

The First Minister was not prepared to tell us what the average student debt is, but can she tell us what the total value of student debt in Scotland is?

The First Minister: Student debt in Scotland is lower than student debt in any other part of the UK, because of the policies of this Government.

Richard Leonard cites the figure in Scotland of £13,230. In England, average student debt is £34,800; in Northern Ireland, it is £22,440; and in Wales, where Labour is in government, student debt is not the £13,000 that it is in Scotland, it is £21,500. This is yet another example of Labour telling us to do as they say not as they do.

Richard Leonard cited figures that were published this week, so let me share with him others that the Student Awards Agency for Scotland published this week. Last year, total student support went up by 4.5 per cent to £882.7 million. Average higher education student support in Scotland has gone up by 1.4 per cent since 2016-17. More full-time higher education students than ever before are receiving support: the figure has gone up by 3.1 per cent since 2016-17. Last year, we paid out 8.9 per cent more in grants and bursaries. The number of students who receive grants or bursaries increased by 2.8 per cent from the year before, to 53,620. As I have already said, Student Loan Company statistics show that students in Scotland continue to have the lowest debt in the UK. My final point is that not only is that the case, but the gap is growing, year on year.

That is our record on student support. It is one to be proud of, and we will continue to support students as best we possibly can.

Richard Leonard: If the First Minister had read further into that report, she would have found the answer to the question that I asked, which is that the total student debt in Scotland is now almost £5 billion. Therefore, while the SNP has been in office, it has presided over a 169 per cent increase in such debt. Let us be clear: it is the poorest students who end up racking up the highest debts, by taking out the biggest loans. That is not just my view but that of the National Union of Students Scotland, which said this week that

“students in the lowest household income bracket still finish their course with the most debt”.

Even by the standards of this Government, promising to scrap student debt and then increasing it by 169 per cent is nothing short of shameful. A generation of students have started high school and gone on to university since the SNP made—and then surreptitiously dropped—its promise on student debt. That is a generation of students who are burdened with debt repayments that the SNP promised that it would write off. As a result, although current and former students may still owe a debt to the Government, the Government owes them an unreserved apology. Will the First Minister do the right thing today and apologise for her £5 billion broken promise?

The First Minister: There must be students in Scotland who have started and finished degrees in the time that it took Richard Leonard to ask that question.

When I was pointing out the fact that students in Labour-run Wales have significantly higher debt than those in SNP-governed Scotland, some members on the Labour benches were saying that that was not relevant. Let me tell them what certainly is relevant. Richard Leonard represents a party that, when it was in power, supported charging students tuition fees, yet he stands here now and has the gall to moan about student debt.

Not only do we have the lowest debt for students in the UK and—according to all the statistics that were published this week—are we actually increasing the amount that we pay to support students, but we have set out further plans. By the end of this session of Parliament, more than £21 million will be invested every year to improve the support that is available to students at universities and colleges. Next year, we will invest £16 million to increase and expand access to further and higher education. For bursaries for students from the lowest-income families, we will increase the higher education bursary income threshold, and we will increase bursary support for the poorest young and independent students in

higher education. Of course, we will also be paying a bursary that is equivalent to the real living wage to all care-experienced students in further and higher education.

Not only do we have a proud record, we have the best plans of any party in this chamber for supporting students in the future. Therefore we will continue to get on with the job and leave the Labour Party to the various contortions that it has managed to get itself into.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are a number of constituency supplementaries—three in fact. The first is from Tavish Scott.

Sumburgh Airport (Car Parking Charges)

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Last week, Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd confirmed that it will impose car parking charges on islanders travelling from Sumburgh airport in Shetland. There has been no consultation, no island impact assessment and no new public transport links between Sumburgh and Lerwick, which is 25 miles away. Will the First Minister explain what happened to island proofing?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd has to take decisions that it thinks are balanced and allow it to support and invest in the airport facilities that are there. Of course, it should do proper island proofing—Tavish Scott is absolutely right about that—and it should consult. I will ensure that the transport secretary discusses the issue with HIAL and corresponds with the member once he has done so.

Education (Access to Subjects)

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): Cameron Barclay, who is a sixth-year pupil from Renfrewshire, is trying to study for his advanced highers. I say “trying”, because he must attend three separate schools and, because Renfrewshire Council refuses to help him with taxi costs, he must make 45-minute cycle journeys between them, which sees him miss class time and lunches every week. Does the First Minister think that that is acceptable?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I do not know the individual circumstances of young Cameron Barclay, but I am more than happy to look into that. Of course, one of the things that we are trying to do—I have had exchanges on this issue with Ruth Davidson at previous First Minister’s questions sessions—is to ensure that young people can access as broad a range of qualifications as possible. Some schools, in different clusters, will provide different qualifications, and young people will go to different

schools to access them. That is part of how we deliver qualifications.

I am more than happy to ask the Deputy First Minister to look into the specific case that the member raises, but the principle here is that we want to ensure that young people get access to as broad a range of qualifications as it is possible to do.

Sauchiehall Street Fires (Impact on Business)

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The First Minister is only too aware of the impact of two fires in Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow. Businesses there have been closed for months on end. Some are still struggling; sadly, some will probably not make it. Does the First Minister agree that Glasgow deserves the same treatment as Belfast? In the United Kingdom budget, Belfast was awarded £2 million to deal with the fallout of the equally tragic circumstances of the Primark fire. Does she agree that it is appalling that Glasgow’s needs were ignored?

I know that the First Minister has been helpful to businesses in Sauchiehall Street, for which I am very grateful, but will she meet the Sauchiehall Street business people to discuss what further help can be given to the city of Glasgow?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The finance secretary has met businesses affected by the two fires, and he intends to continue to do that and to engage with them in the run-up to our own budget in December and, indeed, beyond.

The Scottish Government has provided financial support through business rates relief and the £5 million fund that we set up to allow businesses to access financial support. A number of businesses have taken advantage of that fund.

I certainly do not regret the fact that Belfast got support—that is right and proper—but I regret the fact that the UK Government did not give the same consideration to the situation in Glasgow. The responsibility of the Scottish Government, through our own financial decisions, is to make sure that we are taking all appropriate steps to help businesses affected, and I assure the member that we will continue to do exactly that.

Asylum Seekers (Emergency Accommodation)

3. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Later today, Parliament will debate the treatment of asylum seekers in our society in view of the continued threat of an imminent wave of mass evictions and mass destitution in Glasgow. I hope that the vast majority of us will unite in revulsion at the United Kingdom Government’s brutal policies and in determination to take action to support asylum seekers and other vulnerable migrants.

I am talking about people like Abdul. He was refused asylum and has been destitute in Glasgow for two years. He has serious epilepsy and mental health issues, which stem from his persecution in Afghanistan and from his homelessness here. This summer, he was discharged from an emergency hospital appointment to a shelter that did not have space for him.

As I speak, Abdul faces destitution again tonight. He will spend yet another unsafe night on the streets with literally nowhere to go. Only once he has safe short-term emergency accommodation, staffed by professionals who can meet his health needs, will he be able to start making choices in his life again, rather than being forced to make the grimmest survival decisions night after night. That provision does not yet exist. With winter coming, it is needed now.

Will the First Minister tell us—five months after the Scottish Government accepted the recommendation that there must be funding for emergency accommodation for those at immediate risk—what progress is being made and when that provision will be made available?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The initial recommendations that were made in the run-up to last winter by the homelessness and rough sleeping task force were accepted in full and funding was made available. That funding was used to very good effect—it helped many of those who were facing rough sleeping. The people who I have spoken to, who are working on the front line and who helped to shape those recommendations, are very positive about the impact that they have had. As Patrick Harvie knows, further streams of recommendations have been made by that task force. It has now published its final recommendations, and we are working through the implementation of all of those. It is an on-going process.

I do not know the particular circumstances of the individual who Patrick Harvie mentioned, but often with asylum seekers there are issues around their having no recourse to public funds, which complicates some of the provision that the Scottish Government wants to see. I abhor the way in which the United Kingdom system often exacerbates the trauma that asylum seekers experience and the trauma that has brought them to this country. I want to make sure not only that we do everything we can to help them in the situations that they face, but that our actions to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness help not just asylum seekers but everybody who faces that circumstance.

A large number of recommendations were made by the homelessness task force. On the detail of where all the recommendations are in progress of being implemented, I am more than happy to get

the housing minister, Kevin Stewart, to write to Patrick Harvie, setting out the progress against each and every one of them.

Patrick Harvie: I appreciate the tone of the First Minister's answer. I believe that the Scottish Government wants to get this right. We in Scotland should reject the UK Government's wider hostile environment policy on migration in general, but we should also reject the idea that asylum seekers are a burden. To be asked for asylum, and to be able to offer asylum to those who need it, is to be in a privileged position. To have to ask for asylum is to bear a burden.

We need more than just firm sentiment and the commitment to act; we need action to be immediate, especially as the nights grow colder. We need an urgent timetable for the implementation of the recommendation on the provision of emergency accommodation and an integrated service that includes support services. We know that there is no legal barrier to funding those services, even for those people whom the UK Government has abandoned with the label of no recourse to public funds.

If the First Minister agrees that no one should be made destitute in 21st century Scotland, will she give a clear commitment that the Scottish Government will take the action that is necessary to prevent this humanitarian crisis on our doorstep?

The First Minister: Yes, I give that commitment. As I said in my previous answer, we are in the process of implementing all the recommendations of the homelessness and rough sleeping task force. We learned a lot from last year's winter initiatives and those lessons will be applied this year. We are committing significant funding to that. We have allocated more than £23 million of the ending homelessness fund to get on with implementing the recommendations. We have also recently announced additional funding for the housing first approach.

I absolutely agree with the member, and the sentiment that I now express in terms of the detail of what we are doing to tackle rough sleeping and homelessness is backed up by the practical action that we are taking.

More generally, I think that we should never see those who seek asylum as a burden. We are undertaking our moral responsibility in offering asylum to people here. Given the nature of the constituency that I represent, I regularly make representations on the part of a large number of asylum seekers. We often find that people who come here seeking asylum are highly skilled and highly educated. I strongly believe that they should be allowed to work and make a contribution while they are here, as so many of them want to do.

I hope that the Parliament can unite on all those issues and call on the UK Government to change the rules that are causing and exacerbating so much of the misery that asylum seekers face, and also get behind the work that we are doing to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, not just for asylum seekers but for everybody who faces that situation.

The Presiding Officer: There are a couple of further supplementary questions.

Universal Credit

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Does the First Minister share my concern that this week's United Kingdom budget was a missed opportunity to end the roll-out of universal credit? The chancellor's proclamation that universal credit "is here to stay" risks driving more children into poverty and forcing families to depend on food banks, such as the five food banks in Glasgow Anniesland.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, I agree. The extra money that was announced for universal credit and the changes to the work allowances within it were of course welcome, but they do not go nearly far enough. Universal credit will still adversely affect many people and lead many people into rent arrears and debt that would otherwise be completely avoidable. I still take the view that universal credit should not be tinkered with; it should be halted. I hope that the Parliament continues to call on the UK Government to do exactly that.

I have quoted the Resolution Foundation a couple of times today. Interestingly, it has pointed out that the income tax threshold increases and the increases to universal work allowances

"do not offset the impact of the ... benefits freeze"

for lower-income households. The issue is not just about universal credit; it is about the overall impact of the welfare cuts, which as I said earlier are leading to a situation in which the richest in society will end up better off and the poorest in society will end up worse off. As we saw from Jackson Carlaw earlier, that is literally indefensible, and I hope that the Parliament continues to stand up against it.

Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 (Consultation)

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The Scottish Government's consultation on the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 closed in January. Analysis of the responses was published in July, and the vast majority of the 20,000 respondents want a real ban on hunting with dogs. The fox hunting season begins again on Saturday, yet the Government still has not published a response. Does the First Minister

believe that the Scottish Government has done enough to ensure that foxes are not hunted with hounds when the season begins this weekend?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government's response is due to be published imminently. I do not have the date in front of me, but I know that the Cabinet is due to discuss it very soon. I will ask Roseanna Cunningham to write to the member to give her more detail on the timing of that.

Do I think that we have done enough? I think that we have done the right thing. We asked Lord Bonyon to review the provisions, and he has published a report. It is right that we carefully consider the way forward, and that is exactly what we are doing, taking full account of the consultation responses that we have received. As I say, we will set out our response in due course, and as soon as possible.

Antisemitism

4. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking in response to the reported rise in antisemitism. (S5F-02717)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): There is absolutely no place in Scotland or anywhere else for any form of antisemitism or religious hatred. Last week, we learned of the tragic attack on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, and my thoughts—and I am sure the thoughts of all members—are with all those who have been affected. We stand in solidarity with the Jewish community across the world.

I was reminded of the importance of tolerance, compassion and respect during my visit to Auschwitz earlier this week with schoolchildren from across Scotland. I certainly will never forget what I saw there and none of us should ever forget the horrors of genocides around the world. They are a stark reminder of the inhumanity and violence that bigotry and intolerance can cause.

We are committed to tackling hate crime and prejudice. We recently launched the letters from Scotland campaign, which aims to encourage witnesses and victims to report hate crime and help to create a society where hate crime and prejudice of any form are not tolerated.

John Mason: I certainly share the First Minister's sympathies with those who have been affected by the attack in Pittsburgh. I, too, found my visit to Auschwitz incredibly moving, especially when I saw the railway there.

Does the First Minister agree that the words and tone that politicians use are extremely important and can have a big impact on the people who hear them? Does she agree that we all need to be wary

and careful of the tone that we use, and that that includes President Trump when he talks about Mexico, and other people when they talk about Israel and the Jewish communities?

The First Minister: Yes, I absolutely agree with that. It is incumbent on us all to consider carefully the words, language and tone that we use. Words matter, and all of us are aware of the damaging impact that can be inflicted on individuals and communities through the irresponsible use of language. Everybody in public life has a duty to be aware of that and to understand the importance of the messages, tone and language that we use. It is important that we acknowledge and take time to consider the impact that our words can have on people and their families, and of course that includes personalised attacks and violent language. Those debase all of us, and each and every one of us has a part to play in confronting and challenging them.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): The First Minister referred to her visit to Auschwitz this week. In reflecting on her visit—as I have reflected on my visits to Holocaust memorials, such as Yad Vashem in Jerusalem—does she agree that, above all else, the principal lesson of the Holocaust is that none of us can ever afford to look the other way in the face of antisemitism? Even in a country as otherwise welcoming and civilised as Scotland, as Ephraim Borowski of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities recently said,

“Jewish people remain 30 times more likely than others to be targeted for their religion”.

Is that a call not merely for words but for action?

The First Minister: Yes. All of us have to look carefully at not just what we say but how we apply those words in the actions that we take. As the First Minister and the leader of my party, I take that responsibility very seriously, and I hope that that goes for members across the chamber.

I thoroughly recommend to any member who has not yet visited Auschwitz that they take the opportunity to do so if they get it. It is a profoundly unsettling experience, but an incredibly important one. As I said when I was there on Tuesday, it is important to remember all those who suffered and were murdered there and to pay tribute to that suffering, but it is also really important that we do not see what happened there just in a historical context. It is not just a history lesson. The Holocaust did not start in Auschwitz, Birkenau or any of the concentration camps; it started in everyday antisemitism and discrimination and the othering and dehumanising of Jews. That is the lesson that we must learn and apply in our modern lives.

That is why I was so pleased to be at Auschwitz with 200 Scottish school students and why I am so pleased that the Scottish Government supports—as I know many members do—the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust to ensure that as many young people as possible get that experience. It had a profound impact on me, but I know from watching the reactions of the young people whom I was with that it had a profound impact on them as well. That can only be to the good as we do everything that we can to ensure that those horrors cannot be allowed to happen again.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I fully support the First Minister’s words. However, this week, the acting leader of West Lothian Council’s Scottish National Party councillors and one of his colleagues shared and then defended sharing an article that attacked a young female Jewish trade union leader for her work in representing low-paid workers. The article cited Adolf Hitler and “Mein Kampf”. The author of the article was rightly suspended by the First Minister’s party. Will the First Minister take further action and suspend both elected councillors and others who spread such offensive and hateful material and attack and abuse people for simply doing their job?

The First Minister: I will respond seriously and in a heartfelt way to that legitimate question. To follow up on Adam Tomkins’s question, it is important that all of us reflect on not just what we say but what we do. The author of that blog was suspended from SNP membership earlier this week. Obviously, due process will now have to be gone through, so I will not say any more about that at this stage, but I will say that the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definitions of antisemitism will be used in the consideration of that disciplinary complaint.

The SNP councillor in question has written to the young woman who has been mentioned today with an unreserved apology, fully recognising that he made a significant error of judgment and that that error of judgment arose out of a lack of understanding and knowledge.

There are two things that I want to say about that. First, I discussed those matters in general terms with members of the Jewish community whom I was with on Tuesday. When people get things wrong because of a lack of understanding or knowledge, it is sometimes important that we give them a chance to learn, because education and learning are an important part of combating antisemitism, intolerance and racism of all forms. The SNP is responsible for the decisions that we take on those matters and is answerable for those decisions, but in all such matters, we have consulted the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, and we have done so this week in

relation to the appropriate response to the situation.

The final point that I want to make on this is equally important. I could stand here right now and run through a whole list of alleged failures by Labour or other parties to take these things seriously and, indeed, to act as seriously as we have done this week. However, I am not going to do that because, although in a democracy it is really important that we hold each other to account, check each other's behaviour and call out unacceptable behaviour—that is a vital part of our democratic process—it is equally important that we do not rush to weaponise these things against each other for petty party-political reasons. We are all guilty of that sometimes. Fundamentally, it is really important that we stand united in saying that antisemitism, racism, bigotry and intolerance in any form are completely unacceptable.

The SNP will continue to treat the matter in that way and we will continue to be answerable for the decisions that we make. However, ultimately, on these issues there is a lot more that unites all of us than divides us. We would probably do a greater service to the memory of those whom we have been discussing and to future generations if we took the time to stand in solidarity on these issues as much as we choose to divide.

Students (Mental Health Support)

5. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that there is mental health support for college and university students. (S5F-02737)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Every student should have access to emotional, mental health and wellbeing support. That is why our programme for government includes a commitment to provide more than 80 additional counsellors in colleges and universities over the next four years, with an investment of about £20 million.

We are also supporting the National Union of Students Scotland's think positive project, which aims to find ways to support students' experience in mental ill health, to tackle stigma and discrimination and to promote wellbeing. We will continue to work closely with the university and college sectors, NUS Scotland and other partners on implementation of the additional counsellors, and to ensure an integrated wraparound approach to student wellbeing in higher and further education.

Rachael Hamilton: As the First Minister will be aware, the number of university students in Scotland who are seeking support for mental ill health has increased by two thirds in five years.

Information from universities across Scotland for the numbers of students seeking some form of support shows that 11,700 students asked for help in 2016-17, compared with 7,000 in 2012-13, with cases ranging from anxiety to depression to gender-based violence to body dysmorphia. How does the First Minister plan to ensure that mental health funding is split fairly across colleges and universities? I note that she has indicated that some implementation is going on, but when can the students expect to see more counsellors on the campuses?

The First Minister: The short answer to that important question is that the announcement that we made in the programme for government—obviously, there will be more details when we present our budget in a few weeks—is that we will invest significantly in additional counsellors for schools, colleges and universities. That will have an impact on campuses across the country.

Rachael Hamilton was absolutely right to mention the increase in students who are coming forward for support. Of course, that reflects the increase across society in the number of people who are coming forward for support for mental health issues. As I have said many times, we should in some ways welcome that, because it is a sign that the stigma that is associated with mental health is reducing.

However, that also puts the responsibility on the Government's shoulders to ensure that the services are there. As well as investing more, we need to reconfigure delivery of mental health services, with much more preventative support and much more support not only in schools, colleges and universities, but in, for example, police stations and general practice surgeries, so that is exactly what we are trying to do.

Perhaps one of the most important things that we will do in implementing the plans is to develop the community mental wellbeing service, which will cater for everybody in the five to 24-year-old age group. There is a wide range of things that it is important that we take forward, and we are committed to continuing to do so.

Air Departure Tax (Highlands and Islands Exemption)

6. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what recent discussions the Scottish Government has had with the European Commission regarding the Highlands and Islands exemption from the air departure tax. (S5F-02725)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We want to protect the existing Highlands and Islands exemption from the air departure tax. We have written to the United Kingdom Government, asking

it to notify the exemption for approval to the European Commission, and we have on-going discussions with it on the matter. Only the UK Government, as the European Union member state, can engage with the Commission to pursue that notification.

However, as has been previously set out, notification is only one avenue. We are continuing to explore a range of options in order to try to find the best possible solution to the Highlands and Islands exemption issue, which, of course, needs to be resolved before ADT can be introduced in Scotland.

David Stewart: The First Minister will be well aware of the calls from some quarters of the aviation industry south of the Highland line to kill off the exemption, which would have potentially damaging consequences for businesses and communities across my region. Can the First Minister give Parliament an absolute assurance today that she will resist those misguided demands and protect the interests of the Highlands and Islands by preserving the vital exemption?

The First Minister: It is not just the case that I can give that assurance; the actions that we have taken to date demonstrate that we are absolutely determined to protect the Highlands and Islands exemption. We have taken the decision that ADT cannot be introduced and that some policy changes that we want to make therefore cannot happen until we have resolved the issue of the exemption. We continue to take steps to try to get the UK Government, with us, to come up with solutions.

I do not know whom, exactly, David Stewart was citing, but I would certainly not support anybody who wants to kill off the exemption. We understand that the exemption is important for the economy and connectivity of the Highlands and Islands, which is why we are taking action to try to protect it.

ScotRail (Performance)

7. Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking in light of ScotRail's performance falling to its lowest level since the current franchise began. (S5F-02732)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am fully aware of the performance issues that ScotRail requires to address. However, the most recent punctuality statistics were impacted significantly by the severe weather during storm Ali, which caused damage to overhead power lines and trees to fall on to tracks.

Notwithstanding those issues, we continue to impress upon the senior management of Network

Rail the need for a renewed focus on maintaining the network infrastructure in Scotland. That will help ScotRail to meet its challenging but achievable targets.

Michael Matheson is due to meet Sir Peter Hendy, the chair of Network Rail, and the ScotRail Alliance separately over the next week. He will be making it clear that it is absolutely imperative that performance improves swiftly and effectively to the standards that are expected by passengers. Of course, that process would be helped by full devolution of Network Rail—a move that would allow the appropriate parliamentary oversight of the whole rail infrastructure in Scotland, rather than just part of it.

Mike Rumbles: More services are running late, carriages are jam-packed because the new fleets are well behind schedule, and ScotRail's performance, to be quite frank, stinks. Now, that is being taken to an all-too-literal level. This week, we learned that ScotRail will be dumping human waste on tracks, thanks to the roll-out of trains that first entered service in the 1970s. ScotRail calls those trains "classic"; is that the description that the First Minister would use, and does she think that the practice is acceptable on a 21st century rail system?

The First Minister: That is not a practice that we support, and ScotRail has said that it is not one that it wants to continue. It is an interim measure. It is regrettable, and ScotRail is working to mitigate the issue as soon as possible. The Scottish Government, of course, has directly funded previous installation programmes to eradicate that practice across ScotRail fleets. It will be necessary to introduce some unrefurbished high-speed trains to the service for an interim period, but it is important that ScotRail works to resolve that situation as quickly as possible.

In terms of wider performance issues, it is important—notwithstanding what I said in my initial answer—to stress that nearly 90 out of 100 trains arrive within the recognised punctuality measure. The latest figures showed ScotRail's public performance measure at 87.7 per cent, which is above the Great Britain average of 85.8 per cent. The figures in that period were, as I said, affected by storm Ali and the severe weather that came with it.

My final point is one that I have made before—that more than half the delays to ScotRail trains are to do with Network Rail infrastructure. We continue to work hard with Network Rail to try to resolve that. We fund Network Rail's operations in Scotland, but it would help if we could get the whole Parliament behind the calls for Network Rail to be properly devolved so that we could ensure scrutiny and oversight of the whole rail

infrastructure. I hope that Mike Rumbles will support that.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's questions. I note that a large number of members who wanted to ask supplementaries did not get in today, so again I call on members and ministers for short questions and short answers. Before we move to members' business, we will have a short suspension to allow the gallery to clear, new guests to arrive and the ministers to change seats.

12:49

Meeting suspended.

12:51

On resuming—

Outdoor Classroom Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-14384, in the name of Ruth Maguire, on outdoor classroom day. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that Outdoor Classroom Day takes place on 1 November 2018; understands that this is a global campaign to celebrate and inspire outdoor learning and play; believes that thousands of schools, including many across Scotland, will be participating by taking lessons outdoors and prioritising playtime; considers that outdoor learning improves children's health, engages them with learning and leads them to develop better social skills, enhanced problem solving and team working skills; commends the work of organisers to promote participation by schools in Outdoor Classroom Day, which takes place on two dates each year to fit with term times, and notes the hope that such events will encourage more time learning outside every day.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I thank all the members who signed my motion on outdoor classroom day and those who are in the chamber to take part in the debate. Outdoor classroom day is a proven catalyst for more time being spent outdoors at school, including playtime. Of course, the campaign is about more than just one day. It is intended to inspire more time outdoors every day—time outdoors playing, learning, exploring and having fun, at school and at home.

To achieve that, the campaign has three aims. Number 1 is for outdoor learning to be part of every school day for every child; number 2 is for every child to have a great playtime at school every day for at least 60 minutes, with the longer-term aim of 90 minutes; and number 3 is for schools to act as advocates for more time

outdoors, so that outdoor play becomes part of every child's life every day.

The evidence is clear, compelling and robust that playtime at school and around the school day is important. Play is not just something that is nice to have, and it is not just a shame that children do not play outdoors as much as they used to—it is much more serious than that. Through playing outdoors, our children can improve their physical health. Children are two and a half times more active when they are outdoors than when they are inside, and they sustain physical activity for longer outdoors.

Another benefit is improvements to mental health. We all know that being outdoors makes us happier—we can just think about how we feel when the sun shines on our faces. Multiple research studies from around the world have shown that, whatever the weather, as long as we are dressed right, children and adults feel less stressed, more relaxed and happier if they have been outdoors.

Being outdoors regularly and often helps children to identify a safe, quiet space where they can reflect. Being outdoors and away from screens helps children to build positive relationships, make and sustain friendships and develop the social skills that they will need throughout life.

Outdoor play can also improve academic progress. Children need time to assimilate learning. After playtime outdoors, children are more attentive to lessons and more on task, and they behave better. In a study of more than 2,500 children in Spain, exposure to total surrounding greenness was associated with a 5 per cent increase in progress in working memory, a 6 per cent increase in progress in superior working memory and a 1 per cent reduction in inattentiveness.

Outdoor play also helps children to connect to the places they live in and to the planet around them. We love only what we know. Playing outdoors for sustained periods of time, regularly and often, leads to greater care and concern for the environment. Having more green space in urban neighbourhoods in Scotland is linked to lower levels of perceived stress and improved physiological stress. As Sir David Attenborough says,

"No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced."

Research by Tim Gill, the author of "No Fear", compared outdoor learning with outdoor play and found that, although outdoor learning is important and crucial for understanding scientific facts, outdoor play leaves children with a love of the outdoors, so they want to protect it.

Children who are happier at school and more attentive in lessons and who feel healthy are far more likely to succeed in school and grow up to be happy and healthy for all of their lives.

Overall, Scottish teachers who responded to the survey were pretty robust. Across the United Kingdom, 24 per cent of teachers said that nothing stops them taking lessons outdoors and 16 per cent said that nothing stops outdoor play. One teacher in Scotland said:

"We usually ignore wet playtime, put on our waterproofs and get outside. I give up my break time to supervise this. Midges can be pretty brutal at times, however we still go outside."

That is obviously a teacher from the west coast.

Of all of the teachers across the UK who were surveyed, 99 per cent said that they believe that playtime outdoors throughout the day is critical for children to reach their full potential.

The Scottish Government is committed to encouraging and supporting inclusive play-based outdoor learning as part of the outdoor learning coalition, but playtime at school is important, too. Playtime supports children's social, emotional and academic development within the school day.

When schools stand up and tell the world that they believe that outdoor play is important, parents listen and the wider community listens. If we want Scottish children to be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors who want to protect the places that they grow up in and the environment of the planet, they need more time outdoors.

If we want happy children, they need to play outdoors. We have to make playing outdoors every day routine again. By supporting outdoor classroom day—not just today but on 23 May and 7 November next year—and by supporting the goal that playtime at school should be at least 60 minutes long, the Scottish Government can send the message that it believes that outdoor play is important, not just at school but every day.

I am grateful to everyone who signed the motion to let the debate go ahead and I look forward to everyone's contributions. If anyone wants to join me outside for some fresh air afterwards, we can do that too.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will move on to the open debate. It is quite heavily subscribed so I ask people to keep their contributions tight and no longer than four minutes, please.

12:57

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Ruth Maguire for bringing the motion to the

chamber. It is an issue that is close to my own heart. There is no doubt that outdoor classroom day is a very important, worthwhile initiative not just in Scotland but globally. Thousands of schools across the world will take part, with the aim of promoting and inspiring outdoor education and play. In 2017, more than 2.3 million children worldwide took part, including 530,000 in the UK and Ireland. This year, more than 540,000 in the UK and Ireland are expected to take part. I commend the initiatives in a number of primary schools in my region of Mid Scotland and Fife, such as Letham, Forgandenny, Dunbarney, Fossoway, Portmoak and Muthill primary schools. I have been looking at those initiatives this morning and I am exceptionally impressed by some of them.

I did not need any conversion to the benefits of outdoor learning, partly because I am old enough to be of the generation that was expected to play outside. We were often unsupervised, it has to be said, and played in the company of our friends, so that we made our own fun. I remember very long days outside, perhaps coming home only to eat and to sleep and sometimes not coming home at all until my parents came to find me, and the joy of being able to roam freely in fields and woods and climb up trees with my friends, and playing lots of games and sport. We thought nothing about the risks—perhaps we should have done—but I am clear that the experience built in me a strong resilience, a curiosity about the wider world, and a tolerance, which is something that is much needed in today's world, where it is perhaps sadly missing.

It certainly gave me a personal taste for the wilds of Scotland and the staying power that was required to complete the Munros, particularly on days when I made solo ascents in difficult conditions—I have to tell Ruth Maguire that midges are not just a west coast phenomenon. I was well equipped and very experienced because of my outdoor training, and I want to pass on that passion to many others, particularly young people.

Ruth Maguire has mentioned the scientific and educational information about how valuable this kind of education is. I could not agree more, but I do not think that we needed it all. Common sense tells us all about the advantages for children's wellbeing and behaviour. As a way of lowering anxieties and dealing with the growth of mental health issues, outdoor play and education could hardly be more important. I particularly noticed the recent study by the University of Essex, which has done a lot of quantitative analysis of those issues; it showed that the benefits are impressive.

The results of a new study that was commissioned by project dirt—a wonderful term—were that 99 per cent of UK teachers believe that outdoor playtime at school is critical for children to

reach their full potential. However, for me, the more important statistic was that 45 per cent of those teachers questioned whether they were able to do that, partly because of curriculum pressures and organisational issues. That is not the only thing that holds us back; much more damaging is the pervasive cotton-wool culture. There is an increasing link to what we call, dare I say, the snowflake generation—the young people I have spoken to about this issue—and that provides us with a lot of food for thought about how we raise our young people and make them resilient. There are too many excuses now for parents to cling to in order to overprotect their children, and the impact of that is that they might miss the most valuable learning.

Ruth Maguire: Will Liz Smith give way?

Liz Smith: Yes, of course.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you have come to the end of your contribution. Perhaps someone else will let the leader of the debate come in.

13:02

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): I congratulate my friend and colleague Ruth Maguire MSP on securing this debate on a topic for which she has campaigned tirelessly since our election in 2016.

Outdoor learning is, of course, central to the ethos of the curriculum for excellence. Ruth Maguire noted the four capacities of the curriculum for excellence, which puts the learner at its heart. However, although a secondary school teacher to trade, I was perhaps not naturally inclined to outdoor learning. That may be because of the subject specialism of our secondary schools in Scotland, the age group that we teach or the impending doom that afflicts secondary teachers around April—the start of the annual examination diet.

However, when I thought about my experiences in delivering “outdoor learning”, I realised that it had always been part of the education that I had delivered as a teacher: taking Elgin high school pupils to Grannie’s Heilan’ Hame in Dornoch; taking pupils on the annual sponsored walk at the Royal high school in Edinburgh; and taking primary 7 pupils to Dounans in Aberfoyle as part of their residential week at St Columba’s high school. Each of those experiences was formative to me as a teacher, because they allowed me to form relationships with my pupils outwith the formalities of the classroom.

In Scottish educational discourse, we often talk of the impact of actions on such things as pupil attainment. The impact of being an active member

of my school community and choosing to take part in those outdoor learning experiences was that I dramatically improved the type of learning and teaching in my classrooms. It was also hugely beneficial in confirming with pupils that my colleagues and I did not, in fact, live under our desks.

What about the impact of outdoor learning on pupils? A report that was published by the University of Plymouth in 2016 confirmed that outdoor learning can have a positive impact on children’s development, and an Australian research paper that was published in 1999 claimed:

“outdoor education has clear potential, if well designed, to foster enhancements of personal and social aspects of learning and development.”

We know that access to green space is crucial to improving mental health outcomes.

This week, on Monday, I was delighted to be joined by pupils from the community group at South Parks primary school, in Glenrothes. Earlier in the year, I had been contacted by constituents who had concerns about litter in Riverside park in the town, particularly because 2018 marks the town’s 70th birthday, so I had reached out to the local primary school to see whether it might be able to help.

The pupils excelled themselves. They collected bags and bags of litter and took their jobs as members of the community group very seriously. It was pretty impressive to see—perhaps there are a few aspiring politicians among them. The experience directly involved the pupils in outdoor learning that meant something and was contextualised; it was very different from a lesson on the impact of litter from a teacher in a school. The learning experience was meaningful.

Although I was not able to offer the pupils financial payment, as one of them requested, I promised the community group that I would facilitate a visit to Holyrood in future.

I will quickly mention Thornton primary school, which is taking part in outdoor classroom day today. The entire school is involved and a range of activities is on offer, including den building for younger pupils and an outdoor tour of what is on offer for parents and carers. Primary 7 pupils are taking part in outdoor artwork, and younger pupils are taking part in an environmental print walk. Headteacher Irene Johnson said:

“Outdoor classroom day allows the chance to help children learn about their environment by teaching them about seasonal changes. It’s also important for road safety, now that it is getting darker earlier. It allows children the chance to learn about something different to a classroom environment, which is beneficial for those who get restless and—dare I say it?—bored in indoor lessons.”

I commend Irene Johnson and the team at Thornton primary school for all their work on ensuring that outdoor classroom day is as meaningful as possible for pupils. We need hard-working teachers such as Irene to make educational opportunities such as outdoor classroom day work.

I thank the teachers in my constituency who are making a difference every day. Outdoor classroom day deserves to be celebrated in the Parliament; so, too, do the professionals who ensure that there is outdoor learning in our schools.

13:06

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Ruth Maguire on bringing this important debate to the Parliament, and I thank her.

I want to make a couple of observations, including one that is based on personal experience. A couple of years ago, during the October recess, I went to pick up a couple of young brothers whom I often take out during the school holidays. To my mind, the October school holidays are a beautiful time of year, when every child should be outdoors—the leaves are falling, we get that crisp sunshine and it is not too cold to enjoy the changing of the season.

At lunch time, after spending the morning in my office in Dundee, I went to pick up the boys from their out-of-school club. I asked them what they had been doing, and they said that they had been sitting inside all morning watching Disney's "Frozen"—and it was not the first time in that beautiful week, when the sun was splitting the pavements of Dundee, that they had been inside watching "Frozen".

I support the motion and everything that it says about outdoor classrooms and encouraging teachers to take children outdoors for lessons. There is a lot of value in that. I am also concerned that during the school holidays not enough children in Scotland are outside playing. As Ruth Maguire said in her excellent speech, there is even more evidence about outdoor play than there is about outdoor learning.

I am therefore concerned about the quality of the care that is provided in the school holidays. I recognise that at after-school clubs there is homework to be done and children are tired, so there might be more reasons for children to be inside. During the school holidays, however, there is absolutely no excuse for out-of-school clubs holding children inside to watch repeats of Disney films. I think that that is disgraceful.

I have done a little investigation about the regulation of out-of-school clubs. I think that the

responsibilities rest with local authorities and the Care Inspectorate, but I do not know whether much has been done in that regard. I would be interested to hear what the minister says in her response to the debate and to see whether we can have standards across the board, given that there are private providers and local authority providers. When kids attend those clubs, because their parents have to work, how much time are they getting outside? There should be a heavy presumption that kids should be outside unless the weather really does not allow that.

One of the obvious benefits for children of being outside is the benefit to their health, and I want to talk about that in the time that remains. *The Scotsman* reported three years ago that there are instances in Scotland of rickets—a disease that we thought we had seen the back of in the 1930s. There was a recurrence of it in the 1960s in Dundee and I have heard reports recently that it is recurring now. That is partly due to a lack of exposure to vitamin D from sunshine.

I have vitamin D supplements for my baby son and they are given out at bookbug sessions and sessions organised by health visitors across the country. However, the best thing that we can do is to get our children outside in the sunshine. There are huge health benefits in that. There is now also a recorded risk of multiple sclerosis as a result of a lack of exposure to sunshine. There are those health benefits as well as the benefits for children's wellbeing and mental health that Ruth Maguire outlined. Liz Smith also made some good points about children's robustness. We need to get children outdoors as much as possible.

13:10

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank Ruth Maguire for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

Outdoor learning is, and should always have been, a hugely important part of children's education. I look back to the dark ages when I was at school and it was literally that—no daylight during class time except to play netball for a physical education lesson, and only then if it was deemed sunny enough. The times are definitely changing for the better.

However, as has been mentioned, for the past decade or more children have been spending well over the recommended daily time playing video games and watching television, and way under the recommended time outdoors. I agree wholeheartedly with Jenny Marra's excellent point about holiday and after-school clubs, which is an issue that I had not even considered.

Spending too much time inside negatively affects not only children's health and obesity levels

but their academic performance and ability to concentrate during class. A recent survey of children from 125 schools found that, after spending time learning outdoors, 90 per cent of pupils felt happier and 92 per cent enjoyed their lessons more. Likewise, 85 per cent of teachers saw a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and 92 per cent found their pupils to be more engaged with learning.

Children who spend more time learning outdoors also develop problem solving and communication skills at a much faster rate than those who learn only inside the classroom and, crucially, learning outdoors helps children with attention deficit disorders. We need to teach children from a young age that learning is an ongoing, exciting process that occurs not just within the confines of the school walls but everywhere and all the time.

Of course, outdoor play and learning begins before school, which is why I am delighted with the rise in the popularity of forest nurseries. I have an excellent one in my constituency. All of the early years providers that I have visited in my constituency prioritise having outside space for children to play in all weathers—such a change from 20 years ago when my son was at nursery. It is important to remember that children do not mind rain, wind or snow; it is adults who object to that, which can often affect children's attitudes to going outdoors when they are older.

Scouts Scotland is an expert in outdoor learning and I thank it for its briefing. The scouts prepare young people with skills for life; I know that to be true because my niece and nephew are both active scouts and are flourishing as a result of their involvement with the organisation. Scouts Scotland is the largest co-educational youth movement in Scotland, with 51,000 or so members. Last year, 26,000 young people took part in outdoor learning at the three scout adventure centres. The scouts believe that learning in the outdoors gives young people the chance to develop skills for life that are useful not only outdoors but in the classroom. Building fires, learning how to cook and being part of a team are all skills that many children miss out on but which would enhance their future pathways.

Scouts Scotland believes that learning in the outdoors, away from school or home, can have a powerful, positive impact on young people's academic achievement. That is backed up by what we have heard today.

The scouts believe that many parents or carers may not have the confidence or skills to participate in outdoor learning with their children. Time could also be a factor. The scouts run parent and child camps, not just for scouts but for anyone who wants to enjoy outdoor family experiences.

The facts are clear: outdoor learning leads to healthier, happier young people and healthier, happier adults. Let us support outdoor classroom day.

13:14

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I thank Ruth Maguire for securing the debate. I know that she is passionate about the issue, as am I. Indeed, I asked a question to the minister a few weeks ago. I welcomed the response, which highlighted that

“Play-based learning is an effective and appropriate way to deliver education, and curriculum for excellence gives teachers the flexibility to introduce play in early primary and beyond.”—[*Official Report*, 3 October 2018; c 6.]

I also met Turid Boholm when she was in Scotland talking about the Norwegian outdoor kindergarten model, which was very interesting. In the part of Norway where that model operates, the weather is often very cold, and there are even points in the year when there are few to no hours of daylight, but there is an almost entirely outdoor-based model, and the results are fantastic. When she gave her lecture here, she asked why Scotland, where the weather is much better, could not have such a system. If members have the opportunity or time to check out Turid Boholm's work, I encourage them to do so.

Ruth Maguire and other members have made the case well about the benefits of play and the outdoors on development, learning and mental health, so I will spend the rest of my time commenting on a couple of examples in my constituency. It would be fair to say that I could mention any school in my area and pick out some amazing examples but, for now, I will focus on just three.

One school that strives to incorporate outdoor learning, not just on this day but every day, is Glenmanor primary school in Moodiesburn. I have visited its pupils' fantastic vegetable garden, and I understand that they are currently harvesting the last of the year's veg and preparing the vegetable beds for winter, while composting old leaves and veg. There are so many lessons to be learned from something as simple as a vegetable garden: responsibility, nutrition and cooking skills, the science of how things grow, patience, how to be more environmentally friendly, and how to reduce food waste. All those issues are important.

Another great example is Townhead primary school in Coatbridge. Today, the whole school is involved in a full day of activities. For example, pupils are having their numeracy lessons outside, recognising shapes in their environment, planting shrubs and flowers and having a bug hunt. The children are also involved in building bug hotels

and hedgehog homes, and they have even taken their literacy outside by finding things around the ground from which to make a poem. Of course, like in Glenmanor and other schools, outdoor learning is already an important part of the curriculum there.

Townhead is one of the first schools to be part of the seven lochs project, which is a two-year project that takes place every Friday at Drumpellier lochs. It involves linking the community, the environment and schools with outdoor learning. Pentland school, which is a primary school for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, also takes part in the project and, today, pupils are out on their scooters for outdoor learning.

My final example is St Timothy's primary school in Coatbridge. Pupils have been involved in outdoor learning activities all week. For example, the primary 1s went on a forest walk to learn about autumn and apply what they had learned to science. The school has a partnership with the fabulous Parent Action for Safe Play that involves children working with their gardener in the orchard and polytunnel, which have been developed on the grounds of the school. The school's nursery classes regularly go on forest walks in Drumpellier country park.

Fantastic work is being done throughout by area. As I said, I could have mentioned many other schools—I know that from my son's nursery forest walks.

It is not just schools. The Boys Brigade, the air cadets and others that are based in my constituency do fantastic work in promoting outdoor learning. Recently, I attended, and presented at, the 1st Coatbridge Boys Brigade prize giving, where I heard about the camping and other outdoor work for which some members were receiving prizes.

I try, where possible, to practise what I have said myself, so I am very much looking forward to getting out with my children at the weekend, regardless of the weather, because, as other members have said, children do not care. We will make use of the great spaces that my area has to offer, such as Gartcosh nature reserve, Drumpellier lochs and Dunbeth park, to name but a few.

13:18

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to speak in today's members' business debate on outdoor classroom day, and I thank Ruth Maguire for securing it.

As we all know, today is outdoor classroom day and, worldwide, children are taking to the outdoors

to learn. Here in Scotland, more than 600 schools are participating, which will give thousands of children the opportunity to head outdoors to learn, play and develop. It is important that our children get the chance to do that, because the world of today is very different from how it was 30, 20 or even 10 years ago.

Back in my day—perhaps mostly because there was a lack of other things to do—children would often go out to play with their friends as soon as the school bell rang. We did not have computers, mobiles phones and so on. A 2016 survey by Persil found that, these days, nearly three quarters of children in the United Kingdom spend less than an hour playing outdoors each day. One notable reason for that is the fear that it is no longer safe to let children play outdoors on their own.

Although a range of factors contribute to that statistic, it is no coincidence that the fall in outdoor play has happened at the same time as a rise in computerised play. The same survey also showed that children now spend twice as long playing on screens as they do outside. Although I believe that the huge advances in technology have been beneficial and should be fully taken advantage of, it is important to encourage a balance in children's lives as they grow up.

It has been shown in studies and in practice that outdoor learning has many positive effects. Perhaps most obviously, it improves children's health. Taking part in outdoor classes gives them the opportunity to get their daily hour outside. Beyond health, educational benefits have been observed, including the development of critical thinking, problem solving, concentration and even social skills—the more I say, the more I think that I should join Ruth Maguire outside afterwards for some fresh air. The benefits to education have been witnessed by teachers and early learning and childcare providers, who have said that the change in environment gives children new topics to think of and encourages them to display leadership and teamwork in accomplishing tasks.

However, teachers and childcare providers have highlighted some barriers to outdoor learning. A teacher who spoke to my office praised the idea of outdoor learning in principle but said that, among teachers, there was a general feeling of a lack of understanding of what the desired learning intentions and outcomes were meant to be. As someone who graduated with a degree in primary teaching in the past three years, she added that she had experienced a distinct lack of training in the delivery of outdoor classes, which she said led many teachers to avoid the practice due to lack of confidence. That view is shared by other educationalists across the country.

On top of that, a couple of drawbacks exist. First, extra care needs to be taken to ensure the

safety of the children, and that has a cost attached to it. Secondly, being based in Scotland, we are perhaps less well equipped for all-year-round outdoor learning than countries such as Australia, which, in many ways, pioneered the outdoor learning project. Let us encourage our children to learn outdoors, but let us leave the decision on the level of outdoor learning to the qualified professionals—Scotland's teachers and early learning providers. They should be the ones to decide how to approach the delivery of outdoor learning.

On outdoor classroom day, I welcome the promotion of outdoor learning. It is one solution to the problem of encouraging Scotland's children outdoors, and it lets them experience the joy of being outdoors. Perhaps more training could be provided to our teachers in the delivery of outdoor learning, because studies have shown that, if it is done correctly, it can improve our children's attainment and their health and can help to build character. I certainly think that it is important to have a balance between outdoor and indoor classroom learning.

I will leave members with the words of the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Liz Truss. As she once put it,

"Our children should be climbing trees, not the walls."

13:23

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): It is a real pleasure to have the opportunity to take part in this afternoon's debate, and I thank my colleague Ruth Maguire for securing it. I thank all the speakers who preceded me for an array of very thoughtful contributions, which have certainly helped me to develop my understanding of the benefits of outdoor learning and outdoor play.

Many of the arguments have been well rehearsed already. Outdoor learning has the potential to improve socialisation and physical and mental health and wellbeing. Another key area that has been touched on is its pedagogical utility. I have always felt that there is a strong correlation between excitement about a subject and one's capacity to learn it. In my pre-political life, I was a piano tutor, which did not afford much opportunity for outdoor teaching. However, I know from my experience that a method of teaching that involved the child simply sitting at the piano and not having the opportunity to get up, to dance, to sing or to engage in a broader degree of physicality would be quite limiting. Having that opportunity is an incredibly important part of the process of learning to play a musical instrument, and that applies to academic subjects, too.

I was struck by the comments about the advance of computerised play. I can divide my

childhood into two separate eras: before PlayStation and after PlayStation. I was fortunate to grow up in Barrhead, where my parents' property backed on to the Levern burn. There was nothing that I loved more as a kid than to go in the burn, building dams, fishing and going on adventures. Just a short walk away was the foot of the Fereneze braes, where my brothers and I would also go and play.

I will give an example of the impact that childhood experiences can have later in life. When I was growing up, one of the favourite holiday locations of my family was Rosneath Castle caravan park at Garelochhead. My younger brother, Martin, would regularly go down to the beach and disappear for hours collecting eels, crabs and all sorts of other beasties that he could find. He went on to study psychology at university and he did not enjoy it. At almost 30 years old, he is now studying zoology and absolutely loving it—he is completely engaged. After years of not being engaged, it is fascinating that he has returned to the original experience that enchanted and energised him as a child.

It is vital that our children and young people have exposure to the outdoors. We know all the benefits that it brings, particularly in areas such as problem solving. Children will acquire skills and abilities through outdoor learning that would be simply impossible to deliver in the classroom.

I commend the work of Wallace primary school in Elderslie in my constituency, which is seeking funding from the Aviva community fund. Votes for that fund close very soon. There is a wooded area within the perimeter of the school, and the school is seeking to develop it to enhance its outdoor learning offer to children and young people. I commend Wallace primary school on its endeavours and encourage all constituents in Elderslie and across Renfrewshire South to back the project.

I highlight the work of Elderslie community council, which is also seeking funding through the Aviva community fund to install a play park in Elderslie, where one is currently lacking. Although it is important that our children have the opportunity for outdoor play and learning at school, we want to make sure that they are able to do that outwith school hours, too, particularly during the summer holidays, as other members have alluded to.

Finally, I extend an invitation to the Minister for Children and Young People to come along and see the wonderful work that is going on at Wallace primary school for herself.

13:27

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Tom Arthur describes his experience of play as before and after PlayStation. It is probably fair to say that mine is before and after Etch A Sketch, which, at the time, was regarded as quite high-tech.

I thank Ruth Maguire for bringing the subject to the chamber. It is important and it deserves more attention and recognition than it gets. I, too, would like to thank the organisations, such as the scouts, that provided briefings for today and that have demonstrated a long-standing commitment to getting our young people outside and helping them to develop an appreciation of the outdoors and its many benefits. I also want to thank Play Scotland for its on-going work on this agenda.

As Rona Mackay has pointed out, the scouts are calling for more investment to help parents and carers take part in outdoor learning with their children, and they run parent and child camps that are open to people who are not involved with the scouts. Good work is going on, including in this city, where Cramond primary school runs its forest kindergarten at Lauriston castle. That is part of a City of Edinburgh Council pilot scheme offering 600 hours of nursery and 500 hours of forest annually. Every child would benefit from that—the children there are definitely experiencing a lot of benefits. I believe that the minister is aware of that pilot.

It is no accident that the entire shortlist of the United Kingdom's best nurseries in last year's *Nursery World* awards was made up of outdoor operators.

The children at Lauriston castle do not bat an eyelid when it is raining, but that is not the case everywhere. This March, *The Independent* reported a survey of parents, which found that children use wet weather, fears about getting muddy, tiredness and a dislike of the cold as excuses for not playing outside. It noted that

"One in 10 children said they would rather stay indoors to avoid getting dirty or touching germs"

and that

"Thirty per cent have been too engrossed in a video game to go out".

There is work to be done. There is a culture, but we have to develop a habit in children and ensure that they understand what fun they can have outdoors. Outdoor classroom day is very important. It is about not only encouraging more time to learn outside, but learning through play every day. It is clear that more focus on that is required.

As an athletics coach, I know that outdoor play is crucial for developing physical literacy: self-confidence, strength, balance and co-ordination.

Children and play should just go together—those words should go together, should they not? Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child tells us that every child has the right to play, but too many children in 2018 sadly do not. We know that, in other parts of the globe, children as young as five are going out to work all day, every day, in situations that we in Scotland can barely imagine, such as factories, mines and quarries.

We too, however, in this wealthy, affluent country need to do all that we can to ensure that we are contributing to that right to play, ensuring that it happens and not hindering it. Unstructured outdoor play can be transformational. Children benefit so much from the fact that they have overcome a big challenge or have taken a risk. Taking risks and failing to do something the first time that they try it, but getting there eventually, is key to building resilience and to good mental and physical health.

I look forward to hearing the minister elaborate on how she will take this agenda further in Scotland. It is clear that good things are going on, but it is also clear that we could do more.

13:31

The Minister for Children and Young People (Maree Todd): I am absolutely delighted to have the opportunity of closing today's timely debate on outdoor classroom day. I thank my colleague Ruth Maguire for highlighting this important educational initiative, and for all the hard work that she has done in campaigning on the issue. I am also delighted that the Parliament is celebrating the initiative, and to find that it has so many passionate advocates across the chamber. I feel very passionate about it, perhaps because I grew up in west Highland territory, with all the midges and mountains.

Liz Smith: Not all the midges.

Maree Todd: It has most of the midges.

We know that the benefits of outdoor learning, exercise and play are significant for children. Playing, learning and having fun outdoors help to improve wellbeing and resilience, increase health through physical activity and provide children with the opportunity to develop a lifelong appreciation of the natural world—and naturally encourage good stewardship of the environment. A growing body of research also shows a positive impact on educational attainment, which a number of members mentioned. We should therefore be very proud that Scotland is a country that recognises, values and promotes outdoor learning and play. The Government is committed to continuing that tradition throughout all stages of the learner journey. That is why we have created a policy

framework in which outdoor play can be delivered as a foundation of the educational experience.

This morning, I visited Happy Days nursery in Dalkeith, where we shook apples off a tree and I fell off a scooter—I had a great start to outdoor classroom day. It was also great to hear from Carley Sefton, who is chief executive officer of the Learning Through Landscapes Trust, that Scotland is leading the UK in promoting outdoor learning and—as she mentioned—the world. Quite rightly, she recognised that academics from all over the world are coming to Scotland to learn from what we are doing.

In my portfolio, we have provided £862,000 of funding to Inspiring Scotland to support eight local authorities across Scotland to develop and increase access to the outdoors as a focus of the expansion of funded early learning and childcare. I am determined that that expansion will provide an opportunity for us to define outdoor learning as part of our children's early experience.

Liz Smith: I am very grateful to the minister for giving way and I entirely agree with what she said—a lot of really good things are happening in the early years. However, to pick up the point that Jenny Marra made, the next stage is vital. As children grow slightly older, many of them drop out of these activities, so we really need to focus on continuing the interest in outdoor education. There are a lot of issues about staffing and provision there. Does the minister agree with that?

Maree Todd: Certainly, and I will respond shortly to Jenny Marra's point.

Outdoor access and play are already central to the new health and social care standards. We will ensure that outdoor play is also a key component of the new national standard for early learning and childcare.

Just last week, we launched a position statement in partnership with Scotland's national coalition on outdoor play-based learning, which is an important coalition of 50 organisations and national bodies that have committed to work together to embed playing and learning outdoors as an everyday activity and to celebrate it as a fundamental part of growing up in Scotland.

Our commitment to early learning and play definitely extends beyond early learning and childcare. In the curriculum for excellence we have a framework through which outdoor learning and play can be used to deliver education in all curricular areas between the ages of three and 18. We encourage teachers to engage with motivating, exciting and diverse activities in outdoor environments, through continued support provided by Education Scotland. We have also taken the important step of embedding outdoor learning in the curricular theme of learning for

sustainability. Scotland has a world-leading reputation in the field of sustainability education. We recognise that contact with the natural world will help our young people to understand the importance of environmental sustainability.

In response to Jenny Marra's point, I can say that we are developing a strategic framework for after-school and holiday childcare, which we recognise is a really significant part of tackling the attainment gap. Given our commitment to outdoor play and our track record so far, I have absolutely no doubt that outdoor learning will be a part of that.

Jenny Marra: I thank the minister for that commitment. Will she go so far as to say that during the school holidays, in out-of-school care clubs, there should be a presumption that the children should be outdoors as much as possible?

Maree Todd: I will certainly consider that. I would go further. In the after-school clubs that I have visited, outdoor learning is an important component. It is really important that children can play outdoors every single day. I would not restrict my intentions for embedding outdoor play just to the holidays.

Alison Johnstone: At the cross-party group on children and young people we had a discussion about the fact that some children do not have appropriate clothing or footwear for wet days. We discussed the need to make that part and parcel of school kit in cloakrooms and to ensure that there are wellies and appropriate clothing for all children to use for these very important excursions.

Maree Todd: Certainly, in early years such clothing is almost universally provided as part of nursery equipment.

Children and young people have many rich opportunities to engage in outdoor learning and play activities as part of their education. However, play and access to the outdoors needs to continue beyond the school and nursery gates. Our play strategy, which was launched in 2013, recognised that and sought to deliver a range of actions that will enable Scotland to be the best place in the world in which to grow up.

We have provided funding to the go2play programme, which was recently renamed thrive outdoors. It is doing incredible work, which includes the play ranger programme.

Inspiring Scotland's work as part of the active play programme has been proven to increase physical activity and is definitely linked to improved emotional, social and cognitive development.

I have lots more to say, because this is a personal passion of mine, but I will conclude by thanking all members for their thoughtful

contributions. Outdoor learning and play are vital to enriching the educational and social development of our children and young people. Outdoor classroom day is a fantastic vehicle by which the associated benefits can be delivered.

I am delighted to accept Tom Arthur's invitation and I would be willing to accept any invitations from other colleagues to visit outdoor learning initiatives in their constituencies. I restate the Government's commitment to this agenda and our desire to ensure that outdoor learning and play are delivered not just today but every day for the benefit of all our children and young people.

13:40

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Annual Target Report)

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. The next item of business is a statement by Roseanna Cunningham on "The Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions Annual Target Report for 2016" and setting Scotland's future direction on the low-carbon transition. The cabinet secretary will take questions after her statement.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Today gives me an opportunity to update Parliament on Scotland's contribution to global efforts to tackle climate change.

The need for rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented global change in response to the challenge of climate change has been clearly set out in the recent report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. I welcome the report, and I am pleased that we have moved away from debating whether climate change is real or not. The evidence that the IPCC has set out is the culmination of a comprehensive global assessment of the science that underpins the Paris agreement aim of limiting warming to 1.5°C. The report makes it clear that achieving that, as opposed to allowing warming of 2° or more, would significantly reduce the negative impacts for humans and the environment.

All countries, as well as businesses and individuals, need to act now if the Paris agreement aims are to be met. We can be proud that Scotland has been among the first countries to respond to the agreement, with proposals for strengthened, legally binding emissions reduction targets. That is the purpose of the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced in May.

The IPCC report says that we must act quickly. Scotland has already reduced its emissions by almost half, and our climate change plan sets out a credible package of immediate, on-the-ground delivery measures to continue to drive emissions down. The new bill sets targets for 2020 and 2030 that are the most stretching statutory goals of any country in the world. The IPCC report says that the world needs to be carbon neutral—which means net zero CO₂ emissions—by 2050. With our current bill targets, that is exactly where Scotland will be.

The bill not only sets new targets; it builds on the world-leading approach that was established by the Parliament's Climate Change (Scotland)

Act 2009. That is recognised by representatives of other leading countries. For example, Anders Wijkman, chair of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology Climate-KIC think tank and a former Swedish lawmaker, said in evidence to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee earlier this week that he very much applauds the Scottish approach of including a fair share of the emissions from international aviation and shipping in our targets. I suspect that that is because Sweden does not do so.

The transition to a carbon-neutral Scotland will fundamentally reshape our economy and society over the coming decades. There will be many opportunities, but also some challenges, and we must ensure that no one is left behind. That is why the Scottish Government is establishing a just transition commission to provide expert advice on adjusting to a low-carbon economy in a fair way. Professor Jim Skea has already been named as chair of the commission. Together, we will ensure that further commission appointments give the breadth of experience that is needed.

The independent expert advice of the United Kingdom Committee on Climate Change plays a key role in setting emissions reduction targets that are both stretching and credible. Credibility is vital. Without it, there is a risk of committing future Governments to actions that are, in any practical sense, unachievable. However, the Scottish Government wants to achieve net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases as soon as possible. It is our intention to get there, and we will set a target date for that as soon as that can be done credibly and responsibly. In light of the IPCC's report, I have joined the UK Government and the Welsh Government in writing to the CCC to ask that it provide updated advice on national target levels. We have asked that committee to provide its advice no later than March next year. If it advises that even more ambitious Scottish targets are now credible, we will adopt them.

Other countries around the world certainly need to step up and match Scotland's ambition and action if the Paris agreement is to be delivered. However, closer to home, Scotland will reach net zero emissions sooner if all parts of the UK work together. Many of the key levers, such as decarbonising the gas grid, remain reserved to the UK Government, and that is why it is important that the CCC's advice considers what is feasible across all parts of the UK.

The risk of a no-deal Brexit and what that means for our environment is also very real, and I call on the UK Government to ensure that its approach does not jeopardise the delivery of emissions reductions. The Scottish Government supports continued participation in the European Union emissions trading system as the most cost

effective route to decarbonising energy-intensive industry. The UK Government's approach to a no-deal Brexit would mean our losing access to the EU emissions trading scheme, and we are deeply concerned that the UK Government intends to introduce a carbon tax in its place. As such a tax would be reserved, that would remove any accountability to the Scottish Parliament for emissions reduction from key sectors of the Scottish economy. Such a reduction in devolved powers and accountability is unacceptable to the Scottish Government, and we have written jointly, with the Welsh Government, to express our concerns and to request urgent ministerial meetings involving all four Administrations.

On a more positive note, I turn to Scotland's progress to date in reducing emissions. The statutory Scottish greenhouse gas emissions annual target report was laid before Parliament yesterday, and it confirms that Scotland's annual emissions reduction target for 2016 was met. That means that we have reached our target for the third year in a row. Most important, Scotland's actual emissions are now down by almost half in the long term—a 49 per cent reduction since the 1990 baseline. We continue to outperform the UK as well as western European countries; in fact, only Sweden has done better.

Scotland's excellent progress has been recognised by the CCC in its recent annual progress report, and it also found that our current climate change plan represents an "ambitious statement of intent" and a stretching and credible pathway to delivering further reductions.

One of the key features of Scotland's current climate change plan is the inclusion of a monitoring framework to help us keep track of where changes in approach might become necessary. We published the first annual monitoring report from that framework yesterday, and the information in it complements the annual emissions statistics and independent overviews of progress from the CCC by providing more detail on the on-the-ground implementation of the policies in the plan.

I appreciate that expectations around the monitoring framework will, quite rightly, be high. However, it has been less than a year since the plan itself was published, and it is simply too early to assess whether the plan as a whole is on track. For example, quality-assured data for 2018 is not yet available for many of the indicators. However, this first year's reporting provides a baseline for future assessments of progress, as well as the foundation on which we will continue to develop and improve the monitoring framework. The new bill proposes that the framework be placed on a statutory footing for future years, with individual

sector-by-sector monitoring reports being laid before the Parliament.

Most of my statement so far has been about climate change mitigation, but I also want to take the opportunity to raise Parliament's awareness of our work on adaptation, which featured strongly in this year's programme for government.

Next year, the second Scottish climate change adaptation programme will be published. An outcomes-based approach, derived from the UN sustainable development goals and Scotland's national performance framework, is being developed and, over the course of the next few months, the Scottish Government will be engaging with stakeholders and consulting widely on how we can secure the right outcomes for Scotland from our approach to adaptation.

I have been pleased to update Parliament on Scotland's excellent progress in tackling climate change. That success has been founded on an evidence-based approach, and we are committed to maintaining that. We recognise the global importance of the new report from the IPCC, and we have joined the UK and Welsh Governments in commissioning updated independent expert advice from the Committee on Climate Change on what it means for our own targets.

I will also be proud to take Scotland's positive messages to the UN climate change conference in Poland in December. The meeting—the 24th conference of the parties to the UN Framework on Climate Change, or COP24—will take stock of global efforts through the culmination of the Talanoa dialogue process and will seek to agree the rule book for how the Paris agreement will be implemented. Scotland has a very strong message to share with the rest of the world. Our low-carbon transition demonstrates that deep emissions reductions are achievable and can be delivered in a way that promotes sustainable and fair economic growth.

This statement has been delivered in keeping with the statutory responsibility laid out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. If the new Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill comes into force before this time next year, this will turn out to have been the last such statement.

The Presiding Officer: We move now to questions.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of the statement. A low-carbon transition is a vital component of reducing Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions and achieving our climate change targets. The recent IPCC report on global warming states that, if urgent action is not taken to cut

emissions, global warming could reach 1.5°C as early as 2030.

Scotland has already made good progress in transitioning to a low-carbon economy by decarbonising our electricity and waste sectors. However, it is imperative that we look to other sectors, in particular transport, to meet our future targets, specifically post-2032. Both the UK and the Scottish Governments have sought expert advice from the UK Committee on Climate Change on an achievable pathway to net zero by 2050. If the UKCCC identifies a pathway, will the cabinet secretary adopt it in full?

Roseanna Cunningham: Yes, that is the commitment that I and the Government have made. What has held us back until now is that the UKCCC has been unable to outline that credible pathway. In the absence of that, we felt that it would be unwise to draft the bill in any other way than we have at the moment, but we want to get there. If the newly commissioned advice comes forward with that credible pathway, we absolutely will adopt it and ensure that the bill reflects that.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of the statement. Scottish Labour welcomes the success of a 49 per cent emissions reduction between 1990 and 2016, which proves to this chamber that seemingly ambitious targets can drive innovation and bolster climate action. The IPCC report was the strongest warning yet that we all know about.

Has the Scottish Government assessed its Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill in terms of Scotland's carbon budget and its contribution to global temperature rise? We must heed the IPCC's call for "rapid and far-reaching" transitions in the sectors that we are talking about today. That is why Scottish Labour calls for a target of 77 per cent emissions reduction by 2030. Will the cabinet secretary act on that now, given that we have the information to set a pathway for that?

Finally, given the discrepancies in sectoral ambitions in the climate change plan, what is the cabinet secretary doing to address that and has she considered sectoral targets to ensure that all sectors play their fair part to adapt by 2030 and beyond?

Very finally, Scottish Labour wishes the cabinet secretary very good luck for Poland. That was not a question.

Roseanna Cunningham: I thank Claudia Beamish for her good luck wishes for Katowice in December. I hope that by December the weather in Poland will be amenable to travel in a reasonable amount of time.

To take on board the member's points on the IPCC, I have made it clear that we are looking very closely at and heeding the advice that we are getting. We have asked the UK Committee on Climate Change to give us some of the detail and advice on a credible pathway that it was unable to give us in its last advice. That is because of what the IPCC has said—we have acted as a result of what we have seen in the IPCC report.

All the statements that have been made by me and the First Minister make it very clear that our intention in the bill as drafted is to meet net zero greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, when it is credible and the pathway is clear. If that pathway is made clear to us in the next few months, that is absolutely how we will approach it; my response to Maurice Golden made that clear as well.

I guess that the discussion about sectoral targets is kind of old. We take a whole-economy approach; we set sectoral envelopes, but we do not fix statutory sectoral targets. That is for a good reason. As I have said before in the chamber, it is difficult to assign measures to particular sectors when they cut across sectors. A lot of work is being done on energy efficiency; do energy efficiency measures contribute to reducing emissions from the energy supply or from residential and public sector buildings? How do we decide on that? If a target is set for one sector but not another, we end up not really achieving what we are trying to achieve, but we have done incredibly well.

Sectoral targets can be highly uncertain, because data revisions can have a disproportionate effect on specific sectors. It would have been extremely difficult to set sectoral targets for land use and forestry in the past few years, because of data revisions. The science has changed so significantly that any attempt to set sectoral targets would have come apart.

It is not just Scotland that does not have sectoral emissions targets; my understanding of the evidence that Swedish representatives gave at the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee's meeting on Tuesday is that Sweden does not set sectoral targets for much the same reason as we have chosen not to have them.

Our view is that the whole-economy approach is still the most sensible way to proceed, and that sectoral emissions targets would create an unnecessarily inflexible approach and would not be particularly helpful in the long run.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The cabinet secretary mentioned the urgent warning in the IPCC report that we must act quickly, but she did not mention the authors'

warning that the actions that we take between now and 2030 will be the most crucial for delivering low-carbon transport, warm homes and greener farming.

Scotland's proposed target for 2030 sets the bar too low—it would need barely any extra action to be taken beyond what has already been discussed. If Scotland is to stand any chance of meeting a future net zero emissions target, the Scottish Government must commit to more ambition on our next milestone target for 2030. Why is it not committing to that? Why is it not considering the benefits that strong technical innovation can bring? Estimates have been based on conservative thinking about what is technically possible.

Roseanna Cunningham: Basing our plans on technical innovations that we have no idea about would create a difficulty. I suppose that we could set targets, shrug our shoulders and hope for the best—that appears to happen in some places—but that is not the approach that we in Scotland have taken. I would rather stick to the dogged and continued success of the approach that we in Scotland have taken, which has been shown to be successful in achieving our ends. That is how we will achieve the outcomes that we are looking for.

I remind members that the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill was introduced in Parliament before the IPCC published its report. We were already looking at increasing our targets and our ambition. The IPCC report brings more urgency, which is exactly why we asked the UK Committee on Climate Change to reassess what we are doing. We will wait for our statutory advisers' advice and act accordingly.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of her statement and I welcome the confirmation that further advice has been sought from the UK Committee on Climate Change. The latest advice from the IPCC could not be more stark, and the case for upping our efforts to combat climate change could not be more compelling.

The cabinet secretary referred to the appointment of Professor Jim Skea as the chair of the just transition commission. What is the timetable for appointing other members of the commission? When does she expect it to make recommendations?

In 2015, the energy efficiency of Scotland's buildings was set as a national infrastructure priority. Since then, residential emissions have risen in 2015 and 2016. When does the cabinet secretary expect that trend to begin to be reversed?

Roseanna Cunningham: As the member said, I have appointed Jim Skea as the chair of the just

transition commission. We must now ensure that the commission's members reflect the range of issues that will need to be discussed. Our intention is that the commission will initially run for approximately two years; therefore, I would hope that we will have the commission up and running early in the new year. I do not want to put a specific time on that, because it depends on our ensuring that we populate the commission with the right people.

The member asked about specific issues in respect of buildings. As he knows, a lot of work that will change building emissions is being done. The energy efficient Scotland programme will help to remove poor energy efficiency, which will have a positive impact on fuel poverty and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As the member knows, an enormous amount of work is going on in the Parliament on energy efficiency. We want to make a number of commitments in respect of Scotland's homes and buildings. If the member is looking for more specific responses, I will ask my colleague Kevin Stewart to write to him on the particular areas.

We are on track to deliver our 2016 programme for government commitment on energy efficiency, and we believe that we will be able to make really good progress in the area.

The Presiding Officer: I appreciate that there have been detailed questions and detailed answers, but we now have eight minutes for the remaining nine questions and answers.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): When he appeared in front of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee recently, John Gummer, the chair of the UK Committee on Climate Change, said that it would be challenging to deliver an answer for the UK—with reference to both Scotland and Wales—by March next year. Is the cabinet secretary satisfied that it was correct to jointly commission advice, and will Scotland get particular advice that will be useful for us?

Roseanna Cunningham: Climate change is a global issue and it requires a cross-border response; we are probably in the right place to do that. No one country will deliver the whole solution, so the joint letter that was signed was an appropriate way to make progress. Obviously, some of our activity is influenced by the ambitions and actions of neighbours. I referenced in my statement the issue with the gas grid. For those reasons, I think that joining the UK and Welsh Governments was the right thing to do.

I have asked that the advice be available in time for the Scottish Parliament both to consider it and to complete the passage of the climate change bill before the summer recess. However, the most

important thing from the point of view of the bill is that our decisions are informed by the advice of the UK Committee on Climate Change. I would not want the bill to proceed before we have that advice. The plan is to get that advice in a timely manner to allow us to take the bill forward, but let us see whether the UK Committee on Climate Change can do so in the timescale that we have asked for.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer.

The cabinet secretary rightly recognises that expectations surrounding the monitoring framework for the climate change plan are high. When can we expect an assessment to be made of whether the plan is on track and when will the individual sector-by-sector reports first be laid before Parliament? [*Applause.*]

Roseanna Cunningham: That was interesting—I did not realise that the individual sector-by-sector reports were being awaited so enthusiastically.

This is the very first annual monitoring report. By its nature, it will not be complete. In future years, we expect the sector-by-sector monitoring reports to be published each October. That is the statutory footing to which I referred earlier.

On whether individual indicators are on track, for this first year's reporting, the assessments have been based on the judgment of lead officials for that area. That will obviously not continue, because we are keen to explore ways in which to make the assessment process as consistent and transparent as possible for future reports. We are discussing with stakeholders how that will be progressed. I am conscious that no data is available for some indicators, but that is just a function of this being the first report to be published. Stakeholder engagement is on-going and we will ensure that Parliament and the committee are updated on the work that is being done.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary expand further on adaptation, and will she confirm that stakeholder engagement will play a key role?

Roseanna Cunningham: The Scottish Government is required to set out a climate change adaptation programme every five years, which has to include policies and proposals for action and research. I have said that we are taking an outcomes-based approach. We are not just identifying risks; we are working on the outcomes that we want for Scotland as we adapt to climate change with regard to our communities, infrastructure, natural environment and the economy. Those outcomes are closely linked to

the national performance framework and the sustainable development goals.

Digital and face-to-face stakeholder engagement sessions will take place over the next few months to help to develop the programme prior to formal consultation early next year. As part of the process, we are developing adaptation-focused climate conversations to engage communities throughout Scotland from the Borders to Shetland.

People who engage on Twitter may already have seen two Twitter sessions that have taken place, on natural resources and infrastructure. The first face-to-face workshop was held yesterday in Inverness. Engagement has been lively so far—I look forward to that continuing and to the committee's continued interest.

Some interesting outcomes for adaptation are seen in the climate ready Clyde initiative, which got quite a lot of coverage this morning, and in Edinburgh adapts. Those initiatives are often more regional, so I advise members to keep a look out for whether there is one in their area.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The textile sector accounts for 6 or 7 per cent of the world's direct and indirect carbon emissions, and there are many examples of electronics that are designed deliberately for single use. What action is the Scottish Government taking to improve the sustainability of growing consumption in the fashion and electronics industries, for both consumers and the industries?

Roseanna Cunningham: As it happens, I have flagged up to officials that the textile industry, in particular, is probably one of the coming big issues that will confront us. At the moment, we are quite limited in what we can do. A big issue will be concerns about just transition, because many textile products that we use are made a long way away by people who are not paid much but whose jobs are nevertheless important. It is quite a tricky issue, which should be dealt with globally.

Pauline McNeill can rest assured that I have already flagged up the issue and warned officials that we will start getting questions about it—Pauline McNeill's is the first, and I congratulate her on that. Electronics sit in the same conversation, because none of us wants to be without the electronics that we use. Managing to produce them in a sustainable way will also need a very big global conversation.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): The third, fourth and fifth carbon budgets are excluded from the scope of advice that has been requested from the UK Committee on Climate Change. As climate change is a devolved issue, was there ever a possibility that that would mean that

Scotland's targets up to 2032 would also be seen as out of scope?

Roseanna Cunningham: No, there was not. The confusion arose from the fact that the letter was signed by three Administrations. I had presumed that people would see the carbon budget line and know that it was about Westminster. As that appears not to be the case, we have separately written to clear the matter up. We want all the targets that are proposed in the bill to be looked at and we have no difficulty with that whatsoever—we have made it absolutely clear. As I said, it was just an item of confusion that arose from three Administrations signing a letter.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise to Finlay Carson, Fulton MacGregor, Alex Rowley and John Mason, but I am afraid that we have no time for their questions this afternoon. I would ask all members and ministers to reflect on the length of their questions and answers.

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route

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

15:00

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): I welcome the opportunity to update Parliament on the Aberdeen western peripheral route, which is the most extensive road construction project in the United Kingdom. I am proud that this Scottish Government is delivering this long-awaited project, working with our partners in Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council. It is expected to generate more than £6 billion in additional income for the north-east of Scotland and create more than 14,000 jobs in its first 30 years of operation. It will boost the economy, increase business and tourism opportunities, improve safety and cut congestion as well as improve opportunities for public transport facilities.

The bypass was first proposed in the late 1940s, and it took until 2007 for this Government to progress the project in a meaningful way. After one of the longest public local inquiries that has ever been held in Scotland, legal challenges that were submitted in May 2010 and subsequent appeals, the AWPR contract was awarded in December 2014 to Aberdeen Roads Ltd, or ARL—a joint venture comprising Balfour Beatty, Carillion and Galliford Try.

As construction progressed, the contractor cited delays that were attributable to factors that included the cumulative effects of weather events and the well-publicised collapse of Carillion. On 22 March this year, my predecessor, Keith Brown, made a statement to Parliament advising of the potential for a late autumn 2018 opening, despite assurances from the contractor that its target was to open the project by August 2018. Contractors are often ambitious with their targets in order to motivate and challenge the workforce but, as events transpired, our more cautious view has proved correct.

We have worked tirelessly with the contractor to establish further measures not only to ensure that the project is delivered at the earliest opportunity, but to identify whether sections of the new road could be opened in advance. The sections that have already opened to traffic include the Craibstone to Dyce junction section, the 7km

section between Blackdog and Parkhill and the 12km section between Balmedie and Tipperty. Drivers are already enjoying significant benefits as a result of those improvements.

In May, ARL reported a technical issue on the Don crossing structure. Minor defects were identified while the contractor was post-tensioning a small number of concrete panels. The defects subsequently proved to be more extensive than was originally anticipated, albeit that they are in a localised area of the structure. Repairs have continued alongside construction work, with ARL reporting that it remained on target for a late autumn opening.

However, last Friday—on 26 October—Transport Scotland was informed that a greater scope of work would be necessary to repair the defects. The contractor has undertaken a full investigation of the defects that has been the subject of rigorous independent challenge. The contractor is working hard to repair the defects, and on Monday this week it reported that it was targeting a December opening date for the whole road.

However, the contractor was unable to provide a definitive date for the opening of the Don crossing section. A number of factors could influence the date, including technical issues and other physical factors such as the weather. We will continue to work closely with ARL to ensure that everything that can reasonably be done is being done, and we will provide a definitive date for the opening of the section as soon as possible. Safety remains our top priority, and there has not been, and will not be, a risk to public safety or the safety of the men and women working on the project.

Although the issues reported require time to remedy, it is important to recognise that they were found because of the rigorous quality control and design checks that have been built into the project.

It is also important to note that the costs of the repairs lie with ARL and will not impact on the public purse. ARL receives payment only on sections of the road that are open to traffic.

Our primary responsibility must be to ensure that the works are completed safely and to the required quality standards, and the Don crossing section will not open until Transport Scotland officials and I have confidence that that is the case. I believe that Parliament, and the public as a whole, will understand and support that position.

For some months, Transport Scotland has been working with the contractor to investigate the potential of opening the 31.5km section from Craibstone to Stonehaven and Charleston. In order to do that, a variation will be required to the original contract. Earlier this week, I spoke to Peter Truscott, chief executive of Galliford Try, to

receive an update on the progress that the contractor was making in discussing that variation with its lenders. Mr Truscott confirmed ARL's commitment to the project and offered assurances that it is doing everything possible, with the right level of resources, to open the road at the earliest opportunity. The clear indication from Mr Truscott was that ARL was making the necessary changes to the AWPR contract to open the section.

Having received those assurances, I was disappointed to receive a letter from Mr Truscott yesterday morning that cast yet more doubt on that mutually beneficial solution. The letter suggests that ARL has yet to agree to open that section of road; furthermore, apparently it has yet even to advise its lenders of the draft terms that have been on the table for a considerable time, despite verbal assurances to the contrary on Monday. Such inconsistency is frustrating efforts to progress the opening of the Craibstone to Stonehaven and Charleston section, as the lenders' agreement is required to take it forward.

In agreeing to that substantial change to the contract, the Scottish Government has a duty to protect the public interest. The Government must maintain a balance between opening sections of the road and releasing appropriate payment to the contractor at a time when it is dealing with the financial pressures of an overrunning project while retaining the right level of incentive to finish the job.

In addition, inaccurate rumours have been circulating in the north-east media that that section of road has been ready to open for some time. Despite daily discussions to progress its opening, Mr Truscott's letter confirms that no contractual mechanism is in place to allow that to happen. I have been urging the contractor to conclude those deliberations for some time. I repeated that to Mr Truscott on Monday and have reiterated it in writing today. It is now time for the contractor to stop deliberating and start acting. It must now take the necessary steps to open the majority of the road and let the people of the north-east enjoy the benefits that they have been so patiently anticipating. I have therefore asked for unequivocal confirmation that the agreement is being progressed, and for confirmation of when it will be concluded.

Transport Scotland has been accused of a lack of transparency over opening dates. As has been made clear repeatedly, Transport Scotland can advise on the expected opening date only when ARL reports that the road is ready, which was expected, until very recently, to be late autumn. It has been impossible to be any more specific while the remedial works at the Don crossing were ongoing and in the absence of ARL's agreement to open further sections.

It is a matter of public record that ARL has advanced a commercial claim in relation to the project, but the claim is not related to the current issues at the Don crossing or to opening sections of the road.

I fully appreciate that the project has been challenging for ARL, not least due to the collapse of its delivery partner Carillion. It is well known that that has presented commercial pressures for the contractor. There is a truly exceptional infrastructure project waiting to be used by the people and businesses of the north-east and, clearly, that needs to remain the single focus of all parties until the project opens to traffic. Transport Scotland will continue to work positively with ARL towards a prompt resolution to the current technical issues.

I am fully aware of the eagerness with which the people of the north-east are waiting for their new road, which will be nothing short of transformative for the economy and the community as a whole. I trust that what I have set out today will leave no one in any doubt of the efforts that are being made to open to road traffic further sections of the AWPR as fully as possible, when possible. Those efforts will continue while the matters are considered with ARL.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. We have about 20 minutes to allow for questions. I ask members to be concise, because a lot of members want to ask questions.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement.

I appreciate that the cabinet secretary has been in his job only a very short time and that he has no history in the area, so let me remind him that the Scottish National Party said first that the AWPR would be open in the winter of 2017-18; then it said that it would open in March 2018; and then we were told in this year's programme for government that it would open in late autumn 2018. Now, we are told—again, at the eleventh hour—that there are further delays. The cabinet secretary cannot provide the people of the north-east with a firm opening date.

Today's statement lists various structural, contractual and communication problems that make clear that the cabinet secretary's latest teaser that the road might open in December is clearly never going to happen. Decent businesses would have predicted such issues and delays months ago and made provision. It is a disgrace that the Scottish Government has failed to do so, but that is all too predictable, given that the Government blames everybody except itself.

Given that one would assume that the cabinet secretary has interrogated the contractor about the

bridge delays, the contract delays and the alleged lack of communication, what is a realistic timescale for the road to open in full? Furthermore, according to the statement, the whole project is characterised by a loss of control between ARL, Transport Scotland and the cabinet secretary. People will feel that the Scottish Government has lost its grip on the process. Are they wrong?

Michael Matheson: The answer to Liam Kerr's final point is that the Government has not lost its grip on the process. It is a bit rich for Conservative Party members to give lectures, given that, over decades, the UK Government failed to deliver the Aberdeen western peripheral route. I will take absolutely no lectures from the Conservatives about delivering infrastructure in this country, particularly in the north-east of Scotland.

Liam Kerr says that we should have anticipated the problems. The reality is that when dealing with such a project—the road is some 58km long and has more than 100 different structures on it—it is difficult to anticipate every technical issue that might arise. It is a major infrastructure project, and there will always be challenges and technical issues with major infrastructure projects.

Liam Kerr will be well aware of the reasons for the delays. One reason is weather events, which have had a significant impact on the contractor. Another reason relates to the time that it has taken for other agencies to move some of the utilities that were needed for the work to be carried out. The most recent delays have been caused by a technical issue with bridge at the River Don.

The opening up of the section that could be opened needs to be agreed with the contractor through a contract variation. That contract variation has been on the table for the contractor to agree to for a considerable period of time. That is why it is now time for the contractor to agree to it. That will allow the section of the road that can be opened to be opened to traffic as soon as possible while making sure that the contractor makes progress on the technical issues on the bridge over the River Don in a way that ensures the safety and quality of the work. That is what is happening at the moment.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing advance sight of his statement.

It was 2003 when the then First Minister, Jack McConnell, announced plans for an Aberdeen western peripheral route. Sixteen years later, it is just not good enough that the transport secretary cannot give Parliament a firm date for the opening of the road; all that he has been able to say is that the latest promise of late autumn 2018 is now worthless.

In his statement, the cabinet secretary said that there are technical issues on the Don crossing. The Government previously reported that those were minor, but today the cabinet secretary said that they are "extensive". What guarantees can he give that those extensive defects will be repaired by December? Are any of the defects similar to those that were identified when the Queensferry crossing was built? In other words, has there been a fundamental problem with the pouring of the concrete? Do we have details on what the defects are?

The cabinet secretary said that there are contractual problems with the opening of the 31.5km section from Craibstone to Stonehaven and Charleston. Of course, contracts are a two-way process. What lessons has the Government learned from the contractual arrangements that have been used for the AWPR to ensure that the lack of flexibility that is evident is not repeated on future projects? This is not the first major transport project that has been late on the SNP Government's watch, nor will it be the last.

I understand—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but you have had a minute—could you conclude?

Colin Smyth: I understand that the final cost to the public purse will not increase, but can the cabinet secretary tell Parliament what the final cost of building the AWPR will be?

Michael Matheson: I will deal with each of the issues that Colin Smyth raised in turn.

More detailed remedial action will need to be undertaken to deal with the defects in the River Don bridge—that is what ARL reported to Transport Scotland last Friday. In Transport Scotland, we have technical advisers who have oversight of the work to make sure that it is carried out to the proper standards.

With regard to the member's point about the contract, this type of contract has been used for the effective delivery of other roads in the past, including the M8/M73/M74 bundle and the M80 Haggis to Stepps bypass in my constituency. There is a way in which the matter can be dealt with: through a variation to the contract. That offer has been on the table for a considerable period, and it is for the contractor to agree that with its lenders so that the section in question can be opened. I have called on the contractor to make sure that it does that as quickly as possible.

Mr Smyth made some points about how we manage such contracts. Transport Scotland has a very good track record on the delivery of complex infrastructure projects. That is evident from Audit Scotland's recent report on the Queensferry crossing and the way in which that project was

handled. Transport Scotland is taking the same approach with the AWPR to make sure that the best quality is delivered and the highest standards are met so that the road will serve the people of the north-east in the years ahead.

Mr Smyth can be assured of one thing: I will continue to put pressure on the contractor to open the section of the road that can be opened and to get the necessary agreement with its lenders sooner rather than later. We have been trying to pursue that issue with the contractor for a considerable period.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Eleven members want to ask questions and we have 11 minutes available, so I want people to be concise and fair to their colleagues.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The cabinet secretary has heard the calls for the AWPR to be opened as soon as possible, or at least those parts of the route that appear to be finished. Although I have not been around since the 1940s, I have been waiting for the road all my life, and it has taken an SNP Government to construct it. Therefore, I am prepared to wait for a few more months for this major construction project to be fully completed.

What can the Scottish Government do to ensure that ARL gets agreement from its financial backers to open parts of the route as soon as possible, which I understand is where the blockage might lie?

Michael Matheson: It is unfortunate that there have been technical issues with the Don crossing. I give all members an assurance that the contractor, along with Transport Scotland, is working hard to resolve those issues as soon as possible.

As I mentioned in my statement, I spoke to the chief executive of Galliford Try, Peter Truscott, earlier this week to ensure that the section of the road that could be opened is opened as quickly as possible and that progress is being made with their lenders for that purpose. I was disappointed to get a letter from him some 48 hours later saying that Galliford Try had yet to put the matter to its lenders—despite what Peter Truscott told me on Monday and the work that was taken forward by Transport Scotland over a period to get that agreement.

I am now seeking a meeting with the board of ARL to look at what further action it can take, so that we move from deliberations about the matter to action to get that particular section of the road completed, and to ensure that it is doing everything possible to address the defects that it has identified on the Don crossing.

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):

The minister will be aware that the Stagecoach group has already postponed a planned bus route linking rural north-east communities to Aberdeen airport using the AWPR. Every day that the road remains closed costs the north-east economy huge sums of money. Given the shambolic delivery of the road, how can any business make long-term plans? Will the minister apologise to the business community for the extra costs and disruption caused by these continuous delays?

Michael Matheson: The member's view is that costs are incurred by the north-east economy every day by the road not opening—just think what would have happened had the Conservative Government acted decades ago to build the bypass to support the north-east economy.

When it comes to the north-east economy, all the Conservatives are interested in doing is draining money out of it and into the London Exchequer, rather than investing it into the north-east economy. I will take no lectures from the north-east Tories on doing the right thing by the north-east economy and investing in it. I assure the member that we are doing everything possible to make sure that the contractor agrees to the contact variation, so that we can open up as soon as possible the bit of the road that could be opened up to traffic.

I hope that the member, who gives the impression that he is committed to north-east Scotland, will get behind the Scottish Government in making sure that the contractors, rather than deliberating about it, commit to action to get the road opened as soon as possible.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I welcome the rigorous checking of the Don crossing, which revealed that it is not currently fit for purpose. Opening a duff bridge would not have been a good idea under any circumstances.

In the light of Liam Kerr's demands for a contingency plan, has the cabinet secretary had any communication from the Conservatives that suggests, as Liam Kerr seemed to, that we should be opening the bridge when it is not yet safe?

Michael Matheson: I am not aware of having received anything from Liam Kerr on this matter in particular. However, if he has a particular plan, I would be more than interested to hear it.

One thing that Mr Kerr can be absolutely assured of is that we will not risk people's safety with regard to the work that is being carried out at the bridge. We will ensure that that is carried out to the highest quality in a timely fashion. We are working with the contractor to ensure that that is the case and that the bridge will serve the community in the decades ahead.

We will not get into setting an arbitrary date that could compromise that work being carried out. I know that members might want us to set a date now, but the contractors are clear that, given the technical nature of the work, they cannot give a specific date, because a key part of the work is weather sensitive. Had that remedial work not been necessary, we would not be in this position.

As I have said, once a specific date has been provided by the contractor, we will be in a position to tell people what that date will be.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary appears to have confirmed that the section of the road south of Craibstone is physically finished and that the only obstacle to opening that section is the contractual dispute between the Government and the contractor. If the contract is structured in such a way that he cannot compel the contractor to move forward with the opening of the section, what incentives and penalties can he apply to produce that result, and what arbitration mechanism exists in the contract to allow him to force the issue?

Michael Matheson: As I mentioned earlier, the contract is of a style that has previously been used for the delivery of major road infrastructure projects. Mr Macdonald raises a reasonable issue. If, after the opening of the AWPR, we can learn lessons about how we draft such contracts in the future so as to address the type of issue that we have identified with it, then, clearly, we should do that.

However, there is a solution, which is a variation to the contract. That has been on the table with the contractor for a considerable time. The contractor has to get agreement from its lenders to allow such a variation to the contract to be applied. There is nothing to prevent the contractor from doing that now, as was confirmed in the call that I had with Galliford Try's chief executive on Monday, when I was left with the clear impression that the matter was with its lenders. Some 48 hours later, I received a letter saying that it was not yet with its lenders. That is simply unacceptable. It should be able to put that to its lenders to get that bit of the road open. The contract is not one that prevents that from happening; there is a mechanism that would allow it to happen through a variation, which is why we want the contractor to move on that sooner rather than later. I hope that all members of the Scottish Parliament who represent the north-east will be very clear in saying to the contractor that it should put that to its lenders, to allow the section of the road that could be opened up to be opened sooner rather than later.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): The minister is guilty of continuing to mislead the public with this statement. Does he accept that the

section of the road from Stonehaven to Westhill is physically ready and waiting to be opened? It is the Scottish Government that has mishandled the contract with regard to opening sections of the road when they are ready. When will he take responsibility for that and stop blaming the contractors, the weather, public safety and anybody but the Scottish Government for messing up the contract in the first place?

Michael Matheson: Mr Rumbles rarely rises to the occasion, and this is yet another example of that. A so-called north-east MSP, he wants us to ignore issues of public safety in relation to those matters. I think that his behaviour and comments on those matters are utterly irresponsible. Rather than come in here and try to suggest that I am misleading anyone, the member should reflect on his own comments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, cabinet secretary. Sorry—please sit down.

Mike Rumbles *rose*—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Rumbles, is this a point of order?

Mike Rumbles: It is a point of order.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Really? Let me find out.

Mike Rumbles: It is my opinion that the code of conduct is being broken here.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is my opinion that counts—I am sorry, Mr Rumbles.

Mike Rumbles: Indeed it is, but I must be able to make the point to you, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—this is not a debate, Mr Rumbles. Please sit down.

Mike Rumbles: It is a point of order.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is a robust exchange, in my view. Please sit down.

Mike Rumbles: Can I not make a point of order?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please sit down. I have ruled on the matter.

Cabinet secretary, please continue.

Michael Matheson: Presiding Officer, I suspect that Mr Rumbles does not want to accept the fact that we are in a situation in which the section of the road that is complete and could be opened requires a contract variation.

Mike Rumbles: It is your contract.

Michael Matheson: No—it is a contract between the Scottish Government and ARL. However, the reality is that ARL has to agree to

the variation in the contract. To date, it has not put that to its lenders.

I know that Mr Rumbles often gets things wrong. He has just demonstrated that—yet again—and he is letting down the people of the north-east. However, he can be assured of one thing: given his own party's track record in the Scottish Executive on delivering for the people of the north-east, we will take no lessons from Liberal Democrats on such matters.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind): I welcome and support the cabinet secretary's efforts to get the Craibstone to Stonehaven section open as soon as possible. He will be aware that if that opens prior to the Don bridge being finished, traffic wishing to connect northbound from Craibstone or southbound from Parkhill will have to divert through Kirkhill, Pitmedden or Wellheads industrial estates, and potentially Dyce village as well. I ask that he takes steps now to liaise with local authority transport officials to ensure that appropriate traffic management is in place so that residents and businesses are not disrupted as a consequence of any traffic movements that take place as a result.

Michael Matheson: The member raises an important point. If the section opens, temporary traffic management measures will have to be put in place at a number of points. Transport Scotland has already undertaken work with local partners to identify what traffic management arrangements would have to be put in place. One of the matters on which I have also sought assurance is that the necessary plans will be put in place as quickly as possible, so that there is no undue delay to the opening of the section that could be opened at the present time.

The member raises an important point on behalf of his constituents, and I know that Transport Scotland has already given consideration to the issue, to make sure that the interim traffic management arrangements are appropriate to deal with any additional traffic.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Mason, and I will take Alexander Burnett if you are both brief.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): In his statement, the cabinet secretary said:

"the costs of the repairs lie with ARL and will not impact on the public purse".

Later, he said:

"It is a matter of public record that ARL has advanced a commercial claim in relation to the project".

Will he explain how those two issues tie together?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, could you also be brief, please?

Michael Matheson: The cost of the Aberdeen western peripheral route package is £745 million. That continues to be the case—the remedial work on, for example, the River Don crossing must be carried out within the contract. The cost of that is borne by the contractors, given the additional work that they have to undertake.

As is often the case with major infrastructure projects, there will be additional costs that contractors may not have foreseen as a part of the work that they are undertaking. Contractors can incur additional costs that are associated with things such as the weather or ground conditions that were not identified at an earlier stage.

The commercial claim relates to additional costs that the contractors have incurred as a result of unidentified factors arising during the construction phase. As I say, such costs are often the case with many major infrastructure projects and the AWPR is no different. The commercial claim will be dealt with in the same way that such claims are normally dealt with through the different parties, as has been the case with other major infrastructure projects.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Burnett, you must be brief, as we are going into the time for the next debate.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): Why are my constituents still contacting me about the impact of the AWPR on their land and homes? Matters that have been brought to the contractors' attention many months ago are still not being acted on.

Although the cabinet secretary cannot offer any progress on the opening, will he at least reassure my constituents that progress will be made on defective works and compensation claims?

Michael Matheson: Compensation claims must go through normal due process and will have to be considered by the parties who are involved in lodging any claim and considering any payment.

If the member can identify specific areas where there has been a lack of progress by ARL in carrying out remedial work in relation to individuals' land, I would be more than happy for him to write to me with that information and we will ensure that that is brought to the attention of the ARL board to take action on the matter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions. I apologise to Gail Ross, Jenny Marra and Tom Arthur, whom I failed to reach.

Mike Rumbles: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Do you believe that paragraph 5 of section 7 of the code of conduct has been breached during this statement? I ask that you look at the *Official Report* and let me know, please, whether,

in your view, the code of conduct has been breached.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am happy to do so Mr Rumbles—I just do not want to eat into the next debate. I will do that, and we will report back to you.

Asylum Seekers

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): There is very little time in hand. The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-14548, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on a place of safety: supporting asylum seekers in Scotland.

I remind members that, for the purposes of the standing orders rule on sub judice, no mention should be made of any live cases during the debate. I know that you are well aware of the rule, but I highlight it for you.

15:34

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): We all need a place of safety—a place where we are welcomed, where we feel secure, comfortable and happy, and which allows us to be ourselves but also supports us to fulfil our potential.

This Government is determined that Scotland should be a place of safety for people seeking asylum—a place that gives them the space and the peace that they need to rebuild their lives, free from the war and persecution that forced them to flee their homes.

In January, we launched the second integration strategy, “New Scots: refugee integration strategy 2018-2022”, which was developed in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Refugee Council. The strategy aims to support integration of all refugees and people seeking asylum who are living in Scotland. That is why our key principle remains that integration begins on day 1. That means that people should be welcomed and supported to integrate from the moment they arrive, not just when they have been granted refugee status and leave to remain.

Over the past three years, refugees from the conflict in Syria have settled all across Scotland. That is a fantastic achievement, and I am grateful to everyone who has worked hard to make it happen. However, we must remember that the vast majority of refugees arrived in Scotland as asylum seekers, and it is their experience on which we want to focus today.

In line with the approach of the new Scots strategy, the Scottish Government is pleased to ensure that people seeking asylum have the right to access key services that support their integration, such as health and education services. However, integration from day 1 requires not just access to services, but a fully functioning asylum system—one that treats people with dignity and respect, that makes fair decisions and which does not leave people in limbo for years on end.

People seeking asylum have to navigate a complex and often frustrating system, sometimes over many years, before they are given refugee status and are able to get on with their lives. That is often at great cost to their mental health and their future prospects. I do not think anyone could argue that we have the asylum system that we need; what we have is a flawed system that is failing the very people whom it is supposed to help. Never let anyone say that claiming asylum is an easy option. The asylum system forces people to travel the length of the United Kingdom to get to Croydon just to lodge their claim. The Scottish Government has long believed that people who are in Scotland and wish to claim asylum should be able to do so here. It is not right that people are forced into another harrowing and unaffordable journey. The third sector is picking up the cost and is reducing the risk of people falling prey to those who would exploit them.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The minister mentioned the location for lodging asylum claims, which was one of the issues that was raised in the Smith commission recommendation that my amendment references. Has the UK Government shown any willingness at all to hold discussions with the Scottish Government about implementing that recommendation?

Aileen Campbell: As I speak this afternoon, it will become clear that, unfortunately, it is often difficult to engage with the Home Office and to make progress. When we decide on the motion and amendments tonight, we will all send a clear message about what we think should happen with asylum. It is difficult to get co-operation from the Home Office; nevertheless, we do what we can to work with it to make the progress that we know is needed, and needed quickly.

Glasgow has been a willing partner in asylum dispersal for nearly 20 years. It currently hosts nearly 5,000 people who are seeking asylum, which is more than any other single area in the UK, and more than Liverpool and Birmingham combined. As we all know, people make Glasgow, and Glasgow is proud to welcome people who are seeking a place of safety from persecution. The city has gained enormous benefits from the contribution that they have made.

It might surprise members to know that the Home Office does not provide any funding to Glasgow City Council for the substantial role that it plays in supporting asylum dispersal, despite the facts that asylum is a reserved matter, and that funding and support are being provided to local authorities in England. Along with my Welsh Government colleague, Julie James AM, I have made it clear to the Minister of State for Immigration that that is not an acceptable situation.

The Home Office seeks to widen asylum dispersal out into new areas. In principle, the Scottish Government supports that. However, we believe that dispersal must remain voluntary. It would be far more likely that new local authorities would agree to take people through asylum dispersal if they could see the Home Office working in equal partnership with the authorities that are already involved, and recognising their crucial role by resourcing it appropriately.

Since becoming Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, I have been incredibly concerned about the way in which accommodation is provided to people seeking asylum. A safe place to live is a basic need for everyone, and is a human right. I have already heard of too many cases of people seeking asylum being placed in accommodation that is far from satisfactory, and we are all aware of the threat of eviction that hangs over people seeking asylum. I will not comment further on that now, given that the use of lock-change notices is currently the subject of legal proceedings in the Court of Session.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): The cabinet secretary mentioned that many asylum seekers are accommodated in Scotland. She might be aware that Theresa May has instructed the Home Office to look again at the case of the Bakhsh family, in my constituency. However, the Prime Minister has, unfortunately, declined to meet the family. Because of restrictions, I will not mention the particulars of the family's case, but will the cabinet secretary accept my invitation to meet them to better understand their plight, and will she urge the Prime Minister to join us at that meeting so that she can see for herself how the UK asylum system is letting down the vulnerable families that I represent?

Aileen Campbell: I am very willing to meet Bob Doris and his constituents to explore whether there are ways that the Government can help, forby the work that is already funded across the city to provide advocacy and support in cases of destitution. I hope that the member has informed his constituents of the help that is out there. I am happy to meet him and his constituents, if that would help.

Members will be aware that the Home Office is currently assessing tenders for the next asylum accommodation contract. I understand that the outcome of the exercise should be known by the end of the year. The Scottish Government had hoped that a public sector bid, which would not be motivated by profit, could be made for the new contract, and we were ready to work with partners on that, so we were extremely disappointed that

the requirements and timescales of the tendering process did not support a public sector bid.

The new asylum accommodation contract is expected to run for 10 years, so it is absolutely crucial that the Home Office gets it right. Scottish partners have been frustrated by the lack of engagement so far. We want to ensure that the new provider understands the Scottish context and the differences in legislation and regulation in order to achieve the best outcomes for people seeking asylum. I still want to believe that the new contract can provide an opportunity for the Home Office to work in genuine and equal partnership with devolved Governments and local authorities. We emphasised all those points to the immigration minister at the four nations meeting on asylum on 15 October.

The Scottish Government takes its commitments to vulnerable young people extremely seriously. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are looked-after children. Since 2010, Scotland has led the way in providing specialist independent advocates for them through the Scottish guardianship service, which is delivered by the Scottish Refugee Council and Aberlour Child Care Trust. Forty per cent of children who are supported by the guardianship service have been recognised as victims of human trafficking. We will launch a consultation soon to gather views on the role, responsibilities and functions of the new independent child trafficking guardians. However, we are aware that the funding that the UK Government provides to local authorities to support unaccompanied children does not cover the costs that are incurred. An increase is vital in order to ensure that the support is properly resourced. We have again pressed the Home Office to clarify future arrangements, following its review of funding.

Last month, more than 80 organisations, including the Scottish Refugee Council, launched the “Lift the ban” campaign, which calls for the right to work for people seeking asylum. The Scottish Government has long supported that strongly; employment is critical to integration. It helps people to build their skills; it supports their health, wellbeing and self-esteem; it increases their social networks and friendships; and, at the most practical level, it puts food on the table and clothes on their children.

However, it is not just the people involved who benefit—we all do. Our economy needs more people to work in our public services and to start and grow businesses. “Lift the ban” estimates that people seeking asylum could contribute £42 million to the UK economy if they were given the right to work after waiting six months for a decision on their claim. It is clear that we are missing out on

a tremendous wealth of talent as well as an opportunity to promote further integration.

Without employment, people seeking asylum must survive on financial support of £5.39 a day. I expect that most of us spend more than that just on food before we even consider other essentials such as toiletries, clothes and travel. Poverty is part of the asylum system, and the spectre of destitution is never far away. Even for people who are granted refugee status, the move-on period of 28 days does not give enough time to secure housing and welfare benefits or employment. At a time when people should be able to get on with their lives, they risk becoming homeless and penniless.

People who are refused asylum and who have exhausted their appeal rights face the ending of all support. The Equalities and Human Rights Committee has rightly drawn attention to the issues of destitution arising from reserved asylum and immigration legislation. The Scottish Government is working with partners to develop a strategy with practical actions to try to mitigate some of the impacts on those who are most at risk.

I see that I will have to bring my remarks to a close. The current approach does not have to be how we deal with asylum. We can point to the Syrian resettlement programme as a positive example of the Scottish Government, local authorities and the UK Government working together. We see 31 of 32 local authorities providing homes to people who need them and sanctuary to people who have fled persecution.

Another way—a more humane way—is possible if we choose to work together. I do not want to make the choice that we currently have to make. I do not want people to live in destitution. Another way is possible if we decide to work together across parliamentary boundaries to send a strong message to the Home Office today.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that Scotland must be a place of safety for people seeking asylum; agrees that those seeking asylum should be supported to integrate in Scotland's communities and rebuild their lives from day one of arrival; believes that the asylum system must treat people fairly and with dignity and respect at all times; considers that the UK Government must work in equal partnership with devolved governments and local government and provide local authorities with the resources required to support people dispersed to their areas; believes that accommodation provided to people seeking asylum must meet Scottish quality standards and be appropriate to their needs; considers that people seeking asylum should be allowed to work while their claim is being assessed to help rebuild their lives; recognises that there must be a long-term sustainable solution that does not leave people destitute or homeless at the end of the asylum process, and considers that refugee resettlement programmes provide a model of partnership working and

integration support that should be replicated in the asylum system.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but time is very tight. You took interventions, and I gave you extra time.

15:45

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): Scotland has always been generous when it comes to offering hospitality; indeed, Scots are famous across the world for the welcome that they offer to others. Offering refuge to people who are suffering because of conflict or persecution in their home country—Huguenots seeking freedom from religious violence in the 17th and 18th centuries or Polish exiles during the second world war, for example—has long been part of Scotland's heritage, and things are no different now.

The world is in a state of flux. Millions of people have been displaced from their homes because of a combination of conflict, natural disasters and religious and ethnic tensions. From Myanmar to Kandahar and from Hungary to Damascus, nearly 70 million people are on the move, and 3.1 million of them are considered to be asylum seekers.

We in this country are lucky to have the freedom to express our opinions, to choose our religion, to vote how we please and to write what we will, but many people have endured all manner of hardships for the chance to practise what we take for granted. Thankfully, most of us will never know the pain of having to leave our home against our will, or the pain of being separated from our families and having to cross continents in search of safety.

It is right that people who seek asylum from persecution and find themselves in Scotland should be able to feel safe and secure. That is why it is important that Scotland extends the hand of friendship to those who need it most.

The UK Government and the Scottish Government have taken many positive steps to help asylum seekers, particularly over the past few years with the rise of crises in the middle east, notably in Syria. The cabinet secretary referred to the resettlement programme, which I wholeheartedly support. It is an excellent example of how to help people.

It is important to provide asylum seekers with basic amenities, but we could do more. During the time it takes to go through the process of seeking asylum—which can be years—we need to ensure that we do not put people's lives on hold, waste the skills that people have or prevent them from developing as people. If we do not ensure that asylum seekers have the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to their own lives as well

as to their host nation, we do everyone a disservice.

For that reason, the UK Government should investigate relaxing the rules for asylum seekers looking for work in the UK. Although I appreciate that asylum seekers can currently engage in voluntary work, if we really want to ensure that individuals are able to prosper here, and should they ever wish to return to their countries, the prospect of employment is essential. All regimes fall in the end, and there will come a point after any conflict when the time comes to rebuild. When that happens, countries need a cadre of well-educated people to reconstruct them. People of all professions—doctors, teachers, town planners and market traders—will be required to build their country's future. We can play a role in that mission by ensuring that asylum seekers have the chance to shape their own lives.

When countries are hostile to certain viewpoints or ways of life, they often lose much expertise and diversity because of the brain drain of talented youth. That point emerged while I was speaking to a young man from Pakistan whom I will call Imran, although that is not his real name.

Imran is gay, which is frowned on in his home country. Fearing persecution from religious hardliners, Imran left to seek asylum in the UK—more specifically, in Glasgow. He has been granted the right to stay here, but he spoke thoughtfully about the seven years in which he waited for a decision. I would like to share Imran's words with members. He said:

"I didn't have much money as I wasn't allowed to work. What could I do really? While I'm grateful that I'm now living in a country where I won't be criminalised for my sexuality, I wish I had been allowed to work while my decision was pending. It would have made all the difference, I wanted to work hard and show people that I belong here."

Imran had a language issue. In fact, when we spoke, he spoke in Urdu, and what he said was translated. He said that, although his local mosque offered basic English classes,

"some education from the council would have been helpful."

He found that all he could do with his time was pray and spend time getting to know his new home.

It is really important that we give young men such as Imran a real chance, and that we allow them to work to enable them to show us their talents and to move forward in their lives. We also need to enable them to integrate, as best we can.

Patrick Harvie: I am pleased that the Scottish Conservatives are saying something different from their UK party on the question of the right to work. However, their amendment does not negate the criticism of the UK Government in relation to deliberate use of destitution. Does Michelle

Ballantyne agree with the rest of us that its brutal policy must end?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you are in your last minute, now.

Michelle Ballantyne: I do not agree that there is a deliberate policy of destitution. I do think that we should be giving asylum seekers the right to work. We are having that conversation and we need to continue it, because it is the right to work that will prevent the criticism that Patrick Harvie has raised.

We should be doing all that we can to ensure that people like Imran and many of his fellow asylum seekers are able to grow as human beings during their time here. We have an obligation to do that. It is not only the right thing to do; it also makes practical sense to enable asylum seekers to contribute to our society and our economy and, hopefully, to their own economy, should they choose to return.

In conclusion, for the sake of those such as Imran and for the future benefit of countries around the globe, we should always do what we can to shelter and support asylum seekers, because they come not out of choice, but out of desperation. They come deserving and expecting the hand of friendship.

I move amendment S5M-14548.2, to insert at end:

“; recognises the skills and talent that many asylum seekers have to offer, and urges that due care and attention is given to the facts of individual cases.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry. Time is really tight.

15:51

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I, too, welcome what Michelle Ballantyne said about relaxing the rules on work. I wonder whether that is the official position of the Tories. It would help if that were clarified by whoever closes for them. Like Patrick Harvie, the Labour Party supports the view of the cabinet secretary and the Green Party that a policy of forced destitution of asylum seekers is never acceptable to those who believe in a humane system for asylum seekers and refugees.

The refugee crisis that dominated the news in 2015-16 and which resulted in a sharp rise in the number of people coming to Europe to claim asylum is less dominant now. Arrivals have dropped, and now that many Governments have cracked down on the movement of undocumented migrants within the EU, thousands are stuck in reception centres and camps, not visible to most people. Meanwhile, others are trying to settle and

make new lives for themselves. As *The Guardian* has commented,

“The cameras have gone—but the suffering endures,”

with camps proliferating across Greece, Turkey and many European countries.

Across Europe, there have been political consequences to what has happened. Denmark will no longer take any refugees under the United Nations quota system and is now focusing on integration; the German Parliament has voted to cap sharply the number of refugee reunions; and, ironically, Poland and Hungary are challenging the European Union with regard to who can cross their borders.

On 27 October, Putin, Merkel, Macron and President Erdoğan gathered in Istanbul to agree the formation of a Syria-led constitutional committee to try to bring to an end the seven-year Syrian conflict that has forced 12 million people to flee their homes. No other conflict in recent times has highlighted the causes and effects of war more than the plight of the Syrian people, who are now seeking places of safety across the world.

We have taken only 10,000 of those poor people, despite our being involved in that conflict every day. Around one and a half million people remain in the rebel stronghold of Idlib province, and one million children are at risk. We should be alive to the fact that Britain is involved in the daily bombing of Idlib. There is a cause and effect to being involved in war; in this case, the effect is the refugee crisis and the number of asylum seekers who are coming here for safety.

I thank the Scottish Greens for pushing for the debate and the Government for its positive response, given the dreadful scenes in Glasgow, where thousands of asylum seekers are facing eviction. As I said, we will not support a forced destitution policy—it is not acceptable.

We also believe that there should be a public sector provider of asylum-seeker housing, and that it should be accountable to the Parliament—that is what our amendment is about. The problem with a private provider is that it is not accountable, but it seems that accountability will be lost to us.

According to the Scottish Refugee Council, there has been unprecedented, on-going collective representation by asylum dispersal councils, including Glasgow, to the Home Office saying that they must have partnership and local oversight. The councils say that if the Home Office does not shift its position there is a real risk that they will stop choosing to be dispersal authorities. I am proud of the record of Glasgow and, indeed, Scotland on the matter, and I am sad to see that that ship may have sailed.

The Labour Party agrees that lifting the ban on the right to work is the humane thing to do and that the Smith commission's recommendations, as mentioned in the Green's amendment, are something that we should be able to return to, to ensure that people who come to Scotland have a way of lodging their asylum claim.

I move amendment S5M-14548.3, to insert after "dispersed to their areas":

" , and that the delivery of asylum accommodation, which must be within the public sector, must have adequate funding to fulfil this responsibility and should be housing of a good quality standard."

15:56

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I thank the Government for lodging the motion for debate. There has been long-standing public and political concern about this issue and I well recall the wave of opposition to dawn raids back in the early years of Glasgow's participation in the dispersal programme. Communities would barricade their neighbours into their flats, rather than allowing Home Office agencies to kick in doors, tear children from parents' arms and drag people off to detention.

Those nightmarish scenes sound like something from dystopian fiction, but they were a reality then and they are a reality today, in this country. Detention is still being used without time limits against people who pose no threat to the public, have done nothing wrong and many of whom still have routes to challenge unfair refusal of asylum. If citizens of this country were being subjected in our criminal courts to the sham of due process that asylum seekers endure in the asylum process, the outrage would be overwhelming, and yet the UK Government permits that as part of its wider hostile-environment policy towards immigrants more generally, not just asylum seekers.

A system that should be designed to ensure safety and refuge to all those who need it is in fact a system designed to say no to the maximum number of people possible. It is a system that places people in grossly inadequate housing and then tips them out into the street with nowhere to go—destitution used as a deliberate weapon of policy.

I will not mention specific cases, but we all know that the more general background to the debate is that, in Glasgow, the Home Office's outsourced thugs from Serco have threatened mass evictions and lock changes in a bid to force hundreds of people into destitution. That organisation cannot claim to be neutral in the face of the UK Government's vicious policies; by implementing those policies, it is complicit. Although that threat is currently on hold, we know that the potential is

still there for a humanitarian emergency in Glasgow over the coming winter months.

I welcome the Government motion and agree that Scotland must be a place of safety for people seeking asylum. The asylum system must treat people fairly and with dignity and respect at all times. However, we cannot have this debate without a recognition that the current asylum system in the UK fails to do that and is designed to fail to do that.

We will continue to make—across party lines, I hope—a case for fundamental change in that system, but while making that case we cannot accept that urgent steps can be avoided that are within the powers that our councils and the Scottish Government have. Today, the First Minister agreed that the Government will implement all the recommendations of the homelessness and rough sleeping action group—HARSAG—report. That includes, under recommendation 5,

"Funding for short-term emergency accommodation for destitute migrants",

which includes failed asylum seekers

"who are not entitled to statutory homelessness assistance, and are currently rough sleeping or at a high and imminent risk of rough sleeping".

That has to be

"provided alongside access to advocacy, and immigration and legal advice."

To be clear, that provision does not yet exist and we need a clear commitment from the Government to its urgent delivery. I also want to see the UK Government pressed to act on the Smith commission recommendations.

The Scottish Government should clearly signal that it supports those who, in the most extreme circumstances, find themselves with no option other than to mobilise to physically prevent lock changes and eviction, if such things are threatened once again. If SERCO and the Home Office find other ways in which to intimidate people out of their homes, we must ensure that they have places to go and that those who act in support of them have the support of the Scottish Government.

I move amendment S5M-14548.1, to leave out from first "asylum system" to "at all times" and insert:

"current UK asylum system fails to treat people with dignity or respect their human rights, particularly in relation to the deliberate use of destitution as a policy tool; calls on the UK Government to take urgent steps to end the threat of destitution and to implement immediately the outstanding recommendations in paragraph 96(4) of the Smith Commission report; congratulates the many individuals, communities and organisations that have worked to welcome and support asylum seekers in Glasgow and

elsewhere in Scotland, including by mobilising practical opposition to evictions and lock changes”.

16:00

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful to the Government for bringing the debate to Parliament today. I will speak briefly to the other amendments. We will, of course, support the Conservative amendment, and I can indicate our support for the Labour amendment in particular. We have heard a lot about the situation in Glasgow. Vince Cable, our federal leader, has set out a five-point plan for the Liberal Democrats on outsourcing. One of the clear red lines that he has set is that there are sensitive areas where the profit motive should play no role, and the delivery of asylum accommodation falls into that category.

We are also sympathetic to the Green Party amendment, which we will be supporting tonight. All our parties are signatories to the Smith commission report, paragraph 96.4 of which calls for the Governments to work together to make the system far more flexible, nuanced and aligned to Scottish values.

When we talk about asylum, immigration and refugees in general, we often hear the term “exodus”, which is a biblical term. Human history is peppered with examples of the mass movement of people avoiding conflict and violence. It is very sobering, then, to think that the number of people currently on the move as a result of persecution and violence is greater than the whole of humanity at the time that the Bible describes: 65.3 million people have been forced from their homes and there are 21 million people on the move right now. Those people are fleeing conflict, violence, extreme poverty and famine. Whether that is the caravan of 1,500 refugees fleeing gang violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras or those taking to treacherous, barely sea-worthy craft in the Mediterranean, all those people suffer trauma, dislocation and destitution.

Our response to that movement of people will define us as a nation and it will define our generation. There are two kinds of response to that: the public policy response, which we have heard something about, and the community response, which is the subject of my amendment.

At a policy level, it is fair to say that the UK Border Agency and the Home Office routinely operate in an atmosphere of mistrust; whether in testing age or evidence of torture, the approach is one of disbelief, with no flexibility in the process at all. The process is certainly not trauma informed.

We are wrong to presume that we always do things better in Scotland. The Hillingdon judgment in England afforded unaccompanied asylum-seeking children the status of children at risk far

sooner than that happened in Scotland. I am glad that we have moved towards that so that such children can enjoy support under section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, but that is still not routinely deployed across the country.

The treatment of young unaccompanied asylum seekers is how I got into politics. I worked for Aberlour Child Care Trust and the Scottish guardianship service for eight years. They experience the hostile environment that the UK Border Agency fostered while they provide support with accommodation, navigation through immigration systems and companionship. That is what makes them unique and I support their work.

As part of the committee inquiry, we visited Shakti Women’s Aid, which is incredible in its work to help women with no recourse to public funds to flee domestic violence. The Edinburgh Clothing Store is a charity that gathers clothing to give to new arrivals, English classes in Edinburgh are provided by the Welcoming, and the Edinburgh Remakery refurbishes old laptops to give to asylum seekers and refugees to help them start on their own as they settle in Scotland .

Warsan Shire is a writer I have quoted before. She said:

“no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark.”

Whether you start your journey in Tapachula or Aleppo, you will find space and comfort here in Scotland, our systems will not harm you and our communities will embrace you. That is the spirit of the motion today.

I move, amendment S5M-14548.4, to insert at end:

“, and recognises the immense contribution of the voluntary sector in providing community support, practical assistance, navigation through systems and companionship to some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): We move to the open debate. Time is very tight, so there will be strictly up to four minutes each, please.

16:04

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): As anyone who has looked at Scotland’s place names on a map will realise, Scotland is the product of many diverse influences. Scots have been migrants the world over, and Scotland has become the home to many people who are on the move, whether they have come to study or to work, or have come as refugees or asylum seekers.

Over successive generations, those communities have made great contributions to our social, cultural and economic life. With the Syrian

crisis, I hope that Scotland has shown itself to be a nation that is both hospitable and caring. My constituency, Na h-Eileanan an Iar, has welcomed a number of Syrian refugees. One refugee, 17-year-old Anas, told newspapers of the kindness that his neighbours have shown him since he arrived—they stop him in the streets to ask whether he needs anything and tell him that he is welcome in Scotland.

I also thank the Syrians who have come to the Isle of Lewis for the contribution that they have made to our community. An example of that contribution is the mosque that was built, which reflected a desire to ensure that new members of the community, along with the established Muslim population, had a place of worship for the first time. That principle and that project were supported by a significant majority of the community, including many Christian organisations.

I mention those examples because support of that kind is strongest when people have an idea of why Syrian refugees and asylum seekers have come to this country and what they have had to endure to get here. We should all take the chance to find out, and doing so will give us pause for thought.

Sadly, not everyone does think—and that includes some in the media who should know better. The strange political times through which the world is living have emboldened some voices of prejudice. We all have a duty to challenge prejudice and discrimination wherever they are found, but the UK Government's position on asylum seekers remains lacking in many respects. Dungavel detention centre sits just 30 miles from Glasgow. As we have heard, that centre and others like it often separate families.

Data obtained by the *Sunday Herald* under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 shows that, in one month in 2017, 20 out of 145 detainees were monitored for being at risk of self-harm and suicide. Those are just some examples of the misery that regressive policies can cause when they are inflicted on those who have come to our country to start a new life and to escape the terrors of war and destitution. Along with many others in this Parliament, I am sure, I call on the Tory UK Government to act now to end the intransigent attitude that the Home Office has very often shown towards these families.

We want to do more in Scotland—more than the UK Government's legislation allows us to do, sometimes. We want to be an international leader in supporting asylum seekers and allowing integration. We want to build on the Scottish Government's new Scots strategy and we want to build on support for charities to ensure that asylum seekers have safe accommodation and are not

stuck in detention centres. We want to show that Scotland welcomes refugees and asylum seekers.

These islands have a long record of people of different traditions working together. I think of my own islands, where people of different traditions and heritages work together; across Scotland, new people endlessly surprise by the way in which they can enrich our own cultural heritage. That is true of Scotland as a whole and today is a chance to celebrate our asylum seekers, to challenge prejudice and to call on the UK Government to show the respect that our asylum seekers deserve.

16:08

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): Today, the record of worldwide, forcible displacement of people has never been higher. There are more than 3 million asylum seekers. They may have experienced war atrocities or persecution because of their religious or political identities. Some have been denied their human rights or suffered because of their sexual orientation.

Migrants and refugees, often from countries such as Somalia, Syria and Afghanistan, have faced enormous challenges in their home countries. Surely meeting those challenges with fair engagement and integration upon their arrival in Scotland should, where possible, be our shared aim.

It is paramount that Scotland offers protection for those asylum seekers, which should go hand in hand with support and advice. I have seen first-hand examples, such as a member of my local staff in Kandahar in Afghanistan being threatened because he worked for NATO. His family received night letters in the mosque, which forced my staff member to leave not only his job but Afghanistan for safety.

I know what asylum seekers have experienced, and I welcome the support that is in place as part of our asylum system. On a UK-wide level, refugees who claim asylum have the right to free healthcare, including prescriptions and optical and dental care. Access to those services offers a fundamental and fair right to those individuals. Through its support for refugees in other countries, the UK Government lessens the potential for exploitation and human trafficking. Asylum applicants are also entitled to weekly payments that go some way to help them, including during maternity. Of course, the UK asylum-seeker system is not perfect, but an annual review of the allowance ensures that helpful improvements can be made when possible.

Of particular importance to me, as it should be to the whole chamber, is the principle of family reunion, which the UK favours. Its resettlement

scheme aims to ensure that child refugees can join their families in the UK. In practice, the system may have resulted in difficult cases, but having that principle in place is a starting point that the UK can develop further and build on.

In Scotland, there has been a notable effort to support asylum seekers. It has been encouraging for me that local authorities have reached Scotland's target to house 10 per cent of the UK's refugees three years early—I know about that from having been a councillor in Argyll and Bute. That commitment to asylum-seeker support is admirable and will help to rebuild the lives of those who have suffered. I also note that the goals set out in the new Scots strategy for the next four years are okay. Those aims favour the practical integration of asylum seekers into our communities.

When asylum seekers are resettled, their skills and knowledge must not be underestimated. Our local communities can benefit from them, which I have seen from their input in the Isle of Bute in my region. We should all appreciate the different cultures and experiences that asylum seekers bring.

The asylum system is complex and in need of careful adaption and improvement. Mistakes have been made that must be learned from. I hope for further development of current efforts and goals for the system, for the sake of genuine asylum seekers in need.

16:12

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I want to say something about asylum seekers and refugees as an introduction. They would not be asylum seekers and refugees if the west—the UK and others—had not bombed their countries. We owe those people, because we are the ones who went in there and bombed them, in Iraq and other areas.

Many people have spoken about what happened 10 or 12 years ago. I remember when the first asylum seekers came to Glasgow a good few years ago. I am proud of what Glasgow has done to help asylum seekers, including underage asylum seekers, which can be very difficult. Neighbours and communities stood behind those asylum seekers, as Patrick Harvie said. They stopped them being removed and taken away. They bolted up their houses to make sure that they were not taken away. That was in Sighthill and Scotstoun; I am proud that we did that and that we stood beside them hand in hand.

After that, we had Dungavel, which the Presiding Officer will be very familiar with. That was an abomination; everyone will know the amount of people who stood up to get it closed

down. I am proud of what the Scottish Government and all the parties in Parliament have done to alleviate some of the suffering of asylum seekers.

However, Westminster still pulls the strings on asylum seekers. Years ago, I tried to phone up the Home Office to help asylum seekers, only to be told, "No—that is only for MPs to do." That did not stop people in this chamber; we still went through and pushed and pulled, and we had some successes. I remember a family of six in Royston, who I am glad to say are still here to this day, along with others. We were determined to do something, and that is why the motion says that there should be equality for MSPs and MPs when it comes to helping our constituents. That is the way forward.

We also need equality in funding for the work that local authorities do to assist asylum seekers. It is a disgrace that the Home Office will fund local authorities in England but not local authorities here in Scotland. I think that it was one of the Conservatives who said that Scotland has more asylum seekers than any other area. This is to do with equality, and it is morally wrong not to give the people who come to Scotland the same opportunities as those elsewhere in the UK.

I have often asked—I think that we have all asked this; it has certainly been asked by colleagues of mine, anyway, and members of other parties—why asylum seekers should not be allowed to work. Like other members, I have people in my constituency who are doctors, shopkeepers, psychiatrists, surgeons and lawyers, and they cannot work. They may be people who want to do things with their hands. It does not matter what they want to do. They want to work and, if they are allowed to do so, they can contribute to our economy and, more than that, contribute to themselves. They can help themselves and they will not feel quite so bad.

In finishing, I want to mention destitute asylum seekers. I met a destitute asylum seeker who had walked from the east end of Glasgow to the soup kitchen at Anderston Kelvingrove church. Members who know Glasgow will know that it is a long walk from Parkhead in the east end to the west end. That was the only way they could get food. I think that I have mentioned this before. I assume that, by the time they got back, they would be hungry again, but that was all they had. They had no money and nowhere to stay. I remember the poor soul who died in the churchyard just outside Calton, who was destitute as well.

We owe these people.

16:16

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): The motion states:

“the asylum system must treat people fairly and with dignity and respect at all times”.

It should shame us all that we need to articulate that. However, that is the reality of what is happening in the UK and across much of western Europe. Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

“Everyone has the right to seek ... asylum”.

Sadly, the human right to seek asylum appears to have been lost in the current climate, which has seen the political discourse throughout western democracies tainted by the language of nationalist right-wing populism.

In the UK, xenophobic and racist attitudes have been manifested through the Tory Government’s callous hostile environment policy. In July, Serco attempted to conduct a mass extrajudicial eviction of some of the most vulnerable people in our society when it attempted to covertly remove more than 300 asylum seekers from properties across Glasgow by changing the locks of their properties without warning.

The lock-change policy that was pursued was barbaric and lacked any compassion, humanity and rationale. The decision was motivated by greed. Serco—a company with an annual revenue of more than £1 billion and an annual trading profit of £80 million—wanted to squeeze some extra profit by forcing vulnerable individuals who have been victims of some of the world’s cruellest dictators and most repressive regimes into homelessness and on to the streets of Glasgow.

The events of July were the culmination of the unseen practices of Serco’s management of accommodation for asylum seekers. Through my working relationship with the women asylum seeker housing project, I have heard first hand from asylum seekers of their experiences of Serco’s coercive and intimidating practices. I take this opportunity to welcome to the public gallery the people from WASH who have come to listen to the debate.

I have heard about the extremely poor quality of housing accommodation that Serco provides. I have heard the experiences of men, women and children who struggle to stay warm in the depth of a Scottish winter because they have no electricity or gas as their £10 top-up voucher has been used. Serco has failed to keep their properties in good habitable standard by not repairing broken boilers, and when repairs are carried out, I have heard stories of Serco housing officers using their own keys to enter the properties of asylum seekers without notice when the occupants are not at

home. For someone to have a stranger enter their home without their knowledge is extremely distressing, especially for asylum seekers who have experienced traumatic and violent episodes while attempting to flee oppression or warfare in their home country.

Scotland should be a place of safety, where people are able to live, free from persecution, as valued members of our communities. However, as is always the case with the Tories, the current system puts profit before people. The system must change and asylum accommodation must be taken out of the hands of private companies. We need an asylum system that is based on the values of compassion, humanity and human rights.

I offer a strong and vocal message of solidarity to all asylum seekers in Glasgow who have experienced Serco’s brutal, callous and inhumane practices and the UK Tory Government’s hostile environment policy. Scotland is your home. We welcome you with open arms. You have every right to be in this country and live your life here.

16:20

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): During First Minister’s question time today, Patrick Harvie said that we were in “a privileged position” to be able to offer asylum. I absolutely concur.

Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everybody is entitled to seek asylum. I open my remarks with a few basic questions that underlie how we should approach the needs of asylum seekers. If we were fleeing for our very lives, and with a right to seek asylum guaranteed under international law, how would we wish to be treated at the first port of call where we sought sanctuary? If we—or our families, friends or loved ones—had cause to flee from our homes, towns or villages, taking only what we could carry and in fear for our lives, how would we want to be treated? Would we want to be shown compassion, care, decency and humanity? Would we expect to be able to work and contribute to our new community? How we treat those who need our help defines who we are and what we value as individuals and as a society.

We must ensure that we do all that we can to ease the process for asylum seekers. At present, for example, we have a ridiculous situation in which asylum seekers who are based in Scotland have to make the long journey to the screening unit in Croydon to make their claim, rather than being able to make it here. Claiming asylum can be an extremely traumatic and disorientating process, in which claimants must be evaluated to determine whether a return to their home country would lead to persecution as a result of a range of

factors, including their race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or political beliefs.

Despite the appalling rhetoric on immigration from the UK Government and its inhumane hostile environment policy, the numbers of asylum seekers in the UK are at an historic low. At the start of this century, there were more than 100,000 asylum applications annually in the UK, but the rate is now about 30,000 a year, despite a recent spike caused by the Syrian situation. I endorse Sandra White's comment that we have an absolute responsibility in relation to areas where we are perpetrating more conflict.

Michelle Ballantyne: Will the member take an intervention?

Ruth Maguire: Absolutely not.

Over that period, the success rate for applications has risen from less than a third being successful to about 40 per cent.

For successful applicants, there remain many barriers to be navigated in settling into their new lives. Among the challenges is that of having just 28 days after leaving asylum accommodation to find a new home, set up a bank account, register for benefits and apply for a job. I am pleased that the Scottish Government is making progress in co-ordinating the efforts of organisations and community groups across Scotland to help with that integration process, through its new Scots refugee integration strategy, which has been endorsed by the United Nations Human Rights Council for its involvement of refugees and asylum seekers in the strategy's conception and delivery.

The failings of Westminster's current asylum system are many, but I am proud that Scotland plays its part in welcoming those fleeing persecution. North Ayrshire Council in my constituency of Cunninghame South is just one of many local authorities that have taken in refugees as part of the Syrian resettlement programme, which has settled more than 2,000 refugees across the country and provided them with access to health, education and other essential services to help them integrate into our society. As new Scots, their arrival strengthens our diversity and helps us to collectively redefine and build on our identity as a nation.

Nevertheless, as has been mentioned by countless other speakers, the circumstances in which Scotland wishes to help are becoming more difficult by the day, particularly with regard to the provision of accommodation.

I am running out of time, so in closing I ask Conservative colleagues who have been keen to share warm words to use whatever little influence they have with the Home Office and insist that it works with the Scottish Government, local

government and the third sector. Just leaving us to pick up the pieces is utterly unacceptable.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Alexander Stewart, I warn the last two speakers in the open debate that I expect them to cut their speeches to under four minutes.

16:25

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in today's debate on asylum seekers. Globally, the number of people who have been forcibly displaced continues to rise and is now at a record high. In 2007, about 3 million asylum seekers worldwide fled conflict, persecution or exploitation. It is right and proper that developed countries such as ours support such individuals, because they have made, and continue to make, a massive contribution to our society.

The UK Government is committed to supporting people who claim asylum in our country in a number of different ways, such as by providing financial assistance, housing, education and healthcare.

Rather shockingly, about half of all refugees around the world are children. It is therefore important that we support young people who have been forced to leave their country of origin. Children who have been recognised as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are able to join close family members who are in the United Kingdom. Between 2012 and 2017, the UK Government issued 24,000 family reunion visas, allowing children to start a new, safer life with relatives who are already integrated into communities in the UK. Since 2010, 42,000 children have been granted leave to remain in the UK, affording opportunity to children who are fleeing their own countries. It is right and proper that we have done that.

In addition, the UK Government is committed to supporting asylum seekers and refugees who settle in other countries around the world. The Department for International Development provides essential services to ensure that support. That means that refugees are less likely to be exploited by people smugglers or traffickers as they make the dangerous journey to Europe. The approach seeks to tackle the problems at source rather than deal with them when individuals who are already in difficult situations find themselves in even greater danger.

In Scotland, our record on supporting and integrating asylum seekers is good and we should be rightfully proud of it. We have heard stories of that support from members who have spoken about constituency cases. The Scottish Refugee Council, the Scottish Government and the

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities have set out in great detail how they expect asylum seekers to be dealt with.

I agree with the Scottish Conservatives' amendment that each individual case should be assessed on its own merit, and that the skills and talent that such individuals possess should be recognised. It is encouraging to see the strong collaborative desire in Scotland to ensure that such individuals can live free from persecution as valued members of their community and are able pursue their ambitions through education, employment, culture, leisure and other activities.

Moreover, it is encouraging to note that local authorities in Scotland have met their targets for housing refugees ahead of schedule. As a former councillor, I have seen at first hand the work that has been done by local authorities to achieve that success. They have gone above and beyond to ensure that individuals are housed, educated and looked after. That is important, so I commend and congratulate the councils that have achieved that.

It is incredibly important that we continue to fulfil our moral responsibilities by ensuring that our asylum system protects people who are fleeing conflict, persecution and exploitation. I am confident that, by working together, the UK Government, the Scottish Government and local government can come together to achieve some of our objectives. More can and must be done if outcomes are to improve. We should do everything in our power to ensure that individuals who need support and shelter receive them.

16:29

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): We have already heard from a number of members about the plight of asylum seekers. We know that many are people who have lost everything and are fleeing persecution. A great number of them are vulnerable children with no family to help and support them. I am proud to be part of a country that welcomes asylum seekers and which takes our international responsibilities seriously.

Earlier this year, in his foreword to the "New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022", Sabir Zazai, the chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council, said:

"Refugee empowerment and engagement with communities are at the heart of all our work, so we were delighted to support the wide-scale consultation with communities and refugees across Scotland. Their views are central to the direction and content of this strategy."

Scotland is a country that includes asylum seekers in decisions about what their needs are. The new Scots strategy commits to supporting refugees, asylum seekers and communities, and has been

endorsed by the United Nations Human Rights Council as an "extremely valuable initiative".

We are committed to ensuring that asylum seekers in Scotland have access to health, education and all the other services that they need. We are also assisting with employability by funding the new refugee doctors programme, which is unique in the UK. It aims to maintain the skills of refugee medics and to help them to gain General Medical Council registration.

Since 2010, the Scottish Government has assisted young people who have been trafficked or who have claimed asylum by funding the Scottish guardianship service, which provides guardians to such young people. To date, it has supported 376 young people. In the 2017-18 academic year, the Scottish Government introduced a long residence rule, which means that Scotland-domiciled students who do not have settled status, including asylum seekers who are waiting for a decision to be made, and who meet the long residence criteria, are eligible to apply for tuition fees and living costs.

Although we in Scotland look to work in partnership with asylum seekers, Scottish local government and the third sector, we continue to face the challenge of a shortfall in funding from the UK Government to support such people in our communities. We also have to contend with an increasingly hostile environment for those who come to our communities from overseas. The Home Office continues to be responsible for providing accommodation and financial support to asylum seekers, but there are often problems with that arrangement. We have already heard about the complete boorach that Serco has made of accommodation in Glasgow.

In contrast, our vision is that all people in Scotland should live in high-quality sustainable homes that they can afford and that meet their needs. We have clearly outlined an ambition for fair and respectful treatment of asylum seekers, while recognising the important part that is played by our partners in local government. We now need the UK Government to respect that ambition and to fund fully our local authorities to support the people who are dispersed to their areas.

16:32

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Like many of my colleagues, I am often asked by schoolchildren who come to Parliament what is the best thing the Scottish Parliament has done, or the best law that it has passed. I always return to something that was done in 2007 under the then minority Government—the extension by the Scottish Government to asylum seekers' children of the right to higher and further

education. For me, that is a symbol of our country, of the welcome that we offer and of how seriously we take our responsibilities to asylum seekers. It also differentiated us from the rest of the UK. It was an extremely important piece of legislation.

At the time, David Caldwell of Universities Scotland said:

“This move will not only enhance the skills of these young people but it will allow them to make an invaluable contribution to Scotland’s economy, society and culture and will promote Scotland as a globally inclusive nation.”

Surely that is what we all want—to be a globally inclusive nation.

I mention that because I welcome the fact that the Conservatives seem to have moved towards agreeing that “integration” means that asylum seekers should have the right to work. However, if we expect asylum seekers to contribute to our society in that way, it is not too big a step to take to recognise that that means that we have a responsibility to protect those who cannot work. I do not believe that we should be giving them only £5 a day or £37 a week to feed themselves, to travel and to buy essentials including sanitary products. I do not think that that is a reasonable amount; it is a tiny sum. The right to a safe home that our citizens have should be extended to asylum seekers; their living conditions should not be left to private companies such as Serco.

Scotland has introduced the baby box, which is another symbol of how we value children in our society. However, the children of asylum seekers cannot receive a baby box because of the “no recourse to public funds” regime that they live under in this country.

I would like us to recognise that asylum seekers should have the right to work and to integrate fully into our society. As a society, that means that we must take our responsibilities towards them more seriously. I am delighted that today’s motion has been lodged by the Government, that there has been such consensus across the chamber about the current situation, and that we all agree that using destitution as a weapon against asylum seekers is utterly deplorable.

16:35

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Considering some of the fractious debates that have taken place in the chamber in recent weeks, this has been a refreshing and welcome debate around consensus. That started with the minister—I associate myself and the Liberal Democrats with her remarks—and her belief that any immigration system or system of dealing with asylum seekers or refugees who are fleeing torture and persecution should, by necessity, be based on

compassion and values. Our parties stand shoulder to shoulder in that regard.

I am very proud of my party. People talk a lot about the things that happened when we were in a coalition Government; I am very proud of the steps that we took to end detention of the children of asylum seekers. That was one of the most important achievements of our time in the Government and it speaks to the values of Liberalism and of this country.

We have not seen those values in the conduct of organisations including the UK Border Agency, which still operates based on non-belief. It uses bone-density scanning to verify whether a person is a minor and offers young people the opportunity to extend the time that they need to prepare their asylum case only if there is demonstrable evidence of torture or rape. I find that to be desperately inhumane.

It has been great to hear so many plaudits for Aberlour Child Care Trust and the Scottish Refugee Council, and for the Scottish guardianship service, which they provide. It is important to acknowledge that we still have questions to answer about how we deal with people who have been caught up in human trafficking, in particular around the criminality that is associated with it.

It was refreshing and welcome to hear Michelle Ballantyne talk about the need for asylum seekers to be able to contribute. I warmly congratulate her for calling on her own UK Government to see refugees and asylum seekers being afforded that opportunity. That is important, because the ones whom I have met in the course of my career have been desperate to contribute to the country that they have seen as giving them salvation. We owe it to them to give them that opportunity.

Alasdair Allan spoke warmly about the culture that exists in the islands, and the history of islanders giving welcome to incomers. We are all of us islanders, in one way or another.

Sandra White spoke powerfully about the historical culpability of these islands for many of the troubles that people are fleeing. The sense of national atonement that is still evident in Germany has seen Germany take in nearly 50,000 Syrian refugees. It is important that countries recognise the impact that they have on the world, and that subsequent generations take steps to remedy and address that.

Mary Fee gave us a striking analysis of the events of the summer, particularly with regard to Serco, which has operated beyond the realms of human decency in how it has treated people. That point was picked up by Patrick Harvie and, in a typically brilliant speech, by Pauline McNeill.

Ruth Maguire demonstrated why the decision to make her convener of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee was the right one. I look forward to working with her on the committee to take forward many of the issues, and with Gail Ross, who also made an excellent speech.

Ruth Maguire called on the Conservatives to put pressure on the UK Government: I have been heartened by the tone of the contributions of the Conservatives to the debate. Alexander Stewart capped off a fine set of speeches with a commitment to do just what Ruth Maguire called on them to do.

Clare Adamson closed the open part of the debate by giving us a reminder of what the Scottish Parliament has done within the powers that we have, and we would do well to remember that.

Madeline Uranneck said:

“However they arrive, asylum seekers, immigrants, and refugees reach with outstretched hands toward safer, more promising shores. Welcoming these wayfarers rekindles our humanity and heals our broken parts.”

That says to me that there is huge capacity for enhancement in our communities when we welcome people here. We need to do more to achieve just that.

16:40

Patrick Harvie: I very much appreciate the many contributions that we have heard today. I will not have time to mention them all, but I want to say something about each party's position.

I have already welcomed the Government's motion and its commitment to support asylum seekers' rights to work, to housing that meets quality standards and is appropriate to their needs and to finding a long-term solution that prevents destitution. In that regard, I hope that when the minister closes the debate she will be able to say something about the timescale for the provision of emergency accommodation—a recommendation that I acknowledge that the Government has already accepted.

I also welcome the Labour Party's demand—which the Scottish Greens absolutely share—that the housing and wider support provision needs to be well funded and of a high standard and should be brought back into the public sector. We should be providing such services to a standard that we can be proud of, instead of turning a blind eye while the Home Office and its private sector friends bully and demean people who are here as our guests, leaving them feeling unsafe, insecure and terrified.

I agree with Alex Cole-Hamilton's amendment about the critical role that the voluntary sector has

played and continues to play. From emotional support to crisis accommodation, and from legal advice to donations of basic items such as toiletries and children's toys, huge numbers of people want to help. For me, that is one of the most powerful aspects of the issue. Even after years and years of racist propaganda from both the UK Government and the far-right press, so many people see those who are in desperate need, and they want to help. So many people have a basic response that is one of deep, instinctive empathy. One of my favourite examples is Refuweege. One of the most touching things that it does is to ask people to write a letter or card to an asylum seeker whom they will probably never know. Such letters and simple messages of welcome are included in its donation packages, many of them with local children's drawings of Glasgow. They speak volumes about the natural human empathy that remains so strong and that we must use to prevent the UK Government from succeeding in making Glasgow—and Scotland—a hostile environment. Several members have mentioned the wider global context—the rise of the far right around the world—in which such basic practical examples of actions of human solidarity, which are rooted in empathy, have never been needed more.

I was puzzled by the Conservative amendment when I first read it. I want to say again how much I welcome the fact that the Conservatives are supporting asylum seekers' right to work. That is a welcome difference from the UK Government's policy. However, on its own, and in the absence of a wider change towards a more humane asylum system, should we be asking people who face the threat of imminent eviction or detention without trial to hold down a job? How realistic would we feel that to be, in the absence of a more wholesale change to the asylum system?

Michelle Ballantyne: I remind Patrick Harvie that those who are in detention have failed the asylum process.

Patrick Harvie: Michelle Ballantyne is wrong if she thinks that that is always the case. She is also wrong if she thinks that those who are refused asylum never have their refusals overturned on appeal: a great many of them are refused wrongly.

Given the nature of the Conservatives' amendment today, it is still unclear to me whether they defend the UK Government's policies. Michelle Ballantyne said:

“All regimes fall in the end.”

Let us hope that, in the case of the UK Government, that comes sooner rather than later. While it is responsible for the viciousness of its policies, it is not enough for us to stand by, confident that we know who to blame. We have a

clear and unavoidable moral responsibility to take action in defence of the most vulnerable among us—and in defiance of those who treat them with contempt.

16:44

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

We have had, in the main, a consensual debate. I, too, welcome the women who spend their time campaigning for housing for asylum seekers for coming along today.

As has been acknowledged, the world is witnessing the highest levels of displacement of people on record. The United Nations reports that more than 68 million people from around the world have been forced from their homes due to war, violence and persecution and that that number is on the increase.

All of us will have seen the horrific images from countries such as Syria and Myanmar and the terrible violence that the people there are having to flee from. It is very important that we do not lose sight of the bigger picture in relation to what is driving a global crisis.

Yesterday, I retweeted what the First Minister said about her visit to Auschwitz and its impact on her. I will never stop thinking about what I saw on my visit. I will always remember the tour guide telling me that Hitler initially tried to expel many Jews and when they sought refuge, many other countries turned them away.

I assume that the UN's 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is the world's attempt to make sure that people fleeing violence, persecution, fear and death get support from the countries that have signed up to the convention. The United Kingdom is one of those countries. The United Kingdom can and should do more. The motion is focused on what happens when people are seeking refuge in the UK. The current experience for those seeking refuge and asylum is, we would have to say, not good.

As the cabinet secretary, Pauline McNeill and others said, the Home Office process is slow and ineffective. Asylum seekers are facing record delays in the application process. Campaigners attribute the decline in grants of asylum in part to an "unrealistically high" standard of proof for asylum seekers and say that applicants are expected to obtain "impossible" proof, such as evidence documenting torture and sexual violence.

As Patrick Harvie has highlighted, there is a high level of error in Home Office decisions. Last year, of the 11,461 appeals that were lodged, 39 per cent—that is, 4,307—were successful.

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work. People seeking asylum in the UK are allowed to work only if they have been waiting on a claim for more than 12 months and they can fill a role on the shortage occupation list, which includes positions such as classical ballet dancers. It is estimated that asylum seekers could contribute £42 million to the UK economy if those rules were relaxed.

The Lift the Ban Coalition, which is made up of 80 organisations, is calling on the Government to give asylum seekers and their adult dependents the right to work after waiting six months for a decision on their claim, and to be unconstrained by the shortage occupation list.

Far too many asylum seekers are in detention centres and, given that children account for 53 per cent of global displacement, there needs to be a review of family reunification policy.

In Scotland, we can do better. The motion is correct to identify the need for the UK Government to work more closely with the Scottish Administration. We will also support the Greens' amendment, and urge that discussions take place as soon as is practical to implement the recommendations in paragraph 96(4) of the Smith commission report.

16:49

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank those members who have participated in the debate. I have found it extremely interesting. When I was asked to speak in the debate, the first thing that I did was to look up the technical differences between what constitutes an asylum seeker, a refugee and a migrant. I did that because those terms are often confusing and used interchangeably; they also overlap. In the context of the debate, and the research that has been done for it, I wanted to ensure that we are clear on the differences, because that is important.

In 2017 alone, around 70 million people across the world had to leave their homes for various reasons. Some of those reasons have been well documented and evidenced today. It is not always about war and conflict. There is a plethora of reasons why people have taken the difficult decision to leave their home country. Their political views are often cited as one reason, but other reasons include their religious beliefs and, these days, their gender identity and sexuality.

I turn to some of the comments made in the debate. I will start with comments made by my colleague Michelle Ballantyne in her opening speech. She spoke at first about some of the freedoms that we take for granted and the fact that those coming to this country should be able to maintain the skills with which they arrived. That is an important point, because there is good reason

for letting them maintain their skills. Often, those people are qualified doctors, nurses or teachers in their homelands, but when they arrive here, we label them as asylum seekers. In their home countries, they are professionals and valued members of their communities. We think that they should be equally valued members of the communities and the countries to which they have chosen to come. Therefore, those people who choose to stay should be welcomed, but those who wish to return to their native countries should do so with the skills that they need to rebuild those countries.

With regard to numbers, the majority of asylum seekers in the UK come from Iraq, Sudan, Iran and Pakistan. I can confirm that the Conservative members believe that there is merit in the idea of allowing those waiting for their case to be heard to be given further employment opportunities.

My colleague Michelle Ballantyne has written to the Home Secretary to express her views on that. The example that Michelle gave of her constituent—the young man from Pakistan who felt as though he was in limbo for the seven years that he waited for his case to be decided—serves as a perfect example of why we should have a grown-up conversation on this issue.

I turn to some of the other points that have been made. In the minister's opening remarks, she talked about the Syrian resettlement programme and its success, much of which is due to the great work that has been done in Glasgow. The minister made a fair point in her motion and her speech that integration should be quick and effective, and that access to education, health and housing are some of the basic building blocks for integrating people when they enter Scotland.

I accept the minister's comments that the due and necessary process that is involved in processing claims can be complex and frustrating for those at the receiving end. There is no disagreement on that matter from Conservative members.

The UK is an attractive destination for many, and the volume of applications reflects that. Last year, the number of applications to the UK dropped by only 1 per cent, year on year, whereas it dropped by 32 per cent for the rest of the EU.

There were excellent contributions to the debate, including that of Pauline McNeill, who moved the Labour amendment, which I will address. There is much to agree with in the premise of the amendment and what it tries to achieve. It should be about the quality of the available housing. However, the amendment restricts the provision of asylum accommodation to the public sector, which, at present, it is not

geared up to deliver. For that technical reason, we are not able to support the amendment.

Pauline McNeill made other important points, including the fact that countries such as Denmark, Germany, Poland and Hungary are closing their doors, either literally or in the tone that comes from their Governments. Countries that have borne much of the brunt are also changing their tone.

We are pleased to support Alex Cole-Hamilton's amendment. We should never overlook the voluntary sector and the valuable role that it plays.

I agree with Sandra White's comments about MSPs not being able to make representations to the Home Office, and I share her frustration. I met the deputy chairman of the Conservative Party on Saturday in Ayrshire and I raised that very matter. MSPs should be able to make representations, and we will write to the Home Secretary about that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Aileen Campbell. It would be appreciated if your speech could be six minutes if possible.

16:54

Aileen Campbell: I will do my best, Presiding Officer.

The debate has been an emotional and heartfelt one, which is absolutely correct because, behind the statistics, the numbers and the due process are individual stories of people fleeing their homes because of violence, war, persecution and torture. The fact that journeying into the unknown is preferable to staying with what is familiar speaks to the truth that seeking asylum and sanctuary is not an easy option—it is forced and endured through desperation.

It is up to us to create a welcoming response to that need and to treat people with kindness, support and dignity. I hope that the Scottish Parliament will come together today to show that we reject a flawed asylum system that enforces destitution. It is deliberate destitution that takes away people's accommodation and financial support at the end of the process. That political consensus is not new. Indeed, the Scottish Refugee Council briefing notes the broad and enduring political consensus in Scotland that the legal right to seek asylum and safety and to be treated with dignity by the country of sanctuary is precious. As the Scottish Refugee Council also points out, we should never forget that the legal right emerged after the second world war from the international community's revulsion at the genocide of the Holocaust. That is a timely reminder, given the discussion at First Minister's

question time this afternoon, and it was powerfully articulated by Alex Rowley.

It was important to be reminded by Pauline McNeill in her opening remarks of some of the worrying current trends in responses to asylum across Europe. However, Alex Cole-Hamilton remarked on the positive aspect, in his articulation of Germany's response to the Syrian refugee situation.

It was important to have the chance to debate in the Parliament the flaws and failures of a system that does not reflect the values of the country that we seek to create—a country that is tolerant, peaceful and understanding of global responsibilities. That system requires wholesale change. The barriers that are built into it not only make integration more difficult but, in some cases, exacerbate the terrible traumas that people have already faced. The system hinders people's ability to settle in a new country and to build new lives and connections within the community, and it impacts on their health and wellbeing. Asylum decision making must be fair and enable people to tell their stories. However, it must not leave them hanging on, waiting to get on with their lives for years on end. There must be a holistic end-to-end system of support and accommodation and one that does not leave people homeless and penniless and on our streets. We should not tolerate the current system, which is simply unacceptable.

The current system leaves the Scottish Government, local government and the third sector to pick up the pieces. Despite that, we will continue to work for an approach that is based on fairness, dignity, prevention and partnership. However, we need the Home Office to engage in seeking a long-term solution to supporting people at the end of the asylum process in a way that respects their dignity and rights. If people who are refused asylum are not able to return to their country of origin, the Home Office must provide them with accommodation and financial support by funding an asylum accommodation provider or the local authority.

The Scottish Government already provides extra funding to a number of organisations that work with people who are at risk of destitution and eviction. I am pleased to announce that we will provide an additional £20,000 for Govan Community Project to increase its advice and advocacy services, which brings our total emergency funding to £150,000. However, I question why we in the Scottish Government, local government and the third sector continually have to put sticking plasters on a failed system.

Patrick Harvie: I agree entirely that responsibility lies principally with the Home Office and the UK Government, and that that demand

should be made, but does the cabinet secretary agree that, if they refuse, we—Scotland and the Scottish Government, our local councils and communities—still bear the moral responsibility to put in place emergency provision?

Aileen Campbell: That is why I underlined the fact that we provide emergency help and destitution help through our third sector partners, and it is why I have announced more money to do that through the Govan Community Project. However, if there are ways that we could do more, I will of course engage with the member to figure out how we can move those forward.

I want to respond to some of the pertinent and powerful points that members have raised. I absolutely agree with Pauline McNeill on the need for independent accountability in asylum accommodation contracts. Her support for the position that the contract should be about people and not profit is important. Alex Cole-Hamilton also raised that issue.

I support Patrick Harvie's calls for time limits on detention. It is unacceptable for people who have committed no crime and who have done absolutely nothing wrong—it is important for Conservative members to remember that—to be held in detention indefinitely. The presumption should be in favour of community-based solutions, and we want to work to achieve that, if the Home Office is willing. I will get back to the member on issues relating to the action plan, which we hope to publish in the coming year.

I say to Michelle Ballantyne that I am pleased to hear support for the right to work, and I hope that that will bear fruit with the UK Government. However, Patrick Harvie was also right to reiterate the wider failings of the asylum system, which need urgent reform before anyone can even begin to think about trying to seek work. I hope that that is taken on board and that the Conservatives make those points to their colleagues in the UK Government.

Maurice Corry said that the new Scots strategy's aims are "okay". However, there is no UK refugee integration strategy. If Maurice Corry can influence not just improvements for people in Scotland but changes for people who are seeking asylum in the rest of the UK, I am sure that any improvements that he can make would be welcome.

Sandra White made powerful points about MSPs not being able to represent their asylum-seeking constituents to the Home Office. We have repeatedly pressed on that. Despite that, the Home Office continues to ignore those issues.

On the skills that people bring to the country, we are pleased that we are able to support the refugee doctors project and help people to get

back to their careers and use their talents, skills and experience.

Mary Fee's remarks are welcome. I also welcome to the Parliament representatives of the women asylum seeker housing project. We are pleased to be able to support some of its work through our funding.

The debate has been wide ranging, and much of it has been consensual. I think that we will decide in a few moments that our message from the Parliament to the Home Office is clear. We need the Home Office to fix the failed system and to end the hostile environment. We need to see people treated with dignity and respect, and we need the Home Office to fund our councils to do more to help and to treat our councils with equity and fairness.

The system does not have to be as it is. We can do better, and we want to do better. We want to build an asylum system that signals to the world who we are and what we value, and which is based on tolerance, kindness and understanding. I am glad of the support of many members for the motion, because it signals a very strong message to the Home Office, which I hope it will listen to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-14571, on committee membership. I ask Graeme Dey to move the motion on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Anas Sarwar be appointed to replace Iain Gray on the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee;

Iain Gray be appointed to replace Mary Fee on the Education and Skills Committee;

Mary Fee be appointed to replace Neil Findlay on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Alex Rowley on the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee.—[*Graeme Dey*]

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

Presiding Officer's Ruling

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Earlier, Mike Rumbles raised a point of order, which my Deputy Presiding Officer drew to my attention and which she said she would return to. The point was that the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity had been misleading in the delivery of his statement on the Aberdeen western peripheral route, or in the response to his questions.

I have had the chance to review whether any discourtesy was shown. I believe that there was a robust exchange of views, but I do not believe that there was any lack of courtesy in the situation.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): The minister challenged my legitimacy to represent the people of the north-east. He referred to the "so-called ... MSP". It is discourteous to challenge the legitimacy of anybody in the chamber.

The Presiding Officer: I am glad that Mr Rumbles has clarified the particular aspect that he was concerned about. I listened to that exchange and I heard those particular words. The Parliament is used to a robust exchange of views on a number of matters and, much as I implore every member and every minister to treat each other with courtesy and respect, I do not believe that any discourtesy was shown in this case.

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-14548.2, in the name of Michelle Ballantyne, which seeks to amend motion S5M-14548, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on a place of safety: supporting asylum seekers in Scotland, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-14548.3, in the name of Pauline McNeill, which seeks to amend motion S5M-14548, in the name of Aileen Campbell, on a place of safety: supporting asylum seekers in Scotland, 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, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 81, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next question is, that amendment S5M-14548.1, in the name of Patrick Harvie, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Aileen Campbell, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 81, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-14548.4, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Aileen Campbell, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-14548, in the name of Aileen Campbell, as amended, on a place of safety: supporting asylum seekers in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 81, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that Scotland must be a place of safety for people seeking asylum; agrees that those seeking asylum should be supported to integrate in Scotland's communities and rebuild their lives from day one of arrival; believes that the current UK asylum system fails to treat people with dignity or respect their human rights, particularly in relation to the deliberate use of destitution as a policy tool; calls on the UK Government to take urgent steps to end the threat of destitution and to implement immediately the outstanding recommendations in paragraph 96(4) of the Smith Commission report; congratulates the many individuals, communities and organisations that have worked to welcome and support

asylum seekers in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland, including by mobilising practical opposition to evictions and lock changes; considers that the UK Government must work in equal partnership with devolved governments and local government and provide local authorities with the resources required to support people dispersed to their areas, and that the delivery of asylum accommodation, which must be within the public sector, must have adequate funding to fulfil this responsibility and should be housing of a good quality standard; believes that accommodation provided to people seeking asylum must meet Scottish quality standards and be appropriate to their needs; considers that people seeking asylum should be allowed to work while their claim is being assessed to help rebuild their lives; recognises that there must be a long-term sustainable solution that does not leave people destitute or homeless at the end of the asylum process; considers that refugee resettlement programmes provide a model of partnership working and integration support that should be replicated in the asylum system; recognises the skills and talent that many asylum seekers have to offer; urges that due care and attention is given to the facts of individual cases, and recognises the immense contribution of the voluntary sector in providing community support, practical assistance, navigation through systems and companionship to some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-14571, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Anas Sarwar be appointed to replace Iain Gray on the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee;

Iain Gray be appointed to replace Mary Fee on the Education and Skills Committee;

Mary Fee be appointed to replace Neil Findlay on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Alex Rowley on the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:07.

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

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