



OFFICIAL REPORT
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Tuesday 6 November 2018

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 6 November 2018

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Mark Hazelwood, chief executive of the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care.

Mark Hazelwood (Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care): Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts.

Nearly everyone has experienced the death of someone who is important to them. Everyone here has a memory or a story to tell of someone who has died and who they still miss: a parent, a school friend, a sibling, a teacher who perhaps ignited an enthusiasm, a political mentor, a colleague or a child. Those people's stories become part of our stories.

Where is the space for such stories of dead loved ones in 21st century Scotland? Many of our old traditions of remembrance have declined and, with them, the chance to remember and tell stories. That matters, because it is part of a wider silence that can leave people who have been bereaved feeling isolated. It matters, because the parents of children who have died are made to feel uncomfortable about saying their child's name. It matters, too, because an opportunity to celebrate our shared humanity is lost—an opportunity for smiles, for some tears, perhaps, and for solace.

It is time to reignite old traditions and to create new ones. In the first week of November each year, people and organisations across Scotland take part in a festival called To Absent Friends, which is a people's festival of storytelling and remembrance. To Absent Friends provides an excuse, an opportunity and a time of year when it is normal and acceptable to remember and tell stories. That makes it a little easier during the rest of the year to listen, to say the right thing and to support one another.

Anyone and everyone can take part in the festival in whatever way is meaningful for them. Here is a flavour of what is happening this week: at a care home in Livingston, people are having tea and cake and singing songs that hold special memories; at Easter Road football stadium, fans are writing messages and pinning photos on an absent friends wall; in Elgin, community members are joining together for an absent friends supper;

at St Mary's cathedral, people are gathering for personal reflection while listening to the beautiful music of Edinburgh brass band; in Inverness, young people are creating a photo memory mural; at an intergenerational dance party in Glasgow, people are dancing for the departed; the evening darkness of the Grassmarket is gradually being lit by candles of remembrance placed by passers-by; in Kilmarnock, prison inmates and staff are gathering together to share remembrances; and in cyberspace, memories are being tweeted and pictures facebooked.

To Absent Friends is a people's festival. It takes place in public spaces, social media, workplaces, families, homes and communities and in people's hearts and minds. The festival can remind us of what matters most and of what connects us all most deeply. Let us raise a toast: to absent friends.

Business Motion

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-14648, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for today.

Motion moved,

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

(a) Tuesday 6 November 2018—

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

insert

5.15 pm Decision Time

(b) Thursday 8 November 2018—

after

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Prescription (Scotland) Bill

insert

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Motion: Complaint against Annie Wells MSP— [Graeme Dey.]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: For information, we have agreed to take an urgent question on the subject of the closure of the Michelin factory in Dundee at 4.45. Therefore, decision time will now be at 5.15.

Topical Question Time

NHS Tayside (Staff Numbers and Workforce Planning)

1. **Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with NHS Tayside regarding staff numbers and future workforce planning. (S5T-01299)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): As all national health service boards do, NHS Tayside works to plan effectively to ensure patient safety by having the right staff with the right skills where they are needed. I have made it clear to all boards that I will not accept changes that impact negatively on patient access to care. Yesterday, I spoke to the chair of NHS Tayside, who reiterated his concern about how work to develop long-term plans has been portrayed. He has made it clear that, as the board plans improvements to accessibility, quality and delivery across all its services to meet current and future demand, it will not reduce capacity.

Murdo Fraser: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will appreciate the public concern that has been expressed in response to reports that NHS Tayside is looking to shed 1,300 jobs, or 10 per cent of the workforce. There have already been temporary closures in the minor injuries units in Pitlochry and Crieff because of nurse shortages. This morning, the Royal College of Nursing contacted my office to express concern about the reduction in the nursing and midwifery staff head count in NHS Tayside over the past four years.

I hear what the cabinet secretary said about protecting front-line services, but with that level of a reduction in staff, surely it is inevitable that there will be some impact on already stretched front-facing services.

Jeane Freeman: There is no agreed level of reduction in staff; there is no agreed level of any reduction in staff. What we are dealing with is a sub-committee minute, which the board simply noted. No decisions have been taken. NHS Tayside is doing precisely what we want it, along with other boards, to do—plan its use of resource and its service delivery with its health and social care partners, its unions and its clinicians. That is exactly the right approach, contrary to what Mr Fraser's colleagues have said. They have accused us of not planning for the future, but that is what NHS Tayside is doing. In doing that, it is looking at all options within the overall context of improving the accessibility, quality and delivery of care, as I have made clear.

I understand the public concern, but I understand that that public concern has been

fuelled by reporting based on false assertions. If the people who had made those assertions had taken the trouble to know our health service as well as they think they do and to check the facts, they might not have made such irresponsible assertions in the first place.

Murdo Fraser: The cabinet secretary talks about false assertions, but the figure that was put out—1,300 jobs, or 10 per cent of the workforce—was derived from minutes that were produced by NHS Tayside. There has been nothing in any public statement issued by the health board since the story appeared in the public domain on Sunday denying that level of reduction. If the figure is not 1,300 jobs, or 10 per cent of the workforce, what is it?

Jeane Freeman: Mr Fraser knows better than that. He knows as well as I do that, when a board looks at how it will configure its services across the area, it looks at all the options that are available. In doing that, it gathers data on how it stands compared with what other boards are doing. That is what the sub-committee minute reflects. I am not going to confirm the 1,300 figure, but I will certainly confirm that we will not have compulsory redundancies or changes in our health service that remove capacity.

As far as not removing capacity is concerned, it is necessary to have staff to deliver capacity; I would have thought that that was self-evident. Capacity is not about buildings—it is about the people who deliver the service.

If you want to plan and look ahead properly, you do it in the following way. You gather the data. You look at what your demand is—what your patient cohort needs now and in the future as best as you project it. You look at where your services are. You map one over the other and you look at how you need to make changes to redeploy the use of those services. That is precisely what NHS Tayside is doing, and it is not assisted by assertions that are factually incorrect. There is no agreement to cut any staff in Tayside. The NHS chair and I could not be clearer than that.

What we need to do is understand how these matters happen. If we have concerns, we should absolutely raise them, but on the basis of understanding how our health service works and not on the basis of looking for cheap headlines and scoring political points. That does no one any service whatsoever.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): For information, six members would like to get in. I am not sure that I will be able to get through them all.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I remind the chamber of my interest as a former front-line staff nurse.

I welcome NHS Tayside's commitment to review how to make use of taxpayers' funding most efficiently. However, I can understand that the press coverage of the report may make some NHS Tayside staff feel uneasy. For the elimination of doubt, will the cabinet secretary confirm again that the Scottish Government's policy of no compulsory redundancies remains firmly in place?

Jeane Freeman: Yes, it absolutely does. Both I and the chair of NHS Tayside have confirmed that. What we are looking at here is how best to deploy the staff resource that we have in NHS Tayside and elsewhere in order to meet current and future demand across the whole system, which includes health and social care as well as acute and secondary care in our health service.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): When I read the report in *The Herald on Sunday*, it was clear to me that NHS Tayside was confirming the nature of the story. The cabinet secretary's remarks will have caused further distress to hard-working staff in NHS Tayside. She may be aware that, last year, there were 35,000 stress-related sick days in Tayside. Notwithstanding this very serious report in *The Herald on Sunday*, what discussion has she had with NHS staff unions about the working conditions in NHS Tayside and about these very worrying plans?

Jeane Freeman: Can we just be clear that the worrying report in the Sunday papers probably came from the news release from Scottish Labour, which talks about

"a recipe for disaster that could risk patient safety".

What sloganising nonsense, based on little except a sub-committee minute about looking at options, precisely as I described to Mr Fraser. I will get to the point of the question, but let us be clear—let us not blame our press for how it covers news releases that come out in that language and in those terms.

I take stress-related absence very seriously. That was part of the discussion that I had with Mr Brown yesterday, and it will continue to be part of the discussion that I have with all the health board chairs and which we pick up with our chief executives. It is also something that I raise when I do ministerial reviews and talk in some detail with the partnership forums in each of our boards. I talk to them about the issues that concern them but also about the issues that I want to raise with them, which include staff absence and what more we can do to assist them in the work that they do as members of unions and as employee directors. I take it very seriously and we continue those discussions and look to see what more we might do to assist our staff.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Members will have received a statement

from the chairman of NHS Tayside, in which he said:

“I want the public to know that any changes to our services and staffing will only be made if they ... enhance our capacity to improve the quality of health ... care.

Is the cabinet secretary aware of any comparable health board that has made a similar level of workforce reduction but still managed to support and protect its capacity and the quality of its services? If it has managed to do that, how did it do it?

Jeane Freeman: Let me say again that NHS Tayside has not made any level of staff reduction. What it has done—I, too, will quote from Mr Brown’s statement—is this:

“At this early stage of the”

transforming Tayside

“programme it is important, as well as looking at how and where health and care services are delivered, we start to consider where staff are best placed to respond to the needs of all our patients and service users.”

That is precisely what he is doing, and we will support him and his board and other boards in doing that because we need them to look at not only what they are delivering now but how sustainable and appropriate the services are across the whole system for the future.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The cabinet secretary describes the committee as a sub-committee. I have no doubt that there are some very important and informed people on that sub-committee. The fact that they are discussing the level of reduction that has been mentioned reveals the real problems that exist in the NHS—and certainly in Tayside.

There is something that I would like to understand. The cabinet secretary says that no decisions have been made, but what is the process? When will conclusions be reached? The Parliament has a right to know that.

Jeane Freeman: Mr Rennie is absolutely correct to say that the sub-committee has informed members. The transforming Tayside programme, which Mr Brown referred to, directly involves work with trade union colleagues, managers and lead doctors and nurses. Very well-informed and experienced individuals are involved in that programme, which, as I have said before, is at an early stage.

If the conclusions that the board reaches involve major changes, or I consider them to be major changes, they will be referred to me for decision. At this point, it is not yet clear from the board exactly how long it thinks it will take before it reaches final conclusions, because it began the work before I published the medium-term financial framework, which gives boards relief from paying

back brokerage and a three-year financial planning cycle, and the waiting times improvement plan, which, as members will recall, produces significant additional investment. The board will need to recast some of its work in light of those significant enhancements to the context in which it works and consider how it will go forward from there.

I am sure that the board will provide me with a timetable of what it expects to do over the coming months. I would be happy to share that timetable with Mr Rennie and other members.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise to Fulton MacGregor and Jenny Marra. We do not have enough time for any further supplementary questions.

Firework Season (Protection of Emergency Workers)

2. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to protect emergency workers during the firework season, in light of the reported increase in levels of violence and intimidation that they face at this time of year. (S5T-01303)

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): The Scottish Government will not tolerate any attacks on our emergency services. A number of legal protections are in place, including the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005. Powers that are available through antisocial behaviour legislation have been used effectively as part of the multi-agency approach to planning and to prevention.

I am aware of some reports of antisocial behaviour and attacks on emergency services this year, and I recognise the impact that they have on not only emergency service personnel but the communities that are affected. However, we are awaiting a full response from Police Scotland.

I am sure that members will join me in extending my formal thanks and recognition to our emergency services following their busiest night of the year.

Daniel Johnson: I, too, thank the emergency services for the work that they do. Rather than running from danger, firefighters run to it, and the fact is that people use fireworks night to draw them in. Other members will be as concerned as I was to read reports over the weekend of watch managers having described war zone-type situations in which projectiles and fireworks were thrown at firefighters, and they will have found them deeply disturbing.

I am alarmed that there is a need for a campaign at all. Will the minister join me in welcoming the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service’s

do not attack me campaign? What steps is the Scottish Government taking to follow up that campaign? I had hoped that the minister would be able to share initial reports from last night about the level of violence and intimidation that the service faced with last night's festivities.

Ash Denham: I am aware of the do not attack me campaign, as a result of which very good work has been done.

Unfortunately, we do not have the full data from last night. It is too early for that; the agencies are still putting together the numbers. The number of incidents last night has still to be confirmed, but there is no suggestion at this stage of a significant increase. I hope that that reassures Daniel Johnson on that point.

Antisocial behaviour, unfortunately, occurs all year round, and the police and local agencies have a range of powers and measures available to them to direct and disperse. This year, there has been a lot of multi-agency work on planning and prevention. I have seen the work that has been undertaken in Edinburgh this year, and I was very impressed by the amount of working together, the range of measures that were used and the different levels of planning that were involved. The work has been good, and I commend everyone who has been involved in it.

We will work with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Police Scotland to review last night's events and consider any lessons to be learned.

Daniel Johnson: I hope that those early reports are correct and that there was a reduced level of violence.

I am pleased that the minister raised the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005, which was passed under the previous Labour Administration. It has led to more than 8,000 convictions, with about 800 convictions a year. Individuals who are found guilty receive up to 12 months in prison, a £10,000 fine, or both. I was pleased that the Scottish Government extended protection to general practitioners and community midwives. Does the minister agree that the legislation is useful? More important, does she agree that those who protect us and those who we ask to uphold the law should enjoy the protection of the law and that offences such as those in the act are a vital tool in extending that protection?

Ash Denham: Yes, I agree. Specific laws are in place to protect emergency workers through, as the member mentioned, the 2005 act. In 2008, this Administration extended the act to cover GPs, other doctors, nurses and midwives when they are working in the community. Penalties are available to the courts, all the way up to life imprisonment and unlimited fines, to deal with the most serious assaults. That gives the police, prosecutors and

courts the tools to ensure that those who attack public-facing workers are dealt with appropriately and effectively.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I apologise, again—this time to Liam Kerr and George Adam. I remind all members and ministers to be concise. We will then have more room to fit in other members.

Poverty

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-14621, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the impact of United Kingdom Government welfare cuts and universal credit on poverty.

14:23

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Today's debate takes place in the week that Professor Philip Alston, who is the United Nations' special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, will visit Scotland as part of a wider UK visit to consider the links between poverty and human rights. As Professor Alston and the UN believes, the Scottish Government believes that poverty is an urgent and pressing human rights concern that requires action from all of us. Therefore, I hope that his visit enlightens him about the reality of poverty across the UK for so many people; about the concerted work of this Government, our local authorities and the third sector to tackle poverty and inequalities, particularly child poverty; and about Scotland's record on standing up for human rights. I hope that he will also realise that, despite those efforts, child poverty is set to rise because of the UK Government's continued onslaught of welfare cuts—cuts that in Scotland alone will mean that social security spending will reduce by an eye-watering £3.7 billion in 2020-21.

Like many members, I had hoped that last week's UK budget statement would reverse some of the most damaging impacts of UK Government welfare cuts. Unfortunately, despite improvements to work allowances, the fundamental changes that the Scottish Government along with many others called for have not been made, and the UK Government's approach to welfare is set to continue to drive more people into poverty.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary explain how the Scottish Government proposes to use its ample powers to top up reserved benefits and to create new benefits, rather than just grieving about welfare cuts that other people are introducing? What does the Scottish Government propose to do about it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Scottish Government intends to stand up for the people of Scotland in the face of the UK Government's cuts. Perhaps, when is considering what is said today, Adam Tomkins will reflect on what he would like us to cut from our current budget, since he would like us to use those powers. We will continue to press the UK Government to ensure that the changes are made.

The UK Government scrapped its own child poverty targets, so it is particularly disturbing that the welfare cuts have hit families hard. In particular, larger families and lone parents are badly affected. In its first year of implementation, the two-child limit alone reduced the incomes of about 3,800 families in Scotland by up to £2,780 per year. That situation will worsen year on year.

The welfare changes that have been introduced by successive UK Governments since 2010 are set to increase child poverty in Scotland by about 8 per cent. While we try to lift people out of poverty, the Conservative Government is determined to push more families into poverty, thereby making it more challenging to meet the ambitions of the Scottish Government and Parliament on child poverty. In the face of the welfare changes, and without having full powers over welfare, employment and the living wage, we are fighting poverty with one hand tied behind our back.

All that is compounded by the systematic failure of the UK Government's universal credit programme. When I visited Prospect Community Housing Ltd in Wester Hailes last week, tenants spoke to me about their fear about the roll-out of universal credit. One tenant spoke about how he already could not afford to heat his home and buy food, so he relies on food banks and uses a candle to light his flat in the evenings. Presiding Officer, how has it come to this?

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities evidence shows that rent arrears for people who are in receipt of universal credit in full-service areas are two and a half times higher than the average arrears for people on housing benefit. Furthermore, new figures that came out today from the Trussell Trust show that there has been a 15 per cent increase in food-bank use in Scotland in just six months, compared to this time last year. Benefit-payment delays and the five-week wait are key reasons for that increase. That is against a backdrop of an average increase of 52 per cent in food-bank use in areas that have had universal credit in place for a year or more. [*Interruption.*]

I know that this might be difficult for Adam Tomkins to hear, but he would do well to listen to the Trussell Trust instead of carping from the sidelines during the debate.

The fact that universal credit is causing avoidable and unnecessary harm is beyond doubt. The long list of the failings of universal credit means that the situation is set to get bleaker.

The minimum in-built five-week wait for a first payment causes much of the harm. The National Audit Office found that a fifth of all clients are not paid their full universal credit entitlement on time, and that about 13 per cent did not receive any

payment at all. The Department for Work and Pensions does not expect the situation to improve significantly. If universal credit is supposed to mirror the world of work, it should be paid on time and in full.

The minimum income floor for self-employed people, which makes unreasonable assumptions about the amount of money that a person must earn while on universal credit, is a clear disincentive to people who might be considering self-employment.

As I have mentioned, the two-child cap policy and the rape clause are completely unacceptable, deeply harmful and fundamental violations of human rights—despite what members of the Conservative Party might think. In June, it was revealed by the DWP that 190 women across the UK had had to fill in an eight-page form to prove that their child was conceived as a result of rape, in order that they could receive the financial support to which their child was entitled. That is a disgrace. The two-child limit must be scrapped with immediate effect, and the abhorrent rape clause with it.

In addition, evidence shows that the UK Government's punitive approach to benefit sanctions and conditionality is not only ineffective but is having a damaging effect on the health and wellbeing of people, as well as pushing them into poverty.

During another recent visit, I was told about the case of a man who had phoned his local citizens advice bureau to arrange to get a food parcel. The man had been sanctioned after missing an appointment at his jobcentre, which was several miles away in a different town, and he could not afford the fares to go there. The client had mental health issues and the CAB was aware that he had gone without eating for days at a time and had received food parcels in the past. He also wanted to know whether he would be able to get some toilet paper and cleaning products at the food bank. The CAB marked his case as "starvation while waiting for universal credit". It is simply beyond comprehension that our welfare system, which is supposed to be a safety net, has become so punitive that it is driving people to destitution.

A Westminster Work and Pensions Committee report that was published today recommends that the DWP

"work with experts to develop a programme of voluntary employment support"

for disabled people. That is exactly the approach that we are now taking in Scotland in our main devolved employability programme. Today's committee report highlights once again the failings in the whole conditionality and sanctions regime, which is why it needs urgently to be reviewed.

Next year will see the managed migration phase of universal credit begin to be rolled out. It will require people who are claiming working tax credits to make a new claim for universal credit or risk losing their benefit entitlements. In addition, by the UK Government's own estimate, a third of those who are due to switch to universal credit during managed migration will be people with disabilities or long-term health conditions. Given what we know about the state of universal credit so far, that is extremely concerning.

Before Conservative members rise to defend the changes that were announced in the budget, I ask them whether they really know what those changes mean in practice. Many of the changes will not come into force for years. The repayment period for advances will increase by six months, but not until October 2021, which is three years away. The two-week run-on in legacy benefits will not be in place until July 2020, which is 21 months away. Universal credit needs to be fixed now, not to have the smallest of sticking plasters applied over the next couple of years.

The increases to work allowances for people with children and people with disabilities are welcome as far as they go, but they undo only half of the 2015 cuts.

Devastatingly for many households, the benefits freeze remains in place. It has led to a reduction in spending of about £190 million in the current financial year. To have increases in the cost of living with no increase in the level of benefits that people rely on is unfair and illogical. So much for the end of austerity.

The Scottish Government is using the limited powers that we have to try to make delivery of universal credit better suited to those who need to claim it. Since October 2017, our universal credit Scottish choices have meant that people have had the options to receive their universal credit award twice monthly, and to have the housing costs element in their award paid directly to their landlord, whether they are in the private or social rented sector. Take-up has been high, with about 32,000 people, or almost 50 per cent, taking up one or both of those options. That provides us with good evidence that people want more flexibility and adaptability in how they receive the support that they are entitled to, which adds weight to the argument that further changes to the DWP benefit system are needed.

Scotland is also committed to introducing split payments to provide an independent income to all universal credit claimants, and to promote equality in the social security system. We continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and people who are in receipt of universal credit in order to help us to develop the policy on how

payments should be split. We will make an announcement on that in due course.

I know that there will be calls from some people—we have heard them already today—for the Scottish Government to do more to mitigate the cuts that are coming from Westminster. This year, we are spending £125 million on welfare mitigation alone. However, we cannot get ourselves into a position where the UK Government continues to slash and burn its way through our welfare state while the Scottish Government is expected to take money from other budgets to somehow paper over the cracks of that crumbling system. This Parliament, which most of us campaigned long and hard for, is here to do so much more than just pick up the pieces from failed Westminster Tory austerity policies.

I therefore once again urge the UK Government to listen to the evidence, to make the necessary changes to universal credit, to reverse the cuts that it is inflicting and to help us to raise people out of poverty.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights to the UK and in particular to Scotland this week as part of his visit to investigate the link between poverty and the realisation of human rights in the UK; condemns the unacceptable damage that the UK Government's welfare reform policies are causing across Scotland, and the subsequent negative impact on poverty levels; agrees that Universal Credit is causing debt and hardship across Scotland's communities and calls on the UK Government to immediately halt the roll-out of this; notes the conclusions of the Scottish Government's 2018 welfare reform report, which highlights that the UK Government's welfare cuts will lead to a £3.7 billion fall in social security spending in Scotland in 2020-21, including a £370 million reduction due to the benefit freeze; further notes that the appalling two-child limit has already reduced the income of 3,800 families in Scotland and this number is set to grow year on year and will result in a £92 million cut for families by 2020-21; raises concerns that UK Government tax and welfare changes since 2010 are estimated to increase the number of children living in relative poverty in Scotland by 8%; believes that the UK Government failed in its autumn Budget to support the poorest in society by lifting the current benefit freeze and addressing the fundamental flaws in Universal Credit, and welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring that dignity, fairness and respect are at the heart of Scotland's new social security system.

14:34

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con):

A great deal has been said about universal credit since last Monday's budget. Much of the commentary has been balanced and constructive, but some of it has been less so and has—dare I say it—involved points that are more politically motivated than related to the situation on the ground.

Much of the rhetoric has again implied that the systems that universal credit has replaced were working well and addressing issues of poverty. That is not the case. Experts at the Institute for Fiscal Studies have pointed out that, with working tax credits, working for more than 16 hours a week made little sense, because the gain from earnings was negligible as benefits were withdrawn. That system was driven by the wrong incentives.

By 2011, the UK was one of the worst-performing countries in Europe for workless households—it ranked 28th out of 28. The system was far too complex and error prone. Claimants had to deal with layer upon layer of interacting benefits, which all had their own rules and procedures.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Michelle Ballantyne: I will not at the moment. I need to make progress.

In 2009-10, error and fraud were estimated to have cost the taxpayer about £5.2 billion a year. In the same year, underpayments left customers without entitlements of an estimated £1.3 billion a year in benefits and £260 million a year in tax credits. That was the legacy of Labour Government and the old systems, which the coalition Government inherited in the midst of the most damaging financial crisis of recent times.

Simplification of the system was drastically needed but, sadly, previous Governments failed to take decisive action and instead merely tinkered around the edges. Universal credit is the bold reform that we need—a system that reflects working life as it is, allows for changes to circumstances and flexes with the individual's needs.

Work is the fundamental route out of poverty, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies highlighted this week, and universal credit is the right vehicle. We see that in the statistics—the level of youth unemployment has fallen by more than 50 per cent since 2010; we have a record employment rate of 75.7 per cent; and, since 2010, our policies have meant that an average of 1,000 people have moved into work every day. The United Kingdom and universal credit are working.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Michelle Ballantyne said that 1,000 more people have moved into work each day over the past decade. Is not it true that the population has increased by 3 million, so the fact that more people are in work has nothing to do with the benefits system and everything to do with the population increase? Is it not also important to talk about quality work, rather than universal credit forcing people into exploitative zero-hours contracts?

Michelle Ballantyne: More people are working than ever before and the economy has more jobs than ever before. The Conservative Government legislated against exploitative zero-hours contracts, so the minister cannot keep using that reference.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Michelle Ballantyne: I have just taken one, so I will continue.

The policy's fundamental principles of simplifying welfare, making work pay and ensuring that those who need support receive it, are sound. I hope that few in the chamber would disagree with those aims.

Of course, universal credit has its problems. Attempting to untangle the web of previous benefits and tax credits, which are split between Her Majesty's Treasury and the DWP, is a challenge. However, one of universal credit's strengths is its test-and-learn approach. When something went wrong with the old system, there was no flexibility to change it. Now, changes are tested so that problems can be identified and solutions found. The UK Social Security Advisory Committee has praised that approach and welcomed the stated intention to test and learn. On numerous occasions, that approach has lent UC a flexibility that is light years ahead of any process that the previous benefits system offered.

However, it was clear that universal credit required extra funding. I raised that with Esther McVey and her colleagues, and I know that many Conservative colleagues, as well as Scottish National Party colleagues, shared that opinion. That is why the Chancellor of the Exchequer's announcement last Monday was welcome: it will boost universal credit before the roll-out of managed migration.

I know that the Scottish Government wants to talk about cuts to the welfare budget, but I believe that it will find that universal credit is more generous than the system that it is replacing. Analysis from the Resolution Foundation and the IFS confirms a boost for families on UC that is worth about £630 a year. With £1.7 billion earmarked to increase the work allowance, the UK Government is making sure not just that work pays but that it pays more, which will help 2.4 million families to work their way out of poverty.

Mr Hammond included a further £1 billion to assist with managed migration, and yesterday, we heard from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions just how that money will be spent. The debt that people are carrying when they come on to UC is a real concern. I am delighted that repayment rates will now be reduced from 40 to 30 per cent of standard income, which will help more

than 600,000 families—a move that was backed by Frank Field MP.

Equally, the repayment period for advances will be extended from 12 months to 16 months, which will give people extra breathing space to get on top of their finances. For self-employed people, there will be a 12-month grace period before the minimum income floor comes into effect, which will provide 130,000 families with the best opportunity to grow a successful business. Managed migration will now happen over a longer period and in smaller batches in order to ensure a smooth transition, and there will be added protection for 500,000 people who claim the severe disability premium. Existing decisions or verification will now be used to make aspects of the process easier.

Given that the waiting period has been of concern to many members, perhaps most welcome of all is the announcement that the DWP will begin a two-week run-on for people who are in receipt of out-of-work benefits. In practical terms, that means that when an individual moves on to universal credit, they will receive an additional two weeks' payment, which will reduce the waiting time for their first universal credit payment and help vulnerable claimants to make a smooth transition to the new system. Although universal credit is already working for the majority of claimants, that is a clear sign that the UK Government is working to resolve issues where they occur.

No one is suggesting that the change is easy or faultless, but once the reforms are complete, the system will be much less unwieldy, and we will have a social security system that reflects modern life—a system that is genuinely designed to help people to move out of poverty.

I move amendment S5M-14621.1, to leave out from "condemns" to end and insert:

"believes that a social security system should simplify benefits, encourage those who can to work and support those who cannot, and that therefore the principle of Universal Credit is correct; acknowledges the difficulties that have been experienced during the roll-out of the system; welcomes changes, such as the £1.7 billion announced in the 2018 autumn Budget, which make Universal Credit more generous than the system it replaces, and believes that, with the powers under the Scotland Act 2016 to create new benefits and top up reserved benefits, the Scottish Government can no longer justify simply criticising UK Government policy, and must now focus on its own implementation plans."

14:41

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): The timing of this debate is very welcome, following the UK Government's budget and Esther McVey's statement, but it seems that the UK Government thinks that the debate about universal credit can be put to bed for this year. As we welcome the UN

special rapporteur, I hope that we can make it clear today that more must be done and that both MPs and MSPs must act to help people who are suffering.

Although much of what I will say today will focus on universal credit, I thank third sector organisations for their briefings, which cover all aspects of welfare reform. The MS Society again makes an urgent call to end the 20m rule for personal independence payments and Inclusion Scotland makes a broader point about how disabled people have been targeted by reforms. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Human Rights Consortium Scotland remind us to take a broader view of poverty and human rights.

Scottish Labour will support the Government's motion, but we want to amend it to urge MPs to vote down the managed migration regulations, and to urge Holyrood to look at how it can go further.

The Scottish Government often claims that we cannot mitigate all of Westminster's cuts and that it would be better if all welfare powers were devolved. However, neither of those claims help the 120,000 people who have suffered the roll-out of universal credit to date, or the 90,000 people who have gone to food banks since April. Scottish Labour's amendment calls for cross-party talks about what we can do right now. Looking at last week's budget and yesterday's announcement, it is clear that the UK Government has not gone far enough: Philip Hammond's £1,000 boost to work allowances and Esther McVey's failure to tackle brutal, systemic flaws are a set of fudges that do not fix universal credit.

In my Central Scotland region, 21,000 people have moved on to universal credit over the past year. They are suffering rent arrears, which have quadrupled; they are having to pay back almost £8 million in advances at a rate of 40 per cent; and they are suffering a brutal conditionality system, which is forcing workers to find more work. Those people need support now—they do not need constitutional rhetoric or for the DWP to take years' more time.

On its own, the £1,000 partial uplift to work allowances is a welcome improvement, but it will help some people more than others. The Resolution Foundation points out that lone parents and disabled people who are toiling to pay a mortgage or do not get help paying their rent will still be worse off by £2,000 and £1,200 respectively.

Mirroring UK Labour's 10-point action plan on universal credit, the Poverty Alliance calls for the lifting of the £370 million benefit freeze, the ending of the two-child cap and the ending of sanctions, conditionality and weeks of waiting. All those

moves are urgently needed to cut through the misery of universal credit.

Yesterday's announcement that there will be help for the self-employed and that a new lower 30 per cent collection rate will be implemented was welcome. However, although the two-week run-on payments shorten the initial wait to three weeks, people in receipt of child tax credits—again, lone parents and the working poor—are penalised, because those run-on payments will not apply to them. The delay in the implementation of those changes will not help any of the people who have already moved on to universal credit.

MPs must halt the Tories' managed migration because, bluntly, there is nothing managed about it. There will now be more time to claim or to have payments backdated, but inherent to the design of the process is an attempt to catch people out. People on tax credits will get a time-limited invitation to apply. If they do not do so, they risk losing their transitional protection. Surely the process has to be better than that.

Here in Scotland, we should have serious, thorough discussion about how we can make people's lives easier. Call it mitigation, but people have to be reassured that Holyrood will act and is better than this callous Tory Government. A child benefit top-up is a starting point that the give me five coalition advocates, although I know that the SNP refuses to support that call. We could also consider fast-tracking the income supplement for lone parents and the disabled—those who are still losing out because of George Osborne's work allowance cuts.

Last week's figures on the Scottish welfare fund and Scottish choices show that they are being well used by families across the country. We should heed the call of the Social Security Committee and increase the funding that is available in that regard—not through an uprating but through a substantial increase that not only reverses the real-terms cuts that there have been since 2014 but ensures that people in crisis can get the support that they need.

The fact that, after being asked, half of people in receipt of universal credit have taken up universal credit flexibility is good progress but, with arrears still growing, the Government must look to improve that further. The cabinet secretary mentioned split payments, but should landlord payments not be automatic, with an opt-out?

On the two-child cap, I was not here for the debate when Michelle Ballantyne set out her reasons for supporting that, but I watched it later. As I did so, I reflected on my family's circumstances. I was one of four children. My parents worked hard—my father as a welder and my mother as a bank clerk—to support the family

that they chose to have. My dad was diagnosed with a serious heart condition at the age of 37 and was unable to carry on doing the work that he was trying to do and had been doing for 20 years. Who plans for such situations when they plan to have more than two children? Who in Dundee planned for the situation that they have woken up to this morning? Where is the support network? Where is the state support that children depend on day in, day out when circumstances change beyond anyone's comprehension?

In the talks that flow out of today's debate, we must look at how we can use our new powers to either eradicate welfare reforms or depart from the UK Government's direction. Just as we have banned the private sector from involvement in assessments, thereby securing dignity and respect for the terminally ill, we should consider ending the 20m rule in relation to PIP and putting in place the certainty of automatic entitlement. We should be looking to lift the earnings limit and allow full-time carers to access full-time education, providing real freedom to work and study.

Today, we can condemn the Tory Government as we have many times before. However, I hope that MPs of all parties act on the issue of managed migration. We should do so, too.

I move amendment S5M-14621.2, to insert after "roll-out of this,":

"further agrees that MPs must act to halt the Universal Credit managed migration; notes the contribution of Scottish Choices, the Scottish Welfare Fund and mitigation of the so-called bedroom tax to help counter the impact of welfare reform; believes that cross-party talks should now take place to consider the extent to which the income supplement can protect people from the Conservative administration's welfare reform, and how Scotland's new powers will be best used to support carers, older people and disabled people;"

14:49

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Mark Griffin spoke of some of the organisations that have briefed us for this debate, and I think that the notable amount of briefings that we have received demonstrates the level of interest and concern that exists around universal credit.

In passing the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, Parliament took an important step in saying that it is unacceptable to have hundreds of thousands of Scottish children growing up without access to the basics of life, such as a good diet, a warm and safe home, and toys and activities that allow them to grow and develop.

As the motion notes, we have already made some progress towards reducing poverty by setting up the new Scottish social security system. The new best start grant, which will launch shortly, will more than double the income that is available

to low income families. The changes to the devolved disability benefit assessment process, made by the Green Party and supported by the Scottish Parliament, intend to ensure that people get the support that they need in as non-intrusive and dignified a way as possible.

There is positive change, but the cuts—let us call them that, not reforms or changes—risk undermining that ambition and the progress that we are making. In March, Landman Economics projected that relative child poverty will soar to 38 per cent by the late 2020s. It said:

"the forecast increase in poverty is driven by the substantial cuts to social security for families with children legislated for in the previous UK Government's July 2015 Budget—in particular the four-year freeze on social security uprating and the two-child limit for Housing Benefit, tax credit and Universal Credit claims."

Let us be clear. Cuts to our social security system, including to universal credit, are taking money out of the pockets and wallets of some of the poorest households in Scotland. Yes, last week's budget reversed some of the 2015 work allowance cuts, which should never have been made in the first place, and that is welcome. However, the reversal does not apply to all universal credit recipients. For those who do not have children or who do not have disabled people in their household, the cuts remain.

That represents only £1.7 billion of the £3 billion work allowance cuts that were made by the 2015 budget. As Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies notes, universal credit is

"quite deliberately creating millions of winners and millions of losers."

A third will be £1,000 a year worse off under universal credit, and that is not taking into account other cuts. We still have the benefit cap and the two-child limit. We still have the benefit freeze. Taking those into account, some families will lose many thousands of pounds a year. The IFS projects that, in the long-term, the poorest 10 per cent of households with children will lose £3,000 annually, as a result of tax and benefit changes. In the worst case, for a family unfortunate enough not to have parents in work, the long-term impact of tax and benefit changes is a loss of more than £4,000.

I turn to the gendered nature of the cuts, which is mentioned in the Green Party amendment. Cutting social security reduces the incomes of women disproportionately. Over the decade of austerity from 2010 to 2020, 86 per cent of net savings raised through cuts to social security will come from women's income, placing women at a greater risk of deeper and sustained poverty. IFS figures show that, by 2022, lone-parent families, which are overwhelmingly female, will lose more than £3,000.

To take just one example, the benefit cap, in effect, targets women and their children for cuts. The latest figures, for August this year, show that almost 90 per cent of single and 91 per cent of capped households have at least one child.

Policy in Practice's research shows that for every claimant who managed to move off the cap, more than one household is stuck on the cap for six months or more. For six months, that is a cut of £360. The average shortfall between rent and housing support for those trapped by the cap is £3,750 per year. The research shows that

"The majority of capped households showed no change in their circumstances other than a significant worsening of their living standards following the introduction of the benefit cap ... It is unlikely that the benefits of this policy, both in terms of the savings generated and the positive impacts on employment outcomes, have offset the financial costs, or crucially, the human and social costs associated with rising levels of economic destitution."

The design of paying universal credit to only one person in a household is deeply problematic. Close the Gap argues that the single household payment of universal credit has left many women with no independent access to an income. The Women's Budget Group is concerned that the reduction of women's financial autonomy could result in main carers—in practice, they are usually mothers—losing clearly labelled child payments, which currently are often paid separately and can provide a lifeline to survivors of domestic abuse.

Poverty is a tragedy, because it means that hundreds of thousands of Scots, including more than 200,000 children, are growing up without access to the resources, opportunities and life chances that everyone else takes for granted. I accept that some improvements have been and are being made to universal credit, and those are welcome, but some families will still be very much worse off as a result of benefit cuts. I agree with Mark Griffin that the Parliament has a strong role to play, and I look forward to addressing that further in my closing speech.

I move amendment S5M-14621.3, to insert after first "benefit freeze":

“; believes that these cuts are highly gendered, impacting the income of women disproportionately, and that, contrary to assurances given by the UK Government that Universal Credit would not cut incomes, some low-income families are expected to lose an average of £200 per month”.

14:55

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful to the Government for bringing the motion to Parliament and to Labour and the Greens for their amendments, both of which we are happy to support.

As a Liberal, I often lean on the words of William Beveridge when we talk about social security and the welfare state, but I recognise that we have still failed to meet Beveridge's challenge of addressing the five giant evils of ignorance, idleness, squalor, want and disease over the 60 years since he wrote those words and since my party first embarked on the project of welfare reform.

It might be surprising that my party is so full throated in its backing of the Government motion, as it is true that we were there at the genesis of the universal credit project—we embarked on it in good faith, although I admit that, had we had different partners, things might have been different. However, looking over our shoulder and gazing at what has become of the project, we do so with no small degree of abject horror at the evisceration of the work allowance; at the stubborn incompetence and the inability to address the real, practical problems associated with the roll-out; and at the two-child limit and the rape clause that stems from it, which we blocked continually in our time in office because we believe that the provision of a safety net should never have such a precondition attached to it. I associate myself with Mark Griffin's remarks and powerful personal testimony on that. We do not believe for a second that normal family life should be denied to people who happen to fall on hard times. That is why we resisted the two-child limit throughout our time in office.

To go back to first principles, for us, it was about the provision of a national minimum by the state, which in turn should be a catalyst for social mobility. The system should be a safety net when needed, as well as a catalyst for social mobility to allow people to haul themselves out of their position. Welfare reform was a necessary undertaking in achieving that end, and many poverty campaigners agreed with that underlying principle. Our support for the motion does not mean that we abandon the principle that a degree of welfare reform was needed. However, the motion is right, and it speaks to the values that we share. We should listen to the casualties who have suffered as a result of the botched roll-out so far, heed their warnings and recognise the tremendous capacity to harm some of the most vulnerable constituents we represent.

In the first days of the roll-out, warning lights started to wink to life across the dashboard of delivery. In the debate on the same topic last month, I quoted Frank Field who, in his capacity as the chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, rightly said that Wonderland visions of welfare reform collapse on contact with real life. That is not about the original intentions of welfare reform; it is about the fact that the centre of gravity has inexorably shifted away from the original vision, as

evidenced in the cuts to which my amendment refers.

Throughout our participation, we were clear that the first priority should be to protect and assure a national minimum family income—that should be the alpha and omega—and that, thereafter, the simplification and streamlining of the process would lead to savings through reduced bureaucracy; and, above all, it would incentivise work. However, the Conservatives, governing unencumbered by our influence, have demonstrated that the money-saving aspect of welfare reform has supremacy over all other considerations. We see that in the £3 billion that has been slashed from the work allowance, which undermines family income and routes into work. The theoretical starting point has been corrupted by an ideological shift away from the original intent.

To add insult to injury, the roll-out has been beset by a catalogue of errors, to demonstrable human cost: in the rent arrears that we see mounting for those who are already in direct receipt of the housing benefit component; and in the unintended penalties for the self-employed that we have heard something about.

I associate myself, again, with the remarks of Alison Johnstone, who is right to point out the iniquity of having a system that is not fleet of foot enough to recognise that families are not always united—that, by necessity, we sometimes have to divide payments between claimants, particularly in abusive spousal relationships where finance is still used as a tool of coercive control.

Above all, the plans afford no comfort to families in Edinburgh who, this Christmas, face the roll-out with an understanding of the problems that have befallen those who have gone before them; the delays are legion and they will happen over the festive period, when household incomes and budgets are already stretched to capacity.

In previous debates like this one, I have taken criticism—rightly—about my party's role in welfare reform when in coalition. However, like in those, I point to what the Conservatives are doing now, unencumbered by our influence. There is the uncertainty about the benefits available to people and their reduction; the erosion of social mobility; and the two-child limit, which, by extension, created the rape clause.

For my party, this was a project of reform, which started with the best of intentions but now has been hopelessly derailed and corrupted by ideological right-wing intent. It needs to be stopped.

I move amendment S5M-14621.4, to insert at end:

“, and regrets that the cuts made to Universal Credit by the UK Conservative administration in 2015 were not restored in its recent Budget.”

15:01

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I joined the Scottish National Party in my late teens, when I was 18 years old. At the time, my community was under siege from an uncaring Conservative Government at Westminster. The years move on but some things never seem to change.

What happened then probably defined me politically; it was at that point that I knew the type of future that I wanted for Scotland. I have changed—I have got older and have mellowed slightly—but the Tories do not seem to have done so. Even in the chamber today, we have heard Michelle Ballantyne say that universal credit is a system that tests and learns. Tests and learns—honestly, how can anyone say that? She should say that to the families in my constituency who are suffering because of universal credit. Tests and learns? It is more like tests and ignores.

What we are discussing today is one of the foremost issues that people in our country face. Although not everyone is directly affected by the introduction and implementation of universal credit, the threads run through our society.

We were told that merging the benefits would streamline the system and make it simpler and easier to access and that the transformation from benefits to work would be simpler. I do not think that I have ever come across a Government programme such as this one, which not only does not meet any of its objectives but targets those who are most in need of its services.

A social security system is something that a modern, forward-looking nation should be proud of—a helping hand for people at a time of need, whether because they lose their job or because of other changes in their circumstances that are beyond their control. Mark Griffin gave a perfect example of that when he spoke about the people in Dundee today who may have a major change in their circumstances in the near future—none of it will be their fault, but their lives could change dramatically. Every one of us could face such changes at some stage in our life; and all of us in this chamber must have been contacted by people who face such hardships.

The flaws that are to be found throughout the system are incredible. The issues have been highlighted by the National Audit Office, Citizens Advice Scotland, the Poverty Alliance, Child Poverty Scotland and many others. Whether with the migration of benefits, the loss of income, the issues with passported benefits, the reliance on online claims or the predicted increase in poverty

and child poverty, universal credit has fundamental flaws.

Of the many flaws, one of the most incredible is the length of time that it takes to get an initial payment, which pushes families into debt and rent arrears. Many of those people have never been in arrears in their entire lives, having worked, paid their bills and made sure that their homes were secure. This is the first time that they face the prospect of being behind on their rent, and it is due to the delays that are inherent in the system; 73 per cent of those on universal credit are in rent arrears compared with 29 per cent of those not on universal credit.

It is easy to see what is happening in our communities because of the introduction of universal credit; usage of food banks has increased by an average of 52 per cent in areas where universal credit has been in place for more than one year. That is not insignificant. Nevertheless, we hear from the Conservatives that there are many reasons for the increased use of food banks. I would say that the issue is poverty—poverty that is brought about by a failed and flawed welfare reform programme. Can we imagine having to go to a collection office to ask for a referral, exposing ourselves to feelings that no one would wish to experience, and having to present ourselves to ask for food to feed ourselves and our family? I would like to know what the other reasons for the increase in food bank use that the Tories sound so keen on are. I find it hard sometimes to understand the mindset of those who are determined to make other people's lives more difficult, particularly when it is those in society who need our help.

We parliamentarians have experience of dealing with people with long-term health conditions who have been affected by the welfare changes. We have seen the targeting of people with disabilities through the introduction of PIP and universal credit for those who previously claimed employment support allowance.

Presiding Officer, the life chances that you and I have been given are often harder for others to obtain, or even think of obtaining. The disability living allowance and ESA were there to provide people with the ability to lead a life with equality of freedom and access.

I am not the only one who has witnessed the changes over recent years. The removal or reduction of DLA has changed many people's lives. There are stories of those who are unable to work being pressured to take employment. One of my constituents served in the Army and got a medal for his time in Afghanistan. He was assessed for work on the Tuesday and informed the assessor that he was being treated for cancer

and was having an operation two days later. That young man was immediately passed fit for work.

The sanctions associated with the system are another way in which people in need are targeted. What do we do with people in hard situations who have little money and find it hard to get by? They get sanctioned. Most members in the chamber will know the story of my constituent who had a heart attack and could not sign on. He told that to the jobcentre, but he was sanctioned nonetheless. Even if someone has a heart attack and is in the hospital, they are still sanctioned under this uncaring Tory Government. That is what Tory welfare reform is all about. Where is the dignity? Where is the respect? Where is the understanding that life's events happen?

The Scottish Government should not pay for Westminster's mistakes. Our Scottish Government will continue to make the right decisions. A social security system with dignity and respect should be at the centre of a truly fair society. I might have changed since I joined the Scottish National Party and things might have moved on, but one thing that we can guarantee is that we can never trust a Tory.

15:07

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): It goes without saying that there has been renewed discussion about the impact of universal credit and its effectiveness in recent weeks and months, and I welcome that discussion. We all agree that the roll-out should be done as sensitively as possible and that it should consider, first and foremost, the people whom the system set out to support.

As the Chancellor of the Exchequer said last week:

"Universal credit is here to stay".—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 29 October 2018; Vol 648, c 667.]

It is our duty to make sure that it becomes the success that it was designed to be.

A couple of weeks ago, I put on record my concerns about universal credit and called on the UK Government to implement it in a way that saw no one left behind. I called for measures to be put in place to reform the system before its full roll-out, and I asked that the most vulnerable in our society be reassured that their concerns would be listened to.

It is clear from today's debate in the chamber that concerns will continue to be raised, but it is important that we recognise that there is fundamental support for the principle behind universal credit and that the UK Government will listen and respond—as it has done—to concerns as it is rolled out.

I have seen the effects of being trapped in a benefits system, with little opportunity to enter the workforce. When Iain Duncan Smith MP visited Easterhouse in 2002, he recognised that the policies that were in place at that time simply did not work. He saw the need to give people an alternative to a life on benefits, and one that provides a safety net when it is needed most and that ensures that work will always pay.

That is the point: work is essential to tackling poverty. People who are out of work are much more likely to fall into poverty when they live in a workless household. We must support simplifying a welfare system that ensures that it always pays to work. It made no sense that, under Labour, the benefits system was so complicated that, for some people, there was little point in working more because they would lose more in benefits than they would earn in work.

Third sector organisations have supported the principle of universal credit. Just this week, the Institute for Fiscal Studies said that universal credit had

“large potential benefits from simplification and getting rid of the weakest work incentives.”

Last month, the Resolution Foundation said that the prize of a far simpler social security system was “well worth holding onto”.

The implementation of universal credit is as important as its guiding principles. The UK Government has listened to concerns and changes have been made over time. In 2017, the UK Government recognised the practical difficulties of implementing the system and made a number of changes totalling £1.5 billion in investment. An interest-free advance of up to a month’s worth of universal credit was made available from January 2018; the seven-day waiting period was removed from February; and from April 2018, those already on housing benefit could receive their award for the first two weeks of their universal credit claim.

Two weeks ago, changes made during the 2018 budget were welcomed: according to the IFS and the Resolution Foundation, the changes made universal credit more generous than the system that it replaced. The chancellor announced that, as of April 2019, universal credit claimants will benefit from a £1,000 increase in in-work allowances, meaning that working parents and people with disabilities on universal credit will be £630 a year better off.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Annie Wells: I am sorry, but I have a lot to get through.

From October 2019, claimants will be able to repay overpayments and debt more slowly; and from October 2021, people will no longer have to repay advances. Having listened and responded to concerns about the roll-out, the UK Government has extended the managed migration schedule to conclude in December 2023.

Only yesterday, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Esther McVey, announced new changes, including extending the deadline for claimants to move on to universal credit from one month to three months. As universal credit is rolled out, the UK Government will continue to listen to concerns.

Let us not forget that the Scottish Government has significant new powers when it comes to welfare policy. The Scotland Act 2016 devolved to the Scottish Parliament the power to introduce new benefits and to top up any reserved benefits as it sees fit. If the Scottish Government is serious about developing a fair and affordable welfare system, now is the time to prove it.

As has been said, the Scottish Government is facing its own hurdles when it comes to social security.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Annie Wells: I am in the last minute of my speech.

The SNP Government has talked up its new social security bases, but now we learn that it has no idea where staff are going to be working across Scotland. The Government has been stalling for so long on a timeline for the plans for new benefits that the independent Office of Budget Responsibility has been unable to work out how much they will cost.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The member is closing her speech.

Annie Wells: To finish, I stress again that the principles behind the UK Government’s welfare reforms are the right ones. The extra support in the budget is very welcome and I hope that it can alleviate many of the concerns that have been raised so far, including mine.

Today’s debate gives, I hope, a real opportunity to hear from the SNP Government about its genuine proposals to deliver welfare reform, now that it has significant powers to do so. That would be a positive move in the right direction on welfare.

15:13

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): This debate on universal credit is vitally important, although the matters that we must discuss are deeply unwelcome.

Universal credit sits at the heart of a UK welfare reform agenda—in reality, it is a cuts agenda—that will remove around £3.7 billion from social security spending in Scotland by 2021. These are not simply numbers in a budget line; rather, they are cuts that will push families below the breadline. That is simply unacceptable.

Let me say from the outset that I believe that universal credit is an ideologically driven endeavour by the Conservatives. It is deliberately punitive and will inflict harm on some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

There are many aspects of universal credit that I consider cruel and unreasonable, but what really gives the game away is that a new claimant must wait at least five weeks before they can receive any of the cash that they are entitled to. The system is deliberately designed to ensure that those who are most in need are left waiting without funds. The minimum is a five-week wait.

In its June 2018 report, the National Audit Office stated that

“in 2017, around one quarter (113,000) of new claims were not paid in full on time.”

Late payments were delayed by four weeks on average; staggeringly, from January to October last year, 40 per cent of those who were affected by late payments waited 11 weeks or more.

This year, as universal credit rolls out across my city of Glasgow, the National Audit Office estimates that up to 338,000 new claimants will not be paid in full at the end of their first assessment period. That is the reality. Many of my constituents are already being told by the new and harsh universal credit system to wait for five weeks before they get even a single penny of what they are entitled to. Although they are entitled to it, they will still not get their money—

Adam Tomkins: Will Bob Doris give way?

Bob Doris: Let me make some progress.

They will still not get their money after that five-week wait.

I note that, in certain circumstances, the DWP can provide an advance payment, but that is a loan that must be paid back. Claimants are often not aware of that potential advance. When they inquire, they are asked whether they can borrow money from family or friends or whether there are other sources from which they can get money. What a question to ask one of my constituents. Delay a vulnerable family's cash or deny them

their cash and then suggest that they lean on others, who may well be experiencing poverty, too. Further, some “other sources” of income in a community charge eye-watering interest rates. After delaying unemployed people's benefits, are we asking them to seek a payday loan when they are out of work? Worse still, there are some very unsavoury people out there and desperate constituents could ask them for an advance of money when the DWP advises them to go to “other sources” before getting anything from it. Forty per cent of the claimants who have to wait at least five weeks do not receive an advance loan. Some may have personal funds or have family members who can afford to assist, but I worry about where the others are turning—

Adam Tomkins: Will Bob Doris give way now?

Bob Doris: I want to make progress. I have probably heard enough of Mr Tomkins, to be fair.

Those claimants have to go elsewhere to survive—I worry about where they are going.

As currently constructed, universal credit is, to many, a cruel system that is deliberately delivering indebtedness by design. I grew up in the 1980s; in my house, a provy cheque was how birthdays were paid for and a catalogue was how we paid for Christmas, but people got their benefits. Some of my constituents will go for the provy cheques and catalogues but will not get their benefits. The system is ridiculous and inhumane.

The reality for too many individuals and families is the 15 per cent increase in food bank use in Scotland in the five months to September this year, due to that in-built minimum wait of five weeks. The Trussell Trust has said that, when universal credit goes live in an area, there is a demonstrable increase in demand at local food banks. On average, food banks see a 52 per cent increase in demand 12 months after the roll-out of universal credit.

On Friday last week, I held a universal credit information event in Possilpark in my constituency. I thank Glasgow North West Citizens Advice Bureau and NG Homes for their support, councillors Gow and McLaren for attending and Possilpoint community centre for hosting us. It was one of five events that I have held to date, working in partnership with Citizens Advice Scotland, local housing associations, Patrick Grady MP and local councillors. The concerns that were raised at those events illustrate the other deep flaws in the universal credit system. The people offering support at the information events have witnessed at first hand how individuals and groups with poor literacy skills, low or non-existent information technology skills, limited or no access to computers and a lack of affordable broadband have often been left high and dry due to the digital

by default aspects of making a claim for benefits or the need to maintain an online journal evidencing their attempts to seek work. Inclusion Scotland has spoken about disabled people being targeted. Thirty-five per cent of disabled people have no access to the internet, whereas the general figure across the country is 10 per cent. That is cruel and inhumane, and it is by design.

I ask why sanctions are not abolished, given that, frankly, they are counterproductive. The Public and Commercial Services Union, whose members have to handle the system, wants sanctions to be abolished. We must not make my vulnerable constituents wait for five weeks. This can change, and we must change it.

15:19

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I worked as a front-line housing officer for around six years. It was a very rewarding and, at times, tough job, and it offered a good grounding for becoming a councillor and a member of the Scottish Parliament, because I saw at first hand the daily struggles and challenges that are faced by people who are just trying to get by.

In that job, dealing with the benefits system—in particular, the housing benefit system—took up around half my workload. Helping tenants to complete new claim forms, providing evidence of income or changes of circumstances, advising when people started or ended a job and dealing with errors, mistakes and overpayments dominated my work. All those aspects impacted on the ability of the tenant and their family to afford their rent, feed their family and, ultimately, keep a roof over their head.

Like almost every housing officer in the country, I had to go through the formal process of evicting people. If I recall correctly, I think that I did it a dozen times. On only two occasions was the tenant still at the property when the eviction took place. Every other time, the tenant had abandoned the property in desperation; on the odd occasion, they had never moved in. The occasions when someone was there were awful. It was a horrible experience and a desperate situation. Every housing officer in the country bends over backwards to avoid such a scenario.

Today, those staff are dealing with people who are in crisis. They are dealing with individuals or families with illness or disability, people who might be suffering a mental health crisis and people in debt, who cannot feed themselves or their family and who are at risk of destitution. Many families in such a position have working parents who are doing their best but are having to battle a system that is broken.

Universal credit is in chaos—the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, the Poverty Alliance, Citizens Advice Scotland, councils and charities all tell us that. The only people who pretend that it is not are members of the Tory party, who appear to be saying that all those organisations must be telling lies. There has been a series of problems with delivery. People lose out because the conditionality goal posts have moved. The use of sanctions is increasing. There are delays in payments: there is a five-week wait for initial payment as well as delays in on-going payments. There is a lack of support for people who do not know how to use IT systems. Those are all very real problems in the here and now.

I am sure that all of us support the principle of simplifying the social security system, but simplification is just a cover story for what the welfare reform process is really about. It is about the systematic slashing of the benefits safety net for the most vulnerable people. It is about a redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich. It is all part of the Tory class war on the poor, which was so cruelly articulated by Michelle Ballantyne in her offensive and discriminatory comments of two weeks ago, which were passively endorsed by every Tory member—not one of them has spoken out about those comments.

No one in Scotland or across the United Kingdom should face destitution or abject poverty—the UK is the sixth richest country in the world, for God's sake. We should be ashamed of that fact, and we should be ashamed that life expectancy is falling for the first time in decades and that one in four Scottish children lives in poverty.

We hear a lot of clichéd talk about the state being a corporate parent. What kind of parent, as an act of policy, inflicts such misery on their children? What kind of parent forces a £28 a week cut on households with a disabled child? What kind of parent penalises their children because their mother was raped? What kind of parent supports a policy that results in an increase in the number of evictions of families with children? I will tell members what kind of parent—an uncaring, neglectful and abusive corporate parent.

The welfare reform process is an all-out assault on the low paid, the poor, the weak and the vulnerable. Families are losing thousands of pounds a year. In Scotland, 470,000 people are not getting the real living wage of £9 an hour. That represents an increase of 30,000 on the previous year. We have heard about the rise in the use of food banks. Kettle packs are being distributed to allow people who do not have a cooker or cannot afford to put it on to feed themselves. The need for crisis loans is up and rent arrears are up. In local government, support services such as lunch clubs,

breakfast clubs and youth work are being decimated. There is a crisis in mental health, whereby desperate people are unable to get the support that they need. It is the toxic combination of low pay, benefit cuts and the erosion of essential public services—the ones that hold our society together—that is causing so much damage.

Tory politicians have the brass neck to come to this Parliament and talk about mental health, inequality, poverty and housing. It is the duty of every one of us to call them out on their hypocrisy, their unwillingness to face reality and their disregard for people in our society whom they deem unworthy of support.

The Tories exist to increase inequality. They exist to attack the low paid, the disabled and the vulnerable. Let me tell the Tories this: we will not give them a moment's peace until this appalling system is scrapped.

15:25

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): It is with a heavy heart that I rise to speak. I am ashamed, angry and despondent that, in one of the wealthiest countries on the planet, we have in the 21st century a situation in which the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting even richer. That situation is solely due to the Westminster Government's policy choices and is so bad that it attracts international attention and condemnation from the United Nations and other bodies concerned about human rights. I am mortified.

The roll-out of universal credit began in Aberdeen last Monday and, to be honest, all of us who are in any way involved are just dreading the consequences. The public sector agencies involved, Citizens Advice Scotland locally, food banks, housing providers and my own staff all expect to see a rise in demand for their services. Regardless of how well prepared we are in terms of attending courses or reading up on the changes, we are all fearful. I am especially grateful to Stuart Reid, money adviser in Aberdeen City Council's financial inclusion team, for all his efforts to keep us informed of all the likely consequences of the roll-out of universal credit in Aberdeen.

No one would disagree that the social security system needed to be simplified, as different benefits were changed over time and the system became overly complicated, but no one—no one apart from the Tories—agrees that it should be an opportunity to make the poor poorer by reducing the amount of money available.

It needs to be remembered that the biggest part of the social security bill is pensions and, even then, we have in the UK one of the lowest state

pensions in Europe. Westminster needs to reorganise its finances to meet the electorate's demand to live in a society that looks after those who fall on hard times and need the safety net that a universal social security system provides, as Mark Griffin so graphically illustrated.

Instead, along with its supporters in some of the red tops, the Westminster Government loves to give the impression that the burden of social security payments is doled out to the "feckless poor", who just want to live on benefits for their whole lives. Exceptionally few people want to live with the indignity of living on benefits—I have never had experience of people wanting to live on benefits in all my time as an elected politician, whether as a councillor for one of the poorest parts of Aberdeen or as an MSP with a very diverse constituency.

Neil Findlay: I ask the member to be careful in the language that she chooses. It is not an indignity to live on benefits; for some people, it is their only option. I ask her please to be careful when she says that.

Maureen Watt: I take the member's point. What I meant was that people do not want to live on benefits—that it is not their choice.

The downturn in the oil industry demonstrated starkly the need for a universal social security system, when quite a number of my constituents who had been in well-paid jobs contacted me to say how appalled they were at how little they were expected to live on when they became unemployed. Until they needed it themselves, they had not realised just how poor the pay-outs were, and that was before the introduction of universal credit. That is why we saw a man come to access the food bank in his Porsche, and before the Tories ask why he did not get rid of it, it was probably on some finance scheme.

In the week in which the roll-out of universal credit began in Aberdeen, a Community Food Initiatives North East food bank was already distributing centrally its highest-ever level of food parcels. CFINE is considering cutting its wider distribution in the north-east. Whether the Trussell Trust, my local food banks or anyone else says so, there is, as the cabinet secretary has said, no doubt that universal credit increases food bank use and makes the poor even poorer.

The cabinet secretary and others have mentioned the punitive rape clause and other punitive sanctions. Nothing illustrated those matters more starkly to me than what happened to one of my constituents, who fostered the child of her brother, who had died, and then went on to have two children of her own. She was caught by the two-child rule. The Child Poverty Action Group took the Government to court on that issue and

won, but we have still waited for months for the Government to take corrective action. What message does that send out to people who might consider fostering?

I cannot for the life of me understand why the Tories think that it is acceptable to wait for five weeks for universal credit or what folk are supposed to do in the meantime. Even though people can expect an advance, they are expected to pay that back, which will further reduce their income. The Tories must think that everyone gets a large redundancy payment, although the opposite is the case, especially if the person is on a zero-hours contract, a short-term contract or the minimum wage.

Universal credit is causing misery to thousands of people across Scotland. We have already demonstrated in Scotland that we can treat people with dignity and respect with the benefits that we control. It is time that we had control of all of them.

15:31

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. We are talking about a welfare system that exists as a safety net for those who need extra help and support and to help people into work, where possible.

I wanted to discuss the roll-out of universal credit, because being a list MSP can have its advantages. I get to work across several constituencies. Some time ago, I visited a couple of offices to see how they were rolling out universal credit and met people who had moved on to it.

One of the offices that I went to see has a fantastic approach to universal credit. It has a very good outreach programme, and there is recognition of people who may have mental health issues or related issues. People go to them rather than insist that they go into the office. Meetings are sometimes held in people's houses or on walks, and they are working towards eventually taking the meetings back into the jobcentre. It is recognised that there can be stages in people's development prior to their being fit for work, and that office has not applied a single sanction in over two years. When I spoke to the group, it came across strongly that there was an initial fear around universal credit because of the rhetoric in the media, led by politicians, but there was relief and recognition that the system that people are now in was much improved compared with the complicated system that they had left.

In contrast, I visited another office in which there was an insistence that all applicants appear at the jobcentre. That leads some people into anxiety,

missed appointments and all the issues that ensue.

Why have two jobcentres that are not too far apart and which receive the same instruction and framework developed two completely different policies? If we are really interested in developing a fair welfare system, that is where we should be doing our work. We should be working out why jobcentres can take the framework and come up with two different approaches.

Millions of pounds go unclaimed every year. That is a failure of the system, and another area that we could and should be focused on if we have a genuine interest in those in the system at the core of our thought process. No social security system will ever be perfect, of course—there will always be cracks in the system, and people will slip through them—but we need to ensure that we work to close the gaps.

Keith Brown: Is it the member's position that universal credit has not caused an increase in homelessness, in housing arrears or, as the Trussell Trust says, in food bank use?

Brian Whittle: I thank Keith Brown for that intervention, because that is a topic that I wanted to intervene on earlier. East Ayrshire is in my South Scotland region. When I visited its food bank centre recently, we were informed that the centre has managed to reduce the use of the food bank by 30 per cent. That message is not getting out. The centre has managed to gather services, including the DWP, so that, when someone meets the eligibility threshold, they understand what help is available to them and that all the help that should be available to them is available to them.

We should be learning from the different approaches across all areas. As I said, the message about the work that is under way is not getting out, because it does not fit in with certain political rhetoric and agenda.

Last Friday, I visited a local credit union. Credit unions do not get enough oxygen. They help in a small way to start with, by providing small loans and helping people to develop money management skills. That in turn helps them to develop a better credit rating. Many of us take such life skills for granted, but developing those skills is a must for those who have not had that opportunity.

It is obvious from the mess that Labour created when it was in power that the system had to change. Keith Brown, who was then the minister responsible for welfare, said:

"We agree that reform is needed. We also agree that the system should incentivise work, that it should be simpler and, of course, that it must be affordable ... It is worth restating that we believe that the overall model of universal

credit has some merits".—[*Official Report*, 21 March 2012; c 7498, 7500.]

It seemed to me that every Gordon Brown budget endeavoured to complicate the system more and more. A large proportion of the working population was eligible for tax credit, even those who were on a decent salary. The system was unwieldy and massively complicated, and was responsible for many claimants falling into debt.

As for the SNP, it has some gall to bring this topic to the chamber. All that it has done, at every opportunity, is duck the issue. Let me be frank: the subject has been on its agenda since the announcement of the independence referendum in 2012. I remind members that the SNP said that it could devolve a working welfare state in 18 months. After much carping, the SNP gained control of a third of working-age benefit, which is about £3 billion. The first thing that it did was hand back the powers for an initial three years, then for a further two years to the end of this parliamentary term. After nine years of consideration, we have still to hear an SNP policy. It is easier for the SNP to discuss with warm words what it intends to do than it is for it to explain the consequences of taking responsibility. As the SNP is discovering, that is hard, but so is government.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is concluding.

Brian Whittle: This should be a debate about welfare but it is not; it is a debate about deflection, the abdication of responsibility and grievance. It is poor fare, and Scotland deserves better.

15:38

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): So far in this debate, I have heard that universal credit has three aims. The first is to allow those people who are fit and able to work to get back to work. The second is to ensure that work pays, and the best way to do that is to pay a living wage—a real living wage and not the Tory version. The third is to simplify the benefits system. I think that everyone across the chamber agrees with those three objectives.

However, there is a fourth objective, which is very important to any benefits system. When people are on benefits, whether that is for a short period or for a lifetime, we must use the benefits system to ensure that their standard and quality of living is as good as that of the rest of the community. It is not a safety system that gives people only the minimum so that they must live hand to mouth. Every other country in Europe has a social security system that prides itself on ensuring that, during a period of unemployment or

sickness, or during any other period when people have to live on benefit, their quality and standard of living is up to scratch.

Those countries have such a system for two reasons. First, in principle and from a humane point of view, it is absolutely the right thing to have. They also have it for the benefit of society. Report after report shows, for example, that as with the Danish social security system—which is one of the highest paying in terms of unemployment benefit—it pays the state to pay higher levels of benefit during unemployment than the pittance that people get in the United Kingdom. The evidence shows that people take the time not just to find a job, but to find the right job for them; to retrain; to get a new career; and to make sure that, when they go back into work, it is work of the right kind.

The system in this country forces people into short-term work, antisocial work and low-paid work; it forces them into inappropriate work for their skills. The result is continual churn. In Denmark, when people go into work they are usually in that job for years before they become unemployed again; in this country, we see our people end up back on the bureau very shortly after getting into work. That is because it has been done in completely the wrong way.

Therefore, it is not just universal credit that we need to deal with. In Scotland and in the United Kingdom, we need to completely rethink what we need our social security system to do.

Even in terms of the UK Government's objectives of simplifying the system, getting more people into work and incentivising people to work, universal credit—

Adam Tomkins: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: I will do so in a minute.

Universal credit fails in all three objectives. Proportionally, it has not got more people into work. As the cabinet secretary said, we have seen an increase in population of 3 million and many of the people going into work are those who are coming into the labour market for the first time, either through immigration or by reaching working age. In reality, what has universal credit done? It has driven hundreds and thousands of people into dire poverty and, in some extreme cases, to suicide.

Adam Tomkins: I always enjoy listening to Mr Neil in these debates; although I did not agree with his last point, I agree with a lot of what he said.

Does Mr Neil agree that, under universal credit, claimants are more likely than they were under the legacy system to be in work, to stay in work longer and to be earning higher wages? Those are three

reasons why, despite all the rhetoric to the contrary, universal credit is working on the ground.

Alex Neil: I do not think that, overall, the evidence has proven that. I see quite the opposite with universal credit. If we take the example of people not getting money for five weeks, it is driving people into poverty.

I am not saying that the Tories are evil. I am absolutely sure that, when Iain Duncan-Smith designed this benefit, he was well intentioned. However, George Osborne completely ruined it by making £12 billion of cuts to universal credit, only a small percentage of which was reinstated by the chancellor in last week's budget.

If someone is in a low-paid job, as most people who are on universal credit are, they have no savings. They usually have debt when they go on to benefits; they have nothing to rely on. They do not own their own home, so they cannot raise money on the value of their house. Even when they are in work, these people typically live hand to mouth—70 per cent of the children in poverty live in households where somebody is in full-time work.

Not only are these not rich people. They are typically already poor people, and to starve them for five weeks before they get a penny is one of the cruellest things that could ever be done. One of the things that the Scottish Government is doing—I was responsible for this as a minister—is that we are going to pay universal credit within two weeks. We looked at whether it could be done within one week, but the computer systems that we are inheriting from the DWP do not allow us to do that. Otherwise, we would have made it one week. That is just about being more humane. There is no more money involved, but we do it humanely.

The reality is that this is not being done humanely. It has been a shambles from day 1, it continues to be a shambles, and it utterly fails every basic test that the Conservatives themselves have set for it.

15:45

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): This week, I had the pleasure of visiting a local business, Professional Office Supplies in Motherwell, to celebrate living wage week and see the wonderful job that it is doing in supporting its employees in fair work and decent employment. However, it is very different for the many people who struggle on the minimum wage and work in the gig economy, many of whom will also be dependent on benefits. We must remember that many people who are living in poverty and reliant on benefits are in work.

I am very sad to be here again talking about the problems with universal credit. In the previous session of Parliament, I served on the Welfare Reform Committee, and we did extensive work on the impact of welfare reform on people in our society. Many of the problems that members have discussed today, including the issues of single payments and housing benefit not being paid directly to landlords—something that we have fixed in Scotland, thankfully—were highlighted in the pilots. The Welfare Reform Committee visited one of the pilots in Highland Council to see some of the impacts that the reforms were having on people. None of the problems is new. We are just faced with them repeating and repeating and causing misery for our citizens in Scotland.

I want to highlight some of the work that the Welfare Reform Committee did. We identified that we cannot consider a simple identification of what a claimant looks like. People fall into many different categories. People can be in work or out of work, and they have different personal circumstances. However, one of the bits of work that we did was about women and social security, and the committee heard in evidence that the existing inequality for women had been aggravated by the reforms in the social security system. That includes issues of childcare; occupational segregation; pink-collar jobs, as they are called; the gender pay gap; and women's role as primary carers in society.

Research at that time by the House of Commons library stated that, since 2010, £26 billion-worth of cuts had been made to benefits, tax credits, pay and pensions and that 85 per cent of that had fallen on women and been taken from their incomes. We also know that women are twice as dependent on social security as men, with 20 per cent of women's income coming from benefits and what was the tax credits system, and they have fewer financial assets to fall back on when life happens. Many of my colleagues have talked this afternoon about how unpredictable life can be, and people can lose their jobs unexpectedly.

We have talked a lot about the five-week delay. I am very conscious that we have just had a major announcement about job losses in Dundee. For some people facing redundancy towards Christmas, that could mean five weeks in a period over Christmas and new year when they are faced with absolutely no recourse to an income. That is a shocking state of affairs for people in any country to be in.

Some of my colleagues have mentioned the impact on children. I feel so strongly about that. A child should not be means tested or valued according to their parents' circumstances when they were born. Each and every child should be entitled to the same benefit. That is why I find it so

disappointing that the two-child limit has not been addressed. Support for children is about keeping them out of poverty and helping their families.

I will address some points that I have heard this afternoon. Brian Whittle said that he visited DWP offices and saw differing policies being implemented. I hope that he has written to his Government about that, because that is his Government's responsibility. The variation that he described is an indictment of how broken the system is and how badly his Government and the DWP have administered it.

The use of food banks has been referred to. It is unbelievable that we talk about them as if they are part of what society should be about. It is to our shame that any food banks are needed, so a reduction in the need for and use of food banks is of course welcome. A food bank was said to be bringing in agencies, but the agencies are probably using the Scottish welfare fund to help people. The Scottish Government provides funding of £100 million a year to mitigate the situation and clean up the mess that universal credit is creating for people in our society.

Children in particular have been hit hard. A lone parent with one dependent child is likely to lose about £1,770 a year because of welfare reform, and a lone parent with two or more dependent children will lose even more. Let us look at the effect on individual incomes. Brian Whittle mentioned North Ayrshire, where the average family will lose £540 a year. The impact per household is greater in poorer areas.

I do not understand how broken and morally bankrupt a system must be before that is recognised, but I do not think that the United Nations engages in rhetoric or promoting political agendas, and it is the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that has called out the UK Government for its failure to look after people with disabilities in this country. Is everybody wrong?

15:52

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Poverty in Scotland is getting worse. About 1 million people, including about 230,000 children, live in poor households, and the majority are in working households. What a damning indictment of our economy and the precarious nature of employment that is. It is a simple fact that salaries have not kept pace with inflation, while the cost of living has been rising. People are struggling to get by.

What is the Tory UK Government's response? Instead of pursuing tax dodgers who owe millions of pounds, it is intent on penalising the poor. Universal credit is probably the worst example of

Tory welfare reform. It was rolled out in Argyll and Bute last month and it is being rolled out in West Dunbartonshire this month.

As others have said, when universal credit was introduced, it had three aims: to simplify the system, reduce poverty and support people into employment. It fails on all three counts. The system is still complicated and is beset with delays. Claimants have to wait five weeks, if they are lucky, before they get their first payment. Food banks report increases in the numbers who need help, and that correlates directly with the roll-out of universal credit.

Levels of poverty have increased, not reduced, under the Tories. They have cut the amount of benefits that are paid to some of the most vulnerable in our society. Two examples of that are the cutting of disability premiums by two thirds and the introduction of the two-child cap. The cap reminds me of Communist China's morally abhorrent one-child policy. Now, even the Chinese have abolished that; perhaps the Tories can bring themselves to follow China's example and abolish the two-child cap.

As for supporting people into employment, in-work conditionality is totally inflexible. For people who work in precarious employment, the stress of searching for more work while holding down an insecure job creates financial pressure. The Tories do not understand that.

In short, universal credit is an unmitigated disaster. It is making people who are already in poverty poorer. The UK Government needs to stop the roll-out now and halt the managed migration of existing claimants who are on in-work benefits.

I will point out another flaw, which was touched on by Clare Adamson and Alison Johnstone. The context is that poverty is gendered. The majority of poor people are female. Women are twice as dependent as men on social security and the gender pay gap contributes to women being low paid and facing poverty.

In a recent report, the Work and Pensions Committee noted that the default policy of single monthly payments per household risks the entire family income—including money meant for children—going into an abusive partner's account. The woman can feel trapped and dependent on an abusive partner for money, which he then uses to control the relationship. It makes it much harder for the woman to escape from the abuse. In its briefing for today's debate, Close the Gap noted that 89 per cent of women who experience domestic abuse also experience financial abuse. Dual payments therefore need to be the norm, not the exception.

I turn to the roll-out of universal credit in West Dunbartonshire, and I say to Michelle Ballantyne

that this is the situation on the ground. I pay tribute to the West Dunbartonshire citizens advice bureau, West Dunbartonshire Council and West Dunbartonshire Community Foodshare for their efforts in preparing for the roll-out. Although there is immediate concern about the delay in payments, the real concern is for January and February, when the consequences of spending choices over Christmas will come home to roost. There is a real fear about housing debt becoming an issue, particularly for people who are receiving their rent directly instead of it going to their landlord. I ask that that issue be looked at again.

The two principal mechanisms that we will use to help people locally are food banks, which are gearing up for the roll-out, and the Scottish welfare fund. The UK Government should of course halt the roll-out of universal credit and, to quote John Swinney, we should not let it off the hook, because its welfare reforms have been nothing short of brutal. However, the Scottish Government has the power and the means to help, and we cannot in all conscience wring our hands and say how terrible it all is but stand by and do nothing.

I therefore have one final request of the Scottish Government. I say this as gently as I can: instead of cutting money for the Scottish welfare fund in my constituency—which is the consequence of reprofiling and the real-terms freeze that there has been—making a little more money available to help those experiencing immediate difficulties as a result of universal credit would be in order. Indeed, the Scottish Parliament's Social Security Committee has recommended that, and I believe that it was right to do so. At the centre of this debate are people and families who are struggling to cope. They need practical assistance and they need it now, and we must not lose sight of them.

15:57

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): As we have heard, the UK Government's tax and welfare changes since 2010 are estimated to have increased by 8 per cent the number of children living in relative poverty in Scotland. Citizens Advice Scotland estimates that the primary reason why the people it works with are in rent arrears is that they have been moved on to universal credit. Citizens Advice Scotland recorded that 79 per cent of people on universal credit were in arrears, compared to 29 per cent of the other people it deals with.

Over the past couple of weeks, members of the Scottish Parliament's Social Security Committee have heard evidence from food banks, which anticipate a rise in demand for their services in every area where universal credit is being rolled out. In my constituency, universal credit went live

at the end of September, and the food bank there is braced for growing demand.

Others have also alluded to the Conservatives asking members of other parties to suspend their disbelief and to see no connections among any of those facts. Last week, the Social Security Committee heard shocking evidence from the Public and Commercial Services Union about the apparent unpreparedness of the DWP to cope with the changes that lie ahead. To take just one example of the union's concerns, it is unclear how the tax credit system is to be moved seamlessly from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to the DWP. Just as concerning is the fact that many people in receipt of tax credits, who do not presently see themselves as being part of the benefits system, will suddenly be dealing with the DWP. In many cases, they may have to reapply for something that they thought that they had already been awarded.

As others have also mentioned, there is, of course, the five-week wait for payment of universal credit. I know that I cannot be the only member of this chamber who has encountered a family trying to live off literally nothing whatsoever for a period of five weeks. The Trussell Trust has found that 70 per cent of people in that situation found themselves in significant debt as a result. It would be surprising if it had found anything else.

Today, the Tory social security spokesperson quoted the IFS and the Resolution Foundation as confirming that universal credit is more generous than the old system. I feel that the member might have been quoting rather selectively, because the IFS notes that, under universal credit, a third of households that are entitled to it will be at least £1,000 a year worse off. Those facts speak for themselves.

It is worth considering what all that means in human terms. In the view of Inclusion Scotland, UK welfare cuts have had a disproportionate and discriminatory impact on disabled people. It says:

"Over 50% ... in cuts ... are falling on disabled people and their families."

Inclusion Scotland, which represents Scotland's disability organisations, has made a strongly worded representation to all parliamentarians on this. It calls the UK Government's welfare agenda a grave and systematic breach of disabled people's human rights. Of course, the UN has said something similar, warning of a "human catastrophe".

Inclusion Scotland concludes that the cumulative impact of the UK Government's welfare cuts is resulting in deepening levels of poverty and destitution, worsening mental health, suicides and deaths. I noted that there was much heckling from the Tory benches when somebody else quoted

such a scenario earlier on, but I should say that those are the views of Inclusion Scotland.

The first question to ask is, what can this Parliament do about the situation? Perhaps the broader question is, does this Parliament care?

On the first question, we have power in Scotland to make changes in extremely small areas around the edges of universal credit, important though that power may be. Beyond that, there are regular calls—we heard them today—for this Parliament to mitigate all the effects of the UK Government's benefits reforms on some of Scotland's poorest families. As we know, the Scottish Government has spent £125 million on such mitigation this year, and it is only right that the Government did that, to try to take the edge off the most extreme of Westminster's measures.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The member is in his last minute.

Dr Allan: However, we need to be straight: some £3.7 billion is expected to come out of the UK Government's social security spend in Scotland by 2021. No amount of mitigation by this Parliament from the resources that it has to spend on devolved public services can possibly mitigate that or make the Tories' damaging benefit reforms go away.

As I said, the wider question is, does the Parliament care? I wish that I could say that there was unanimity across the chamber in answer to that question. However, having listened to what the Tories have had to say today, and some of their recent revealing outbursts about people on benefits, I have to conclude that I cannot with any honesty say that all parties in this Parliament care about this matter. However, I hope that the rest of us who do will continue to make our views loudly known.

16:04

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): My constituency of Clackmannanshire and Dunblane was an early adopter of universal credit in 2015, so I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate and highlight the impact that the policy has had on the people I represent.

There is no doubt that, as part of the wider welfare reform agenda, the introduction of universal credit has been the biggest change that the welfare system of this country has undergone. In order to assess the impact of the roll-out in my local area, I hosted a summit in our town hall on 7 September. It was well attended by councillors from various parties, officers from

Clackmannanshire Council and Stirling Council, and members of Stirling and Clackmannanshire citizens advice bureaux, local food banks, the Poverty Alliance and the local third sector.

I also invited the two Tory MPs who represent my constituency at Westminster, and who are more than willing to stand up in the House of Commons and extol the virtues of universal credit. For example, just a few weeks ago, Stephen Kerr MP stated:

"I am grateful to be a proponent of universal credit."—*[Official Report, House of Commons, 17 October 2018; Vol 647, c 709.]*

and Luke Graham MP said earlier that

"universal credit is a positive and transformational reform",—*[Official Report, House of Commons, 5 December 2017; Vol 632, c 964.]*

which I suspect will be news to many of my constituents. Unsurprisingly, both Tory MPs declined the opportunity to attend the summit. Perhaps they were unwilling to listen to the facts about this toxic Tory policy.

Adam Tomkins: Does the member agree with these words?

"We agree that reform is needed. We also agree that the system should incentivise work, that it should be simpler and, of course, that it must be affordable,"

and

"It is worth restating that we believe that the overall model of universal credit has some merits".—*[Official Report, 21 March 2012; c 7498, 7500.]*

Those are the member's words—uttered in this chamber—praising the virtues of universal credit.

Keith Brown: What a complete waste of an intervention. You have already heard from all around the chamber about our shared values of trying to make the system simpler and encourage people into work. We understand that point, but it does not excuse the effect of the policy that you and your party are supporting.

It was clear from the evidence presented by all those who attended the summit that I mentioned that the system is fundamentally flawed and penalises the most vulnerable people in our communities, causing financial hardship and extreme distress to many claimants.

Since the full roll-out of universal credit in my area, and despite what Brian Whittle said, both council areas have seen a significant rise in the level of claimants who have rent arrears, with nine out of 10 tenants in Clackmannanshire who are claiming universal credit accruing rent arrears in 2017, and the average debt per universal credit case is nearly double that of the non-UC cases. A similar situation can be observed in Stirling Council, where rent arrears rates are also on the

rise. In 99 cases, Stirling Council tenants had arrears accumulated solely while waiting for their first universal credit payment to arrive. A record number of people have applied for crisis loans and there has been a steady increase in the use of food banks. Brian Whittle's denial that the Trussell Trust might be saying something other than rhetoric when it points out the direct link between universal credit and the increase in the number of food banks will come to haunt him. There has also been a surge in the number of people using local services such as citizens advice bureaux.

There are five Tories in the chamber. I am happy to give way to any single Tory who wants to stand up and say that they agree with Theresa May that austerity is over.

I thought not. Nobody in my constituency believes it, and certainly nobody on universal credit believes it. As we heard from the cabinet secretary, it will take two to three years for some of the most basic changes to happen, so austerity will still exist for those people.

The system is not simple. Adam Tomkins pointed out that we should support the system's simplifications, but it is not simple. The House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee reported that it is not simple. It is unreliable, even for the most capable of claimants, with little or no support built in for those who need additional help, and it leaves local councils, food banks and voluntary advice services to pick up the strain.

I will highlight just a few of the issues raised by those in attendance at the summit that I referred to earlier. The fact that claiming universal credit is a difficult and complex process for everyone was highlighted repeatedly. I should say that local councils and the Scottish Government have to improve the way in which we make universal credit as accessible as possible. Simply telling people that they have to use an IT system is not enough. We have to make sure that they have support. The representative from Clackmannanshire citizens advice bureau stated that it can take hours to make a claim even for those who have IT skills and that it is a nightmare for most people, not only for those who have complex needs. We will see it bite when people who have complex needs are exposed to the system.

Representatives from the third sector shared their experience of supporting vulnerable people through the process of claiming UC, highlighting the difficulties faced by people who have learning disabilities.

There is also the issue of bank accounts. People can get trapped in the difficult situation of having no money to get an ID in order to get a bank account, in order to receive benefits. As I have said before in the chamber, in my

constituency, we do not have a single RBS or Clydesdale bank in the first place.

It is alarming to note that sanction rates in the two Jobcentres that are relevant to my constituency have risen significantly and progressively since they received full roll-out and as the claimant count has grown.

The Tories in my constituency and across the country continue to be enthusiastic cheerleaders for universal credit, denouncing any criticism as mere rhetoric. The UN, the Trussell Trust and the House of Commons select committee are all just using rhetoric, according to the Tories. That could be the only way that they feel that they can deal with this situation. The five Tory members who are here have barely lifted their eyes during the entire debate. I think that you are thoroughly ashamed of the situation, and if you are ashamed of it, you should be speaking up.

If you feel that it is a bad system, because people are committing suicide and there is real misery among children—some of you must feel that it is—I suggest that, instead of sitting there saying nothing, you go down to Westminster, grab your colleague Tracey Crouch and see whether you can borrow the Tory spine for a day. At least she had the spine to stand up for something that she knew was having an effect on poverty across the country. We should see some of that spine in the Tory group in the Scottish Parliament. You know that it is not working—you can see that for yourselves. You never said it before your chancellor agreed to it a couple of weeks ago, but you should say it now. It is not working. You should halt the roll-out and admit that you have the policy completely wrong.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind all members that they should always speak through the chair.

We move to the closing speeches. I ask members to be quite tight on timings.

16:10

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am pleased to close this illuminating debate for my party, because it offers me the opportunity to restate my party's support for the amendments in the name of Mark Griffin and Alison Johnstone, and for the motion.

The cabinet secretary set the tone and described the landscape in which the debate is being conducted when she evoked the image of a gentleman being forced to light and warm his home by candlelight. I am haunted by that. In particular, the five-week delay before any cash is forthcoming has led to such images and to the increasing demands on food banks that we have heard about. The structural flaws in universal

credit and its roll-out have created such situations. It is astonishing that we should be using bureaucratically words such as “starvation”—that is Dickensian.

I am most struck by how far away we are from introduction of the aspects of mitigation that the UK Government has hinted at. The cabinet secretary was right to point out that those measures will come in three years hence, because people are suffering right now. Put simply, if the Tories recognise that the system is already broken, they should either fix it now or stop the roll-out entirely.

Michelle Ballantyne started by suggesting that debates such as this are politically motivated, and Brian Whittle echoed that point. However, when her Government refuses to acknowledge complaint after complaint and calamity after calamity in the roll-out of the system, I am afraid that calling it out in a political arena such as this is all that we have left to us. She laid out the original drivers, and I agree with them now as I agreed with them in 2010, but they are no longer the drivers behind the system. There is no recognition of things such as in-work poverty, the delays that have been referred to or the iniquities of money being paid into one bank account in situations in which spousal abuse is a factor.

Bob Doris addressed empirically the way in which we have moved from a reform agenda to a cuts agenda. He referred to the £3.7 billion that is now gone from the system. That is exactly what my amendment speaks to, because it underscores the difference between the intention of the Government of which my party was a part and that of the Government that followed immediately after in 2015 and which has brought about that punishing cut to universal credit.

I commend Neil Findlay on the passion of his contribution. His reflection on our dereliction of duty as a corporate parent really spoke to me. I have long argued that case, since before I became a member of Parliament.

Mark Griffin offered a powerful speech, and his family example was compelling. He showed an understanding of the lived experience of the reforms and what they mean. Neil Findlay’s and Mark Griffin’s experiences of the system have clearly shaped a good part of their lives, and I am glad that they are channelling that to this day.

The debate is no longer about a system that is unravelling; it is about a system whose fundamental fabric is ruined and unmendable. George Adam picked up on that in addressing Michelle Ballantyne’s ill-chosen words about our needing to “test and learn”. I have two points to make about that. First, we are talking about human lives—they are not lab rats. Secondly, we

are trying to show that her Government still refuses to learn from cases in which the system has failed those tests and pushes back. She should reflect on that.

Alison Johnstone anchored her speech in the not-insubstantial cuts that the July 2015 budget brought about. Our amendment also speaks to that. I appreciate the fact that the Green amendment refers to the gendered nature of the impact of the reforms—a point that was eloquently picked up by Jackie Baillie and Clare Adamson. I reiterate that finance is still used as a tool of coercive control in abusive relationships. The system has to recognise that it exists to serve the most vulnerable people in our society. I can think of very few who are more vulnerable people than those who are abuse survivors, or are still stuck in abusive spousal relationships.

Again, Annie Wells took us back to basic principles. Once again, I say that we support those principles, but they are far adrift from where we are today.

One of my favourite speeches in the debate was from Alex Neil. I enjoy his contributions immensely. The international comparison that he made is very important. He reminded us that social mobility in Denmark and in some other European countries is not just about moving people out of the unemployment column; it is also about giving them a meaningful new start in life, and economic self-management and sustainability. It is important to hang on to that point when we consider the early foothills of our social security system in this country.

The system is clearly broken, as is evidenced in the early roll-out areas—Keith Brown’s constituency, among others—and we have to listen to the lived experience of those who have suffered because of it.

I am not a particularly religious person, but there is a passage in the scriptures that I have reflected on before when talking about the welfare state and social security. The book of Jeremiah says:

“‘For I know the plans I have for you’, declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you’”.

I repeat that I am not religious, but that really speaks to me in respect of the first principles—the important starting-point to which any social security system or any other public policy that we design in this place should cling. We are a country mile from that point now.

16:16

Alison Johnstone: I confirm that the Greens will support the Government motion at decision time, as well as the Lib Dem and Labour

amendments. We will not support the Conservative amendment.

The cabinet secretary focused on many of the flaws of universal credit, not least the five-week wait, and pointed out—rather alarmingly—that the DWP does not expect any significant improvement. That is rather horrifying. She also spoke of the uncertainty that self-employed people will experience under the policy—people whose earnings vary from month to month.

Among the most daunting things in the cabinet secretary's speech were her informing Parliament that 190 women have had to fill in a form to prove that conception of a child was not consensual, and that a CAB had filled in a form noting that one of its clients was suffering from

“starvation while waiting for universal credit”.

Michelle Ballantyne pointed out that no one is suggesting that universal credit is faultless and that, of course, universal credit has its problems. Really?

Alex Cole-Hamilton picked up on the fact that the Greens have focused on the gendered nature of the cuts, and pointed out that finance is used as a tool of coercive control. I cannot think of a better example of that than the two-child limit and the rape clause. I am not entirely surprised by Michelle Ballantyne's response on that. I notice that she is not responding now.

A few months ago, Esther McVey came to speak to the Social Security Committee and we had a chance to question her. I asked the secretary of state:

“As a minister, are you comfortable with the idea that a woman has to prove non-consensual conception to access an entitlement?”

In her response, Esther McVey said:

“There is potentially double support there—they will get the money that they need and perhaps an outlet that they might need.”—[*Official Report, Social Security Committee*, 16 April 2018; c 23.]

That is not the outlet that women who have been traumatised in such a shocking way need.

Mark Griffin's speech was very powerful. He pointed out that this Parliament has to step in. That is absolutely right—I agree. This is a devolved Parliament and we have a responsibility to ensure that the people who live in this country have every opportunity to succeed. Equality is key, but it is difficult to experience the opportunities that friends and neighbours have when one is suffering abject poverty. This Parliament should and must do all that it can. However, it is very frustrating—I speak as someone who joined the campaign for a devolved Parliament before I joined a political party—when this Parliament is constantly called

on to sort out the chaos that is inflicted on people in this country by another Parliament. [*Applause.*]

That said, I will continue to push strongly in asking the Government to adopt a universal child benefit top-up. At the very least, as Mark Griffin said, the income supplement should be fast-tracked.

Annie Wells spoke about devolved powers. I would like to know what she thinks is the point of this Parliament. I hear little vision coming from Conservative members; instead, I always hear a cry—Brian Whittle joined in—for the Scottish Parliament to mitigate Westminster's cuts. Surely, they should have more vision than that.

Brian Whittle: Alison Johnstone will find that I discussed the way in which universal credit is being rolled out and the framework. What should we have done? The Parliament was given £3 billion, and the first thing that it did was to give it back to Westminster. How can she complain when that is what happened?

Alison Johnstone: I am sure that Brian Whittle is well aware that what is being delivered to this Parliament and through universal credit is nothing but cuts—cuts to living standards, cuts to quality of life and cuts to the most vulnerable people in society.

Bob Doris and Neil Findlay spoke about sanctions. We need to remember that what is happening under universal credit is unprecedented. For example, we have never had in-work conditionality. Now, even when someone gets a job, they are still not trying hard enough. Do the Conservatives not realise that, if higher-paid work was available, it is highly likely that the people who are seeking work would be in those higher-paid jobs? Last week, the Public and Commercial Services Union spoke to the Social Security Committee about the impact of cuts in the number of jobcentres and in the number of staff who work in jobcentres. How can work coaches help people to find higher-paid jobs when they are struggling under ludicrous case loads?

Neil Findlay pointed out that no Conservative member has picked up on Michelle Ballantyne's speech from a week or two ago. That is because what she said is Conservative Party policy and Conservative members are quite comfortable with it.

I agree whole-heartedly with Alex Neil that we should not offer people the bare minimum on which to survive when they need support. We should ensure that they have support that enables them to contribute in a way that maintains their human dignity and helps them into well-paid jobs.

Jackie Baillie spoke about people budgeting for Christmas. On universal credit, that is a big ask.

As a Parliament, we have a role in ensuring that everyone can enjoy a decent quality of living. We will continue to campaign for increases to child benefit, and we will continue to condemn Westminster's cuts when that is the right thing to do.

16:22

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Universal credit is in crisis. What is more, Conservative members know that it is in crisis. Only a few weeks ago, Esther McVey contradicted the Downing Street line, when she, at least, admitted that there are losers under the universal credit system. I agree with Keith Brown on that point. During all the debates on the matter in which I have participated in Parliament, I have hardly heard a word of real criticism from Conservative members.

The seven or eight reforms that we have heard about indicate that the test-and-learn approach is utterly failing. As George Adam does, I find it quite insulting that Conservatives say that we should support a system that tests and learns. Who are the people about whom we are talking? The people whom the Conservatives are testing in order to learn from them are the people who need most support from the state. It is not acceptable to say that that is how we are going to adjust a deeply flawed system.

Heidi Allen, who is the MP for South Cambridgeshire, has been most outspoken on the matter, and says that even the injection of £1.7 billion is not enough. We need to be honest with ourselves: universal credit is not working. Michelle Ballantyne said that Conservative members made representations behind the scenes. I would like to hear about them.

Analysis from 38 Degrees found that 39 Tory MPs have seats in which the number of universal credit claimants outweighs their majorities, so there have been some accusations that political rhetoric is involved. I wonder who is playing politics.

Iain Duncan Smith was the architect of universal credit. At least he had some ambition. The system that the Tories are defending is nothing like the system that Iain Duncan Smith wanted—it is a million miles away from it.

Michelle Ballantyne said that the Tories did not just want to tinker with the previous welfare system. They certainly have not tinkered: they have removed billions of pounds from the welfare system. There are mounting rent arrears, use of food banks is up and the entire system for people who rely on tax credits and child tax credits has been completely overturned. As we heard from Alison Johnstone and others, the waiting times

that are built into the system are, on their own, inflicting deep poverty on thousands of people daily. The Tories certainly did not just “tinker” with the system, that is for sure.

The design flaws are hurting people. The facts speak for themselves. The Resolution Foundation has said that, on average, families will lose £1,200 a year by 2020.

I have said that the system has some good features—the online system is not all that bad, although it penalises many people who are not on the internet—but there is still a lot to fix.

It is extraordinary that anyone would build a system in which people will get transitional protection unless their family circumstances change. If someone's partner leaves them, they leave their partner, they stop work, or they join households with another person who has children—incidentally, I note that the two-child cap would apply to them—they will lose their transitional arrangements. What kind of system does that do to people? Everyone knows that people's lives and circumstances do not stay the same, but change. Why would anyone build that into a system?

I have heard that the inclusion of self-employed people in the universal credit system came about because the Conservatives had forgotten about self-employed people and put them in only when they remembered them. That is borne out because anyone who has been self-employed will know that it is not really viable for them to assess their daily needs on a monthly basis. That must fundamentally change.

Members talked about gender issues. What has shocked me most about universal credit is that it is well known that when single payments are made to a household, it is likely that the benefits will go to the male earner in the household. Thousands of women will suffer if that is not fundamentally altered.

In 2014, the director general of the universal credit programme, Neil Couling, said that many people were unaware that they would be changing from receiving from the HMRC to receiving from the DWP. I am talking about people who have worked for 20 or 30 years, but who have relied on the tax system for a little bit of help. Have the Tories forgotten about those people? They will all be affected by the change. It seems strange to take them out of HMRC and move them on to the DWP. I would bet any money that when the letters arrive it will—mark my words—be a shock to people who have never been unemployed and have only taken some credit from the state. Why would the Conservatives apply conditionality to people who have paid their taxes as working people? It is extraordinary.

I was very concerned to hear last week from the PCS evidence that management of universal credit and all the changes in relation to staff are as nothing compared to management of the work that the change will take from the HMRC. The affairs of thousands of people who are on tax credits will now be administered by the DWP, but no account has been taken of that.

Universal credit must be halted: too many changes to it are needed before it could work to tackle poverty in Scotland.

16:29

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): Universal credit is the biggest and most fundamental reform to the welfare state since its creation after the second world war. It is a modern benefit based on two sound principles: work should always pay, and those who need support should receive it.

The change is necessary because we simply cannot go on with the legacy benefits that universal credit replaces. They were a legacy of failure: they were complicated to use, completely outdated and unaffordable, and, most important of all, they did not work for the people who used and relied on them.

Alison Johnstone: Will Adam Tomkins give way?

Adam Tomkins: Not at the moment.

Under the last Labour Government, spending on welfare increased by almost 65 per cent and, at the same time, the number of households in which no one had ever worked almost doubled. That is a legacy of failure and why universal credit is a necessary reform. Labour Governments had the opportunity to reform welfare in the Blair/Brown years, but they did not take it. As Alex Cole-Hamilton said, it was right that the coalition Government grasped that nettle, took responsibility and governed, but that is not what we hear from those on the SNP front bench.

Universal credit is revolutionary. The old system was one size fits all—*[Interruption.]* It is a significant change; there is no argument from the Conservative benches about the magnitude of the change that universal credit seeks to achieve, nor the magnitude of the problem that was created under the last Labour Government, which needed to be addressed. We now have a system that is not one size fits all but which is tailored to each claimant's individual needs, abilities and skills and which recognises that every person is unique.

Keith Brown: Will the member give way?

Adam Tomkins: I will in a minute if I can.

Even before last month's autumn budget, universal credit has helped people to get into work

faster and stay in work longer than the old system did. Alongside that, figures released last week showed that the number of children who live in a household without working adults is the lowest ever. A working role model in a child's life is immeasurably important, and if that is one of the achievements of universal credit, we should welcome it.

Keith Brown: Adam Tomkins said that the policy is tailored to individual needs, but the report from the House of Commons select committee said that the human cost is simply too high and that the policy is "arbitrarily punitive". Does Adam Tomkins accept any criticism of the policy, or is it all dismissed as rhetoric?

Adam Tomkins: I do not dismiss all criticism of the policy as rhetoric—I hope that Mr Brown knows me better than that. I have been in and out of jobcentres all over the Glasgow region, which I seek to represent in Parliament, and I have heard work coaches, whose work is immeasurably to both the Government's credit and their own credit, enjoying the new and unique flexibility that universal credit has given them and which they did not have with the legacy benefits. I will be interested to know whether Mr Brown has heard the same in jobcentres in his constituency.

Of course, there have been significant issues with the roll-out—this is the biggest single change to the welfare state in 60 years. However, under successive secretaries of state—starting with Damian Green, then David Gauke and now Esther McVey—we have seen a DWP that is listening, learning and seeking to make the changes that we have called for and welcome. The seven-day waiting period has been removed; interest-free advances have been added to the system; and freephone telephone numbers have been introduced—Pauline McNeill called for those when I served alongside her on the Social Security Committee. In last month's budget, the chancellor also reintroduced £1.7 billion to universal credit.

Universal credit has always ensured that work pays, and now it pays even more. That has been welcomed by stakeholders and charities across the board, from the Resolution Foundation to the Trussell Trust, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and more. The Trussell Trust, which the cabinet secretary mentioned, said,

"By restoring work allowances and increasing support to those moving onto Universal Credit the Government has listened to evidence from the frontline and from foodbanks. These are significant improvements that will make a real difference to many people supported by Universal Credit in the future."

The key point is that those changes will "push the expected cost" and the expected

"generosity of Universal Credit higher than the system it replaces".

Those are not my words but the words of the IFS, and they are supported by the Resolution Foundation, which said last week:

“This will mean that the government’s flagship welfare reform is now more generous than the benefit system that it is replacing”—

not that we have heard any of that from members on the Opposition benches this afternoon.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Resolution Foundation also pointed out that the increase in work allowances—which is not coming back for everyone—and the decrease in income tax will not compensate the average household in the bottom 30 per cent of income distribution for the amount that they will lose because of the benefit freeze. What is being brought back—which is not a lot—will not cover what the UK Government has already taken away from the poor.

Adam Tomkins: The point is that, under the reforms, universal credit is now more generous than the system that it is replacing. It is not a scheme of cuts; it is a scheme of welfare reform.

We have heard nothing at all from those on the SNP front bench about what the Scottish Government wants to do with its powers. We have heard nothing about what it intends to do on employment services or discretionary housing payments, which have been fully devolved since 2017. We have heard nothing about how the Scottish Government proposes to use the power to top up reserved benefits or the power to create new benefits. Today’s debate was an opportunity for the SNP to lay out exactly how it sees devolved welfare powers working in Scotland, and we have heard nothing from those on the SNP front bench about that.

The Scottish Government still has no idea where hundreds of new social security staff will work, despite having advertised for some 400 workers. *[Interruption.]* It has been so slow to set out a timeline for the delivery of new benefits that the Office for Budget Responsibility has been unable to forecast the cost. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could we have a wee bit of hush and let Mr Tomkins finish? He is almost at the end of his speech.

Adam Tomkins: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is absolutely right to say that, for those who can, work represents the best route out of poverty. That is why it is critical that universal credit is designed to get people off welfare dependency and into the world of work. That is the argument that I was trying to have with Alex Neil. His view is that universal credit is not doing that, whereas my view is that it is doing exactly that. It is for that reason—and, if I am honest, for that reason alone—that I support it. I believe passionately that the Joseph Rowntree

Foundation is entirely correct in saying that, for those who can, work represents the best route out of poverty.

That is why universal credit is working. It is working because, under universal credit, people are more likely to be in work; under universal credit, claimants work more than they did under the legacy benefits; and, under universal credit, claimants earn more in wages for the work that they do. That is why I support universal credit and why I support Michelle Ballantyne’s amendment.

16:37

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): It has been a passionate debate, which has been informed by the many organisations and third sector groups that have contacted MSPs to describe the impact of welfare reforms and universal credit on people and communities. The cuts have not affected just anyone—they seem to have targeted the most vulnerable in our society, and as Alison Johnstone pointed out, they have had a pernicious impact on women.

The debate coincides with the visit to Scotland of the special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. It is a timely visit and a timely debate. We have all had the chance to talk about the impact on people of the cuts and to highlight the hurt that they are causing and the punishment that is being endured by families for daring to have more than two children. Despite the chancellor’s rhetoric and the claims that austerity is over, more and more children are being pushed into poverty.

Universal credit, which is the UK’s flagship welfare policy, is in crisis. Successive UK Governments have failed to develop and resource universal credit properly over the past eight years, and they have failed to learn crucial lessons about its disastrous impacts on households across the UK. As the UK budget made clear, the UK Government has failed, even now, to take the action that is needed to sort out the mess. That is why the roll-out of universal credit must be halted until it is made fit for purpose.

No Government should pursue policies that are so clearly causing harm, yet the prospect of ideological cuts seems too irresistible for a UK Government that is hell-bent on ignoring facts and figures on the devastation and hurt that the welfare cuts are causing. The truth is that people are hurting.

As we have heard, the Trussell Trust has told us that there has been a 15 per cent increase in the use of food banks in Scotland, which it has related directly to shortfalls in universal credit. George Adam talked about a constituent of his who was sanctioned while he was in hospital recovering

from a heart attack. Mark Griffin described how family circumstances can suddenly change, yet the welfare system is no longer designed to help provide the safety net that so many families up and down the country require. Maureen Watt spoke about her constituent who was caught by the two-child cap after fostering a member of their family after a bereavement and then having two children of their own. Those are horrifying examples of what is happening in the here and now as a result of Conservative action.

Michelle Ballantyne called those people “customers”. Therein lies the problem: the inhuman, transactional opinion that the Conservatives and the UK Government have about our welfare state. Maybe keeping it inhuman—keeping it separate somehow—helps them cope with the pain that is being felt by others. There certainly seems to be no care and no understanding.

Annie Wells suggested that somehow we in Scotland should ignore the root cause of the poverty that is caused by her Government’s social security cuts and not bother that the finger of blame points squarely at the UK Government and the disruption that it is creating. She suggested that, to right this wrong, the Scottish Government should absorb it by continuing to soften the Tory blows and by taking money from elsewhere in our budget to plug the gap. That is unsustainable.

It is estimated that annual social security spending in Scotland will be £3.7 billion lower in 2020-21 than it would have been without UK welfare reform. To put that into context, that is the equivalent of three times our annual police budget, or the entire annual budget of both NHS Glasgow and NHS Lothian together. That is one heck of a sticking plaster that Annie Wells and Brian Whittle expect this Government to find.

Let me be clear that, although the chaos of welfare cuts is the fault of the Conservatives, we will not sit blithely by. That is why we have taken significant action, with the powers and resources that we have. We have spent £125 million on welfare mitigation and on other measures this year to help protect those on low incomes, which is more than £20 million more than we spent last year. That includes fully mitigating the bedroom tax, helping people to keep their homes. It also includes our Scottish welfare fund, which has helped 306,000 individual households, a third of them with children, with awards totalling £173 million over the past five years. That money simply lets us stand still, mitigating the worst impacts of another Government’s policies, set by another set of politicians who are blind to their impact.

On universal credit specifically, we have given people in Scotland the choice of receiving their universal credit award either monthly or twice

monthly and of having the housing costs in their award paid direct to their landlord. We are also committed to delivering split payments in Scotland.

Free school meals are available to all children in primaries 1 to 3 and to children of families on low incomes. We know that many families struggle with the cost of feeding their children when that provision is not available during school holidays. That is why in the programme for government we announced that we were increasing our fair food fund to £3.5 million. Of that, £2 million will provide targeted support for children and families experiencing food insecurity during the school holidays. Last week, I launched the financial health check with Citizens Advice Scotland, which seeks to reduce household costs. That is just a flavour of the action that we are taking to help protect the people of Scotland.

In response to claims that we have not used the powers at our disposal, let me set the record straight. Guided by an approach that ensures a safe and secure transition, we are already delivering a better service in Scotland—a service that is designed with people.

Following the passage of the Scotland Act 2016, we started extensive consultation. In 2017, we started delivering Scottish choices for universal credit to give people flexibility over universal credit payments. In 2018, the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 was passed, and Social Security Scotland was established. The agency has started to deliver the carer’s allowance supplement, and it will deliver the best start grant before Christmas, despite the DWP not having changed its IT system to aid us in delivering that. We have also announced that the disability benefits assessment will be fairer. All that suggests to me that a lot of action is happening as a result of this Government’s priority for and commitment to help for those who are most vulnerable in our society.

The UK Government and the Tories talk about testing and learning. They should learn from this Government how to run a social security service that is based on dignity and respect.

There is, of course, more that we have to do. We need to make good on our child poverty targets, and we are working on the development of a new income supplement to lift children out of poverty.

Tonight, we will again vote to send a message to the UK Government. I have no doubt that everyone bar the Conservatives will unite to say to the UK Government that it should scrap its policy of a two-child limit and its morally bankrupt rape clause, halt the chaotic roll-out of universal credit, and—please—treat people as people, not as customers and certainly not as a target for its ideological drive to stigmatise those in poverty.

It does not have to be like this. We as a country have the potential to take a different path. We are showing a glimpse of what is possible through our new social security agency. Another Scotland is possible: one that is based on fairness, equality and protecting those who are most vulnerable. Unfortunately, that is not a message that we see the UK Government taking forward. It needs to heed the will of the Scottish Parliament, listen to what we tell it, stop its callous cuts to our social security system, and treat people with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

Urgent Question

16:46

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is an urgent question that I was able to select earlier. I am grateful to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work for returning from Dundee to answer the questions that members wish to put. As a consequence of the urgent question, decision time will be at 5.15.

Michelin Factory (Closure)

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what talks it has had with management at the Michelin Tyre plc factory in Dundee, the trade unions and Dundee City Council regarding the future of the plant.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work (Derek Mackay): As members might imagine, I have quite a detailed initial answer to that question.

As the Presiding Officer has just said, I have just returned to Parliament from Dundee, where I was joined by my colleague Shona Robison, who is the local MSP. I have had a range of meetings with representatives of the workforce, trade unions and Dundee City Council. The discussions had to be cut short so that I could return to update Parliament today rather than tomorrow, as had been proposed. However, I will continue to engage with all those whom I mentioned and with the United Kingdom Government, as we explore all options for the site.

Michelin's announcement that it intends to close its plant at Dundee is devastating not just for the people who work at the Michelin plant, but for their families, the whole city of Dundee and the wider area. The message from the Scottish Government is clear: Dundee is a hugely vibrant city and a great place for business to invest, grow and develop, and the Scottish Government will do all that we can to secure a future for the plant and the workforce.

Let me be clear: we will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to keep the plant operational. Our top priority is to pursue options for the site to continue with commercial production. Our thoughts are first and foremost with the 845 workers and their families who could be directly affected, if the plans go ahead, as they go through this period of huge uncertainty. We will work with the unions and the management to provide the best possible support to the workforce at this difficult time. I want to set out to members what action the Government has taken and will take.

The Scottish Government was informed at the end of last week that Michelin proposed to close the Dundee plant. On Thursday 1 November, I met the managing director of the plant, John Reid, and Alexander Law, the public affairs manager of Michelin Dundee. At that meeting, I sought engagement with senior Michelin management to test the status of the decision and to explore how open it would be to alternative proposals.

On Sunday 4 November, the chief executive and the strategy and sectors managing director of Scottish Enterprise and I met members of Michelin's group executive. They have agreed to consider a proposition that we will bring forward to secure a sustainable future for the plant. I confirm that I will convene an action group to explore all options to develop that proposition and to secure a future for the plant and its highly skilled workforce. I will chair an initial meeting of the group in Dundee next Monday, and the action plan will be taken forward by Steve Dunlop, who is the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise, with the leader of Dundee City Council, John Alexander. Having spoken to the council, the trade unions, local politicians and the UK Government, I am confident that there is a shared desire to work together to secure the best possible future for the site and its workforce.

We are aware that the task is not easy and that significant challenges are to be faced, but the Government is determined to do everything in our power to prevent closure of the plant.

Michelin in Dundee was established well over 40 years ago, in 1972, and has become a key part of the local community. The plant, which is a cutting-edge facility that uses the latest manufacturing techniques, has a highly innovative and talented leadership team and a highly skilled workforce. They have been working hard to deliver significant efficiencies and environmental improvements, and to extend the range of markets that they service.

I know that Michelin has not arrived at the decision lightly. Although the market is clearly difficult for the products that are made at the Dundee plant, I know that the workforce and the unions have gone to immense lengths to make the plant as competitive as possible in order to secure its future.

The influence of Dundee's excellence in engineering and manufacturing extends well beyond these shores. It is the complementarity and the spirit of collaboration between the private and public sectors that makes it unique. Based on Michelin's existing strengths and those of the broader manufacturing and engineering sectors, we will work in collaboration with all partners to retain the manufacturing facility in Dundee.

In recent years, Dundee has undergone a major transformation, and it is a great place to do business. The Scottish Government will work with everyone across Dundee in efforts to ensure that there continues to be a vibrant future for manufacturing there.

We have been working with partners to complete the arrangements for the £300 million Tay cities deal, and for an additional £50 million investment package. The Scottish Government stands ready to move forward with the Tay cities deal as soon as possible. We call on the United Kingdom Government to bring forward additional measures and investment in the light of Michelin's announcement.

Jenny Marra: I thank the cabinet secretary for his response and for all the work that he has done over the past week. I am sure that it is appreciated by workers and their families in Dundee.

The Labour Party is devastated for the workers and their families throughout the city, who tonight face grave uncertainty about the future of their jobs and their livelihoods. As the cabinet secretary said, Michelin has been in Dundee for 46 years. Its success is due entirely to the dedication of the loyal workforce and the constructive relationship that Unite the union has fostered with management. Consequently, there has been understandable upset at the mismanagement of the closure news which, I am sure, everyone regrets.

I pledge my support and that of my party for the action team that the cabinet secretary plans to set up. Does he agree that the £350 million that has been pledged for the Tay cities deal will now not touch the sides, especially as investments will go to other parts of the region? Can more money be found for Dundee? The Tay cities deal is long promised. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we have not moved fast enough on decommissioning jobs for Dundee, and that we cannot allow any further delay in investment? The Tay cities deal was due to be signed tomorrow. Will he commit to signing it before the end of the month?

Derek Mackay: I thank Jenny Marra for the tone of her questions and the offer of support from the Labour Party, which I take in the spirit in which it has been offered. A cross-party approach will be very welcome in Dundee. I stand shoulder to shoulder with the trade unions in doing everything that we can to support the workforce at this challenging time, and to find a solution to address the future of the plant.

We are offering immediate support to management to support the workforce. I agree entirely that the trade union has good relations with management; indeed, its working relationship

with the company has been held up as an exemplar. That good will is partly why Michelin is willing to listen to me on a proposition. How we have conducted ourselves over the past few days has been positive, too. We will use that good will to try to get the best for the plant.

On communications, I agree that what happened was an appalling way for the workforce to find out about the announcement. The matter could have been better handled. I simply say this: if it was a leak, it was not from the Scottish Government, and I do not believe that it was from Michelin either, which leaves one other substantial party to explain its behaviour.

It is important that we proceed with the Tay cities deal. We do not want economic and industrial benefits to slip away from us through others using the situation as an excuse not to sign up. We should proceed with the deal, but we must give all partners the opportunity to make additional resources available in the light of Michelin's announcement.

I call on the UK Government to step up to the plate, to allocate additional resources to the cities deal, and to look at the industrial strategy and sector deals in the light of other on-going negotiations in order to ensure that we can deliver for the region.

I have reached out to the UK Government—I had a call with Greg Clark, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, yesterday—and it has pledged to work with us. I will take that forward in the spirit of positive engagement. Next Monday, when the action group is in place, we will have a number of strands of work to take forward.

In relation to other industrial interventions, we will have opportunities to work on other areas, including decommissioning. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has issued a call for evidence on the prospects for decommissioning work. We will work on all that, but our primary objective right now is to protect the workforce and to save the plant.

Jenny Marra: I welcome and agree with the cabinet secretary's initial response—that the plan is to support the workforce and the plant. I also welcome his latter comments on options for the future, because we know from experience that the ambition that we have at the start sets the path for recovery and for what will come out of the process.

Whatever the outcome for the plant and the workers, I do not think that the cabinet secretary would deny that, today especially, we need a laser-like focus on industry in Dundee. The cabinet secretary knows as well as I do that the unemployment figures for the city do not reflect the real joblessness there. That laser-like focus is

absolutely necessary, given the news today, the challenges and the delay on decommissioning, and the unemployment figures in our city, which, in UK terms, are terrible and need to be addressed. Will he back an independently chaired task force on industry in Dundee?

Derek Mackay: I will be helpful to Jenny Marra. The trade unions have asked me not to set up a separate task force. They have welcomed the decision about the action group, and the language that has been used around that is significant. There is a distinction to be made. I hope to continue the partnership that we have established today with the trade unions, which are content to be involved with the action group that I am establishing. I do not want an independent piece of work. There are opportunities to look at the wider industrial strategy for Dundee, but the "laser-like focus" is now on the art of the possible for the 850 jobs there. We will be absolutely focused on that, and we will align our enterprise agencies and all parts of government to support that proposition.

For the avoidance of doubt, as a Government, we will consider all calls for additional resources in support of Dundee and the strategy for Michelin. I ask that the UK Government match that commitment and step up to the plate on the additional resources that might be required to assist Dundee at this time, thereby recognising that although Dundee is the epicentre, the issue goes wider than the city and extends to the whole of Scotland and the region.

We will calibrate all our efforts around industrial strategy, innovation, engineering, national manufacturing institutes and so on in order to give Dundee a fighting chance to save the plant. It is important that we showcase the positives of Dundee because that will keep Michelin interested in a future at the plant.

I assure Jenny Marra that I will do absolutely everything that I can—the Government, which is absolutely united on this, will do everything that we can—to focus on a solution that gives Dundee a fighting chance, while exploring the wider industrial and employment issues in relation to the city and the wider region.

The Presiding Officer: Five members have indicated that they wish to ask a question.

Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): The news has clearly been devastating for the workforce and the city in general, but does the cabinet secretary share my admiration for the workforce at Michelin, whose tenacity, flexibility and determination despite this challenge was so clearly demonstrated at the meetings that we held with them earlier today?

Further, does he agree that what matters now is a focus and action on Michelin? Can he tell me

when he next expects to meet the Michelin senior management team? What does he hope and expect to have received at that point from the action group that he has announced today, which has been very much welcomed by the workforce, to be able to put to Michelin at that meeting?

Finally, will he confirm again how important it is for all parties, including the UK Government, to come forward with packages of support for Michelin, whether that is through the Tay cities deal, the industrial strategy or any other route? What matters is specific packages of support for Michelin, the plant and the workforce.

I hope that he was left, as I am sure he was, with a clear impression from the workforce that it has been through ups and downs in the city over many years and that, despite the current challenge, their determination and effort is an example to us all. We should get behind them but also, importantly, follow their lead in what they are asking us to do.

Derek Mackay: Shona Robison is absolutely right. Even though the workforce and the shop stewards are absolutely devastated at the news, they have a resolve to take forward to management a proposition that will allow the plant to continue, and we will assist in every way that we can with our efforts on the economic interventions that we may be able to make, our partnership with the local authority on non-domestic rates and our partnership with the UK Government on the industrial strategy and the city deal. We can unite, and now is the time to unite and work in partnership with everyone who is interested in order to give the plant in Dundee a future.

For us, that is about retention first and foremost and repurposing, if that can be achieved in partnership with the staff, who are absolutely up for the task that is before us. That is why the constructive and positive debate and discourse during today is so helpful. I also note again that, in the spirit of partnership, Greg Clark, the UK Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, has made the offer that his officials and junior ministers will be supportive. I hope that that will allow a really constructive dialogue on the actions and interventions that will lead to meaningful input by way of the UK Government.

We are all up for this and we need to work together in partnership to put the best possible proposition to management. The timescale for that at the moment is that management will meet me in the next few weeks. Of course, I will have to respect the confidence of that meeting, but I think it is really significant that management is willing to hear from us and hear our proposition. What we need to do now is to unite to put the best possible

proposition to Michelin in the way that Shona Robison has articulated, and then take the matter forward in the best way that we can to retain as many of the jobs as we can in Dundee.

The Presiding Officer: There are six more members who wish to ask a question.

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): I echo the comments of Jenny Marra, Shona Robison and the cabinet secretary. Our thoughts are with the workforce, their families and their communities, and we will work with whoever is involved to try to find a solution.

I have a couple of questions for the cabinet secretary. First, given that the number of redundancies is potentially large, will he make sure that the Scottish Government agencies that will be involved have the resources that they need to do the work? Secondly, I note that the cabinet secretary spoke to Michelin management. Was that the group management that made the decision to close the factory and would have the authority to amend it? What did he say to them?

Derek Mackay: Bill Bowman asked me to press on all those who are involved to come forward and help. I gently remind the Conservatives that the UK Government is involved, and any pressure that Conservative members can apply to the UK Government will be welcome.

Do Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and partnership action for continuing employment have the necessary resources to help? Yes—they do. However, let me be clear that, before we even come to mitigation, we have a greater objective, which is retention and saving the plant.

I have instructed the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise to do everything possible and explore every avenue to give the plant a future. Scottish Enterprise can look at our strategies, including the economic action plan, the industrial strategy and the internationalisation strategy, and pull all that together with the business directorate. With everyone else, including the local authority, the local business community and the UK Government, we will pull together with the workforce to provide the resources to put the best possible case to Michelin, while recognising that the rationale for the decision includes issues such as Asian imports coming into the market and the cost of production. It will take a monumental effort to get the outcome that we want, but we will make that effort.

As for the group executives, I have met senior decision makers. The decision was taken well in advance of last Wednesday, when the Scottish Government first heard about it—as soon as we heard, we asked to meet the local management and then to meet the company executives. I fully

expect the people I meet in a few weeks' time to be the decision makers who have the authority to look again at the circumstances and see whether we can work together to pull something from the situation.

The most pressing point is that we will have a window of opportunity in which to act. I have resolved that the Scottish Government will be committed to doing everything that we can, and I need equal support from the UK Government, so that we can put the best possible offer to Michelin international.

The intelligence that has been passed to me is that the company has never before in such circumstances had such a positive and constructive engagement with a Government. That gives us a bit of good will and flexibility to get the best possible outcome for the workforce in Dundee, and I will not squander that opportunity.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The Parliament should be united in its concern for the workers who are directly affected and their families and in its support of the action group that the Scottish Government has established. However, we should also be mindful that, when particular sectors or large employers face changing circumstances that threaten their viability, a proactive approach is always preferable to a reactive setting-up of task forces and action groups, which we often hear about.

If additional funds are found for the Tay cities deal by one Government or preferably both Governments, what extra measures will be put in place to ensure that the outcome is the most sustainable possible economic activity? That would avoid what I hope we all want to avoid—the risk of being back here to bemoan something that was here today and gone tomorrow.

Derek Mackay: I am sure that Patrick Harvie is aware that we were investing in the plant, that Scottish Enterprise was engaged and that there had been leadership, environmental support and transformation of the plant—so much so that it was to be the first Michelin site to achieve carbon neutrality, which we all welcome. That is why there is some hope in the Dundee site's environmental credentials.

We had engaged on innovation and interventions to give the plant a future. We thought that the plant had a future, because the most recent briefings that we had suggested that that was the case with the necessary transformation in place. Where we can, we will continue to work on innovation to ensure that the plant has the best possible chance of success through technologies, design and research and development for the future, from which manufacturing benefits will come along.

We are of course looking at the Tay cities deal, but it is important to allow that to progress, because other economic interventions are contingent on it. We give the UK Government the opportunity to come to the table and provide at least match funding for the contribution that we have put on the table for the deal.

I spoke about the environmental credentials of the plant, which was heading for carbon neutrality. There is scope for further environmental enhancements. We have worked with the site and we will continue to be proactive as we take forward our ambition to save the plant.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): The Liberal Democrats support the cabinet secretary's efforts over the past few days to find a solution, which I am sure everybody who is involved will appreciate. Has any part of the private sector expressed interest in the Michelin plant? What can Skills Development Scotland do to assist with any retraining for the workforce that is required to meet the industry's challenges more effectively?

Derek Mackay: Again, I offer my appreciation for the support from the Liberal Democrats. That is important. With regard to some of those specific issues, there would be arrangements in place for mitigation, PACE and support for the staff. The company is committed to a retraining programme, but before we get to that, we must be laser-focused on trying to save the plant, save the jobs and see what can be done around that proposition, so that we do not have to look at other issues. I understand the reason for moving into that territory, and that will be done, but the mission for today, this week and the short term is to save the plant.

This is not about a skills shortage. This is about the Asian imports, supply, and the product at Dundee; therefore, we need solutions that are appropriate to the challenges that we face. Of course, if required, the Scottish Government will stand ready to support the staff in the next phase, but alongside everyone in Dundee, we are united right now in the mission to save the plant, or as much of the plant as we can possibly save. We will return to those matters as and when required.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the Scottish Government commit to publishing all information about any funding that Michelin has received from Scottish Enterprise or any other Scottish Government bodies?

Derek Mackay: I will publish any information that it is appropriate to publish. If this debate is going into the territory of the clawback of Government grants, that is a fair question to ask. Of course, the Scottish Enterprise grant clawback conditions will be fulfilled, but the objective is not

to scrape back a few million pounds from Government grants; it is to save 850 jobs. That is our priority and our mission. I will make sure that there is due diligence and compliance around any Government grants, but right now the mission surely has to be save the plant, save the jobs and give Michelin a future in Dundee. It is on that mission that I am 100 per cent focused.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I welcome the cabinet secretary's actions to save the factory and these workers' jobs. It is important that we all work together constructively. Has the cabinet secretary examined or will he examine ways in which, as part of a wider Scottish industrial strategy, Scottish Government public procurement can be utilised to generate work to sustain these present and future high-quality jobs in Dundee?

Derek Mackay: In essence, yes, I am actively looking at our whole procurement approach. I was looking at it before I knew of the announcement, so yes is the answer to Mr Leonard's question. I am not sure that, in isolation, procurement is the answer to the wider challenges that the plant faces. We will get on with everything that I have said today and anything else that we can do. I received a very helpful letter from Richard Leonard in relation to some of the other suggestions and I agree with much of it. Although I do not think that it is a panacea, the Scottish Government is, in any event, looking at procurement.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I associate myself with the concerns for the workers at the Michelin plant and their families that have been raised by other members. I also acknowledge the work of the cabinet secretary in the area. What assurances will the cabinet secretary seek from the management of Michelin to use their best endeavours to save the plant in Dundee and as many jobs as possible?

Derek Mackay: I will say something about the local plant manager, John Reid. From the strength of support that I witnessed today from his fellow workers and the trade union shop stewards, and the respect with which he is regarded by the management at Michelin, it is clear that he is something of a local legend who has saved the plant in the past. I will work closely with him and all other parties to try to save the plant. We are working as hard as we possibly can and it will require a partnership between the workforce, the management, the council, the enterprise agency and, hopefully, the UK Government to get the outcome that we all wish to see.

Ivory Bill

17:14

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of a legislative consent motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Ivory Bill, which was introduced in the House of Commons on 23 May 2018, relating to the prohibition and regulation (including enforcement) of the import and export of ivory into and from Scotland for sale or hire and acquisitions by and between accredited museums and galleries in Scotland, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Mairi Gougeon.*]

Committee Announcement

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):

Members may recall that the commission on parliamentary reform proposed that time be put aside during plenary meetings to allow committees to make significant or urgent announcements. We are trialling the new procedure up until Christmas and, in that context, I am pleased to call Johann Lamont, convener of the Public Petitions Committee, to make an announcement on an inquiry into mental health support for young people in Scotland.

17:14

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. On behalf of the Public Petitions Committee, I would like to draw the Parliament's attention to an inquiry that the committee will launch tomorrow into how young people access mental health support in Scotland. The inquiry stems from a petition raised by Annette McKenzie, whose daughter Britney tragically died after being prescribed medication when she sought help for her anxiety.

During the committee's consideration of the petition, a recurring theme that has emerged is that significant improvements are required to signpost young people to the appropriate sources of support, as well as the importance of intervening early to prevent mental health issues occurring or escalating. As members will be all too aware, we have repeatedly heard concerns raised in the chamber about how young people can get help for their mental health. Although it is encouraging that the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities have established a task force to examine the whole approach to children's mental health services, it is hoped that the inquiry will help inform the future policy direction of youth mental health services in Scotland.

The inquiry will focus on the ways in which young people can get the help and support that they need, particularly for the first time, if they are feeling low or anxious. The committee is keen to hear from a wide range of voices on the topic but particularly from people under the age of 18 with direct experience of seeking help for their mental health or young people who want to share their views with us on the topic. The committee is also keen to gather the views of parents and carers, non-specialist mental health workers and any other relevant professional organisations.

I encourage members to draw the inquiry to the attention of as many people and stakeholder groups as possible to help inform the committee's work on this important issue for our young people

in Scotland. I know that the committee clerks and committee members will be happy to provide more information on how members might be involved, should they wish to be so.

Decision Time

17:16

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There are potentially six questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, on the first question, if the amendment in the name of Michelle Ballantyne is agreed to, then all other amendments will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S5M-14621.1, in the name of Michelle Ballantyne, which seeks to amend motion S5M-14621, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the impact of United Kingdom Government welfare cuts and universal credit on poverty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (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)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-

shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 27, Against 85, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-14621.2, in the name of Mark Griffin, which seeks to amend motion S5M-14621, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the impact of UK Government welfare cuts and universal credit on poverty, 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)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (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 85, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-14621.3, in the name of Alison Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S5M-14621, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the impact of UK Government welfare cuts and universal credit on poverty, 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)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (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 84, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-14621.4, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S5M-14621, in the name of Shirley-Anne

Somerville, on the impact of UK Government welfare cuts and universal credit on poverty, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)

McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (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 84, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-14621, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the impact of UK Government welfare cuts and universal credit on poverty, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (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 85, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights to the UK and in particular to Scotland this week as part of his visit to investigate the link between poverty and the realisation of human rights in the UK; condemns the unacceptable damage that the UK Government's welfare reform policies are causing across Scotland, and the subsequent negative impact on poverty levels; agrees that Universal Credit is causing debt and hardship across Scotland's communities and calls on the UK Government to immediately halt the roll-out of this; further agrees that MPs must act to halt the Universal Credit managed migration; notes the contribution of Scottish Choices, the Scottish Welfare Fund and mitigation of the so-called bedroom tax to help counter the impact of welfare reform; believes that cross-party talks should now take place to consider the extent to which the income supplement can protect people from the Conservative administration's welfare reform, and how Scotland's new powers will be best used to support

carers, older people and disabled people; notes the conclusions of the Scottish Government's 2018 welfare reform report, which highlights that the UK Government's welfare cuts will lead to a £3.7 billion fall in social security spending in Scotland in 2020-21, including a £370 million reduction due to the benefit freeze; believes that these cuts are highly gendered, impacting the income of women disproportionately, and that, contrary to assurances given by the UK Government that Universal Credit would not cut incomes, some low-income families are expected to lose an average of £200 per month; further notes that the appalling two-child limit has already reduced the income of 3,800 families in Scotland and this number is set to grow year on year and will result in a £92 million cut for families by 2020-21; raises concerns that UK Government tax and welfare changes since 2010 are estimated to increase the number of children living in relative poverty in Scotland by 8%; believes that the UK Government failed in its autumn Budget to support the poorest in society by lifting the current benefit freeze and addressing the fundamental flaws in Universal Credit; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring that dignity, fairness and respect are at the heart of Scotland's new social security system, and regrets that the cuts made to Universal Credit by the UK Conservative administration in 2015 were not restored in its recent Budget.

The Presiding Officer: The final question, is that motion S5M-14625, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the Ivory Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Ivory Bill, which was introduced in the House of Commons on 23 May 2018, relating to the prohibition and regulation (including enforcement) of the import and export of ivory into and from Scotland for sale or hire and acquisitions by and between accredited museums and galleries in Scotland, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Maybole Bypass

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-14491, in the name of Emma Harper, on the Maybole bypass and South Scotland road infrastructure. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the upcoming announcement from the Scottish Government regarding which company has won the contract to carry out the five-mile stretch of off-line bypass and associated junctions for the South Scotland town of Maybole; understands that this decision will be based on one of four already shortlisted companies, Farrans Roadbridge, John Paul Construction, R J McLeod and Wills Bros; notes that this stretch of road will separate local road users from those travelling longer distances, including to the ports, which will therefore minimise disruption from heavy traffic in Maybole; considers that this stretch of bypass will significantly improve road safety and journey time reliability; congratulates the Scottish Government on achieving what it considers this landmark step for the infrastructure in South Scotland, while understanding that more investment on other roads in the region, such as the A75 and A77, is also needed in order to improve safety, journey times and to bring about business that will see a much needed boost to the rural and local economy of the south west of Scotland; acknowledges the work of the Maybole Bypass Committee members past and present, local residents and businesses who have tirelessly dedicated themselves to many years of campaigning to secure the bypass, and commends both the A75 and A77 action groups for their continued efforts to bring about positive change in the region.

17:23

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank everyone from across the chamber who has supported my motion on the Maybole bypass and the wider South Scotland road infrastructure. All that support from my colleagues has allowed us to have this important debate. It is crucial to the people whom we represent across the south-west of Scotland.

I welcome the support, collegiate working and input from Jeane Freeman, who is the constituency member of the Scottish Parliament for the area. She has helped to engage people and to raise awareness of the issue. I look forward to working with her in the future.

I pay tribute to the A75 and A77 action groups, who are watching from home. Because of the digital infrastructure that we are so keen on, many people have chosen not to travel from the region and instead are watching from home. I thank them for their work in lobbying me, other elected members and the Scottish Government for major investment in the transport and infrastructure issues that affect our main arterial routes in the south-west.

People in Maybole have been campaigning for a bypass for 70 years, which seems like a long time. Members of the Maybole bypass committee—including Peter Mason, David Kiltie and former MSP Adam Ingram, to name but a few—helped me by providing additional information ahead of the debate. I spoke directly with Peter and Adam and they explained that it was agreed by many people years ago, before the Parliament was even created, that a bypass was essential in order for Maybole to be a viable modern town. The committee should be commended for having the foresight to secure future funding to support the historic attributes of the town centre.

In 1998, 22 years ago—again, before the creation of the Scottish Parliament—Maybole community council set up a sub-committee to campaign formally for a bypass. Peter Mason has chaired the group ever since, for which I thank him. The sub-committee, which is made up of hard-working and dedicated local people with cross-party associations, has met every single transport cabinet secretary and minister since the Parliament's creation 20 years ago. The committee's only interest is growth and prosperity for the people of Maybole and the surrounding area.

Speaking with people from Maybole has made me realise how important it is for the town to have a bypass. It would be 5km long, and would cost an estimated £30 million. In addition to some of the more obvious reasons in favour of a bypass, overall roads improvement would contribute to attracting the people whom we need to live and work in rural south-west Scotland, including general practitioners, teachers, healthcare workers and other skilled professionals. Maybole and the connecting A77 area boast much of the south of Scotland's history, historic buildings and heritage, and the town hall and the castle have serious cracks that are believed to be due to heavy traffic trundling its way through the town centre.

Although I am encouraged that the Scottish National Party Scottish Government has committed to construction of the Maybole bypass, I urge the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government to make the contractor announcement as soon as possible. The announcement will allow shovels and diggers to be put in the ground, and will show the people of the south-west that they are not forgotten, and that the SNP Government is standing up and delivering for them.

As well as the need for the Maybole bypass, there is a wider need for upgrades to infrastructure around South Scotland, particularly on the A75, A76 and A77. Those main, and critical, arterial routes connect the south-west to wider Scotland and to international markets via the port of

Cairnryan. Businesses, local people and our emergency services rely on the roads for their operations. The roads are essential in bringing people, tourists and investment to the region. I am reminded of the comment, which I have heard since I was a wee girl, that is aimed at tourists coming from the south and heading north, that they should not forget to turn left at Gretna.

The roads are not fit for current travel and haulage purposes, which is causing much upset, dismay and frustration for local people. In August, I hosted a meeting in Stranraer with representatives from the A75 and A77 action groups, which was attended by representatives of Stena Line and P & O Ferries as well as MSPs, including the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity. That was an opportunity to listen to local voices. It was concerning to hear Stena and P & O, as well as local people, say that they felt forgotten by the Scottish Government because of the lack of a clear commitment to investment in those routes.

Rather more worrying is that anecdotal evidence suggests that some hauliers are avoiding the A75 and are using alternative routes to access Ireland by travelling to Holyhead. They blame the poor infrastructure and the 40mph speed limit for that. We cannot let that happen, so I ask the Scottish Government to investigate and discuss that with the companies.

I welcome the positive steps that the Government has taken so far on improvements to the A75 and A77, and the work to create the Maybole bypass. I encourage people to provide input to the south-west Scotland strategic roads review. Indeed, when elected members met Humza Yousaf at a meeting that was organised by Jeane Freeman MSP, he encouraged them to continue to feed in on-going road improvement suggestions ahead of the launch of the review.

I stress to the cabinet secretary how important it is for the Scottish National Party Government to ensure that the people in the south-west are listened to, are connected to wider Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom and—most important—feel that they are not forgotten.

Additionally, I call on the Scottish Government to provide feedback on when the construction company will be announced so that we can witness construction of the Maybole bypass.

I conclude with a comment that was made to me by the chairman of the Stranraer Development Trust, Romano Petrucci, which is relevant to the wider south-west communities, with regard to our conversation about the roads. He said:

"We are Scotland. Help make us part of Scotland. Connect us to Scotland".

That is my message to the cabinet secretary today.

17:30

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the chamber. It comes on the back of a similar motion of mine, so we need have only one debate on the matter.

Ever since I came to Parliament the issue has, to be honest, been on my agenda. One of the first meetings that I attended as an MSP was a meeting in Dumfries with the then Minister for Transport and the Islands, Humza Yousaf, and the Deputy First Minister. The room was full of local councillors, MSPs, hauliers, and shipping agents. At that point, I think that both the cabinet secretary and the Deputy First Minister said that they were there to listen.

Roll on another year and pressure from the A75 and A77 action groups meant that there was another meeting in Parliament with Humza Yousaf, who once again said that he was there to listen. More recently, this year we had a new cabinet secretary, Michael Matheson—as Emma Harper has already said—coming to a meeting and saying that he was there to listen.

That is the reality of the situation. If we go all the way back to 2010, the then First Minister, Alex Salmond—in welcoming a £200 million investment by Stena and a £90 million investment by P & O—made a commitment to upgrade the A75 and the A77. In 2011, Alex Neil, who was then the relevant minister, stated that it was a travesty that the previous Labour Government had not invested in the A77.

In 2016, Jeane Freeman's campaign leaflet said that she was working to make sure that we would see the Maybole bypass being started, as promised, in 2017. In 2017, the very same member's campaign leaflet said that she had secured confirmation from the Scottish Government that work would start in the summer of 2018 on the Maybole bypass. In summer 2018, a newsletter dedicated half a page to saying that the SNP Government had made Maybole safer. Interestingly, it went to some lengths to avoid committing to a specific date.

It now looks as though Maybole will get the bypass that it has campaigned so long for, but I do not think that it will get the kind of bypass that it so richly deserves. It does not speak to that bigger picture of what is required for the transport infrastructure of the south-west.

Maybole has a 20mph speed limit to protect the buildings and the safety of the people. That is on a trunk road. I have on my office wall a map that

shows all the trunk roads in Scotland, and where the 20mph, 30mph and 40 mph limits are on the system. The A75 and the A77 are littered with 20mph and 30mph limits. From Ayr, people can get all the way to Aberdeen or they can go all the way to Berwick. If people get on the A75, once they get to the M74, they can go all the way to Barcelona without coming into contact with another 30mph limit.

The south-west is cited as the forgotten corner of Scotland. I would go further; the reality is that it is being ignored. I had the great pleasure, with the Health and Sport Committee, of driving up the A9—

Emma Harper: Does Brian Whittle agree that the debate will raise awareness of the south-west of Scotland, so that we can change the rhetoric about being forgotten and ensure that the Government pays attention?

Brian Whittle: My colleague Finlay Carson and I have been part of the campaign since we were elected to Parliament. I say gently to Emma Harper that, quite frankly, she is a bit late to the party. We have been talking about the issue for a long time. It is only through campaigns, such as those by the A77 and A75 action groups, that momentum has gathered and she has started to pay attention. I am sorry if that upsets Emma Harper, but that is the reality.

Emma Harper: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his final minute.

Brian Whittle: It is a real pleasure to drive up the A9, which is a fantastic road, but it will be dualled—people are talking about electrifying it—before any real work is done on the A75, the A76, the A77 and the A70.

It is time that the south-west got the investment that it so richly deserves. Those roads are there for not just the economy of the south-west but the economy of Scotland. Cairnryan is the biggest port in Scotland and, the last time I spoke to Stena Line, it suggested that we are losing 6 per cent of business to the Dublin to Holyhead route. Not having that investment will affect the economy of the whole of Scotland.

17:36

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Emma Harper for lodging her motion.

The cabinet secretary might recall that, when he met South Scotland MSPs and members of the A77 and A75 action groups in Stranraer in September, John Campbell from the A77 action group laid a pile of envelopes on the table. Inside

them were numerous improvement plans for the road that went back for decades, none of which has happened. John even told us that the route for the Maybole bypass was pegged out in 1936, but it has never been built. I suspect that the people of Maybole will believe that a bypass is going ahead when they see workers physically on the ground with shovels, digging the road.

At a time when the Government is pledging £3 billion to dual the A9 from Perth to Inverness, the fact that we are celebrating that just 1 per cent of that investment is planned for trunk road upgrade projects in the whole of south-west Scotland highlights that we are a forgotten region when it comes to investment in transport.

As Brian Whittle said, people can drive south from Golspie in the Highlands to Ayrshire for more than 250 miles without needing to go through a stretch of road where the speed limit is below 60 miles per hour. However, as soon as they hit the village of Minishant on the A77, they need to go through not one, not two but eight towns and villages with speed limits as low as 20 miles per hour on the 40-mile stretch to the ferry terminals at Cairnryan.

Frankly, the A75 is not much better. It is the main trunk road that connects the north of England with Cairnryan and the ferry crossing to Northern Ireland. However, the villages of Crocketford and Springholm remain without bypasses, and most of the rest of the road is single carriageway, with limited safe overtaking opportunities.

Connectivity with the ferry ports is key. That is why the roads are of strategic importance not just to south-west Scotland but to all of Scotland, the north of England and Northern Ireland. Fundamentally, the issue is not about roads; it is about the economy. The A75 and A77 carry billions of pounds of products and services to and from Northern Ireland every year. They also serve communities the length and breadth of south-west Scotland—communities whose economic challenges are well documented.

Pay in Dumfries and Galloway is the lowest in the whole of the United Kingdom. We have a rising unemployment level at a time when the national level is falling. That is before we factor in the chronic problem of the outward migration of young people from the region because of a lack of local high-skilled and high-paid employment opportunities. There is no doubt that the lack of investment in our infrastructure—physical and digital—is a major barrier to growth for existing firms and to our ability to attract new businesses to south-west Scotland. We need to break down those barriers.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Could Colin Smyth tell us why only £1.9

million was invested in the A77 when his party was in power from 1999 to 2007? Since the SNP took power in 2007, we have invested £35 million in the A77. Can he explain that?

Colin Smyth: There has been significant investment, going back many years, from Glasgow right down to Kilmarnock, where Willie Coffey lives. There has been no investment in Dumfries and Galloway—not a single project from the SNP Government to upgrade major roads in the area. That is shameful. The Government should take no credit.

The fact that the Government is proposing to invest £3 billion in the A9 is fantastic news for people in the north of Scotland, but why is there not more investment in the south of Scotland? We need to break down the barriers for the A75 and A77.

Of course, there may be other roads in other parts of Scotland with vehicle numbers that are higher overall and which are crying out for investment. However, on the A75 and A77 there are significant traffic volumes that tie in with ferry times—much of it heavy goods vehicles travelling at 40mph. That leads to pinch points where journey times are just not good enough for such a strategically important route.

The A75 and A77 are not economic pipelines for the south-west of Scotland. They are currently a stranglehold on economic growth.

In 2011, the then First Minister, Alex Salmond, opened the new Stena ferry terminal at Cairnryan. In his speech he made several grand promises. He made a commitment to the three Rs: regeneration, roads and rail. The delivery of all three for the people of south-west Scotland has been three Fs: fail, fail and fail.

In the brief time that we have, it is not possible to do justice to the undeniable economic case for investment in the A75 and A77 or to the sheer anger and frustration within south-west Scotland at the neglect that we feel when it comes to the lack of investment of the past. There is a reason why we now have such active and passionate A75 and A77 action groups, which are doing a great job of raising the profile of the plight of our region's trunk roads.

It is time for the Scottish Government to listen to those groups. It is time for a long-term commitment from the Scottish Government to dual the A75 and A77. In the short term, it is time for clear plans for major upgrades and more passing places that will begin the journey towards that goal. In calling for that, the people of south-west Scotland are asking not for favours but for fairness.

17:41

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Emma Harper on raising this important issue in Parliament. I welcome the considerable £30 million investment in the Maybole bypass.

I asked about that investment in June 2018; I was pleased that, in response to my parliamentary question, the cabinet secretary confirmed that the construction would provide opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises to bid for subcontractor roles and that there would also be site-based training opportunities. I understand that peak employment during construction will amount to jobs for 165 people. That is really good news.

As Emma Harper said, that is a tremendous testament to the tenacious campaigning by local people and to a Government that listens. I notice that the website of the Maybole bypass action group shows that—as other members have noted—campaigners have been writing to transport ministers for years. It was a trip down memory lane to read the names of previous transport ministers: Sarah Boyack, Tavish Scott and Nicol Stephen. Those ministers did not deliver, but the SNP Government is delivering.

As other members have said, the campaign goes back 70 years, through many years of Tory neglect of Scotland's infrastructure when the Tories were in charge before the Scottish Parliament was set up.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Joan McAlpine: No, I want to make progress.

The Labour and Liberal Democrat ministers I mentioned were in office before austerity. Since the financial crash of 2008, a great deal less money has been available, but the Scottish Government is delivering. That is all the more remarkable when we think that in the 10 years that the Tories have been in power at Westminster, our budget has fallen by £2 billion in real terms—yet we are still delivering.

The motion goes on to talk about other roads in the south of Scotland and a similar theme emerges: other parties carp and carp, but the SNP delivers. Brian Whittle mentioned a meeting that he attended in Dumfries in 2016, which was his first experience of talking about roads in the south of Scotland. I was the one who called for that transport summit in 2016, which was delivered in the August. It is Brian Whittle who is a little late to the party.

In a members' business debate in 2012, I pointed out that the six improvement projects identified as priorities for the A75 in the 2008 local transport plan had all been delivered by the

SNP—that was just before the major upgrade of the A75 from Hardgrove to Kinmount was announced.

I contrast the delivery of those six projects by the SNP Government—as I did in 2012—with the previous Labour Government's record between 1997 and 2007 of only one major project completed on the A75. Further, in the five years to 2012, the SNP Government devoted £36.7 million to special projects on the A75; in 10 years, Labour spent £5.9 million. However, that does not mean that I do not think that there is more to do for the A75.

Colin Smyth: The Government is committed to spending £3 billion on the A9—which is good news for the people of the north of Scotland—whereas there are no proposals other than the Maybole bypass for the whole of south-west Scotland. Does Joan McAlpine think that that means that we are getting a fair share of Government investment at the moment?

Joan McAlpine: I was going to go on to say that I have spoken about the 2008 local transport plan, which had six project priorities for the A75 that were all delivered. I was really surprised in 2016 to see that that plan had not been updated. Colin Smyth was head of economy in Dumfries and Galloway Council at the time [*Interruption.*] If he was so keen for the Scottish Government to improve the A75, why did he not get the finger out and tell the Government what he wanted it to do? That is why I called the transport summit—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, no, no, no. Please sit down a moment. I want to hear the member. I also say that microphones do not come on when people are heckling. Please continue, Ms McAlpine.

Joan McAlpine: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

As I said when I called the transport summit, a constructive way forward was to get a focus, so that we could update the local transport plan, which has still not been updated, and let the Government know the priorities. That is what we did. Members need to focus on making sure that the Government's national transport priorities, which are outlined in the strategic transport review, contain ideas for upgrading roads in the south-west. I am interested in the A75 in particular.

As a result, the Government has launched a study. It has commissioned the south-west Scotland transport study, which focuses on how to connect D and G and South Ayrshire to key markets. The consultancy AECOM is consulting people in important stakeholder groups across south Scotland. It is important that we all make constructive proposals, which is why I have

worked with the dual the A75 group, getting it a meeting to brief the previous minister on the challenges for that road. Other people have talked about the A9; it is important to learn from the A9 campaigners and feed into reviews. When we do that, I am confident that this Government will deliver, because it has a record of delivering that the Tories and Labour do not.

17:48

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I congratulate Emma Harper on lodging her motion for debate, and I note that she is part of the current generation of politicians who are calling for a Maybole bypass. I declare an interest as a resident of Carrick, which has been disadvantaged by the lack of a Maybole bypass for many years. Brian Whittle has also recently nailed his colours to the mast of the campaign for the bypass, as has Jeane Freeman. Before her were Adam Ingram, Phil Gallie, Cathy Jamieson, George Foulkes, George Younger and Colonel Sir Thomas Moore—and they are just the ones whom I have known.

The motion tells us that the bypass is about to be delivered, but I want members to note that it has been a long time coming. Indeed, my father told me before he died that the first campaign for a Maybole bypass took place between world war one and world war two, which tells Parliament just how long it has been an issue for the people of Carrick, as has been confirmed today by Colin Smyth.

That a bypass would be a boon for the townspeople of Maybole is beyond doubt; they have been blighted by the volume of traffic that has polluted the High Street for generations. That a bypass would benefit significantly the people who live south of Maybole in Girvan, Ballantrae, Barrhill, Newton Stewart and Stranraer is beyond question. International businesses such as William Grant & Sons, which is based in Girvan and has 60 lorries a day on the road, and all other businesses there, as well as the Ireland ferry traffic, will welcome the bypass. I hope that it will finally be built by the Scottish Government after so many false dawns. The local view is that people will believe it when they see it.

Willie Coffey: Can John Scott confirm that he and his party voted against the budget that allocated funding for the Maybole bypass?

John Scott: I cannot confirm one way or the other because, to be frank, I cannot remember.

Today's debate encompasses the A77 and the A75, and I want to speak about the need to improve the A77 at the Bankfield roundabout in Ayr, which is known locally as the hospital roundabout, where congestion at peak times usually makes it on to Radio Scotland's road traffic

reports. Southbound traffic on the A77 is often queued back to the Holmston roundabout, which is almost a mile to the north of the Bankfield roundabout, between 7.45 and 9 o'clock in the morning, as patients and staff make their way to Ayr hospital. Similarly, in the evening, traffic can be queued from Ayr hospital to the Bankfield roundabout, with patients and staff overloading the A713 at that time.

It is not just me who says that the part of the A77 from the Whitletts roundabout to the Bankfield roundabout needs to be made into dual carriageway; the cabinet secretary will know that the case for that was made 10 years ago. Jacobs Consultancy produced a report for South Ayrshire Council that demonstrated the need for that section to be dualled. That need was appraised under the Scottish transport appraisal guidance by Transport Scotland, and it is still detailed on Transport Scotland's website under the strategic transport projects review objective 2 in table D24.1.1.

In the past 10 years, absolutely nothing has been done about the need to upgrade the A77 from single to dual carriageway around Ayr, between the Whitletts roundabout and the Bankfield roundabout, and I can tell members from personal knowledge that the congestion that resulted in the STAG appraisal that required action to relieve congestion and address road safety concerns has only got worse. It is time for another appraisal of that most congested part of the A77 to be carried out, and for a delivery plan to be put in place to address seriously the needs of neglected A77 road users and, in particular, those who use that section of the road, which adjoins my constituency.

17:52

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Although I welcome Emma Harper's bringing this evening's debate to the chamber, I find it a bit strange that we are being invited to welcome something that has not yet happened, that is years late and that will not deliver the bypass that the people of Ayrshire and of Dumfries and Galloway want—a bypass that is fit for the future, by which I mean a dual carriageway with associated cycle and walking paths. The debate marks a landmark—a landmark in mediocrity, which is a further indication that the Scottish Government has not taken the south-west of Scotland seriously.

My contribution to the debate is about the need for further investment in the road and rail infrastructure in our forgotten part of Scotland. It is incredible that Emma Harper and Joan McAlpine can defend the SNP Government's lack of

investment in infrastructure in Dumfries and Galloway.

Emma Harper: Will the member take an intervention?

Finlay Carson: I would like to make some progress.

I will start with the topic that is at the top of the agenda in my constituency at the moment—the Stranraer to Ayr railway line. The line was closed to all trains until last weekend because of the dangerous state of Ayr Station hotel. I record my thanks to Alex Hynes and his ScotRail Alliance team for getting services up and running again. However, we need a cast-iron assurance from the cabinet secretary that the task force will continue to meet regularly until the situation is fully resolved. I ask him to give a commitment that trains will continue to run without further line closures. We demand that if platform 4 has to be closed again, as might well have to happen to allow work on the hotel to be done, the train service be run from a temporary platform south of Ayr station. My constituents will accept nothing less.

I turn to the roads.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was reading the motion and wondering when we would come on to the roads. Here we go.

Finlay Carson: The motion is about infrastructure investment, Presiding Officer.

I live only a few hundred yards from the A75, and have done so for almost 45 years of my life. I have lost count of the number of fatalities that I have heard about along its 95 miles, which have impacted on the families and communities that those people came from. My sad claim to fame is that my great auntie, as a child, was the first recorded fatality on that road, and was among the first fatalities from road traffic accidents in Scotland, after having been hit by a car only five yards from where my father still lives.

The A75 is a Euro route—it is part of the E18—and has huge importance for Dumfries and Galloway and the whole of Europe, because it is the route to the Cairnryan ferry port and one of the shortest sea crossings to Ireland. However, it is the only stretch of that Euro route that is not dual carriageway. The UK Government has dualled the roads from Heysham and Holyhead, but many parts of what should be the fastest route to Ireland, particularly at the western end, have not changed much in decades, as the Deputy Presiding Officer will appreciate. That has earned it the name “the longest goat track in Europe”. Only two settlements on the whole E18 are now not bypassed by it—Springholm and Crockettford. The campaign group fights daily to get a bypass,

which would dramatically improve the villagers’ quality of life.

We all know that the route is classed as one of the most dangerous in the UK, with a tragic list of fatalities over the years. Fatalities may have reduced, but the statistics do not record the near misses or the number of drivers who are frightened every time they take to the route. Hundreds of HGVs travel its length daily, but many places on the road are not fit to take them.

I would not say that I am a nervous driver, but only last night an HGV, whose licence plate number I have, tailgated me for six miles at 60mph, and swerved on to the wrong side of the road in an attempt to pass me. That is not unusual. Last week, a video was recorded of three lorries travelling up the Gatehouse bypass side by side. That was a gut-churning film that showed the reality of day-to-day driving on that road.

Hugh Gaffney and other residents of Haugh of Urr have campaigned for years for improvements to the junction to their village. They take their lives in their hands every time they turn across the carriageway to get home. There have been many near misses, but their pleas have fallen on deaf ears because there have not been enough fatalities to warrant improvements. That is simply not acceptable. Currently, the roadside maintenance, including maintenance of road signs, hedges and trees, is not being carried out to the proper level, which makes the road even more dangerous.

Community surveys often ask whether people feel safe in their communities. Perhaps we should ask members of the public who have to use the A75 whether they feel safe using it. I can tell the minister right now that the answer would be an overwhelming no.

I urge constituents to respond to the south-west Scotland transport study before the deadline of 16 November, and I urge the cabinet secretary to act on it as a matter of urgency. We have waited long enough for the Government to deliver for the south-west, and the formation of groups such as the dual the A75 group, the A77 action group and the Springholm road safety group sends a clear message that the people of south-west Scotland have waited long enough. We need action now, before we see the ferries leaving Cairnryan, companies leaving Galloway and more deaths on our appalling roads.

17:58

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Like other members, I congratulate Emma Harper on securing time for this debate on an issue that I know is very important to her and

her constituents. I welcome the fact that some of our constituents are able to watch the debate online, no doubt as a result of the Scottish Government's investment in the digital infrastructure in Scotland because of the UK Government's failure to make the necessary important infrastructure investments in the Scottish economy.

Brian Whittle: No wonder the cabinet secretary is smiling.

Michael Matheson: A lot of people regularly laugh at the UK Government, Mr Whittle.

The debate has reflected a number of issues that were highlighted to me during my visit to Stranraer in August this year. A number of elected members participated in the meeting alongside the A75 and A77 action groups. I reassure all members and members of those action groups that the Scottish Government recognises the important role that transport plays in the lives of those who live and work in the south of Scotland. That is why we are taking steps to address some of those matters.

Members have already highlighted the fact that there have been calls for a Maybole bypass. John Scott reflected on his father's stories about the requirement for a bypass many years ago. We heard from Colin Smyth that it was apparently pegged out back in the 1930s. As Emma Harper said, there have been calls for it for some 70 years.

The good news is that this Government will deliver a Maybole bypass. The procurement process is under way. It is going well and should be completed by December. I note Ms Harper's interest in knowing who the contractor will be. Once the process has been completed, we will be able to announce which contractor will carry out this important piece of work.

The bypass project is important because it will help to separate traffic that is going into Maybole town and the traffic that is going further afield, including those who are travelling on to the ports and along the A77.

I have no doubt that the £38 million investment in the bypass will significantly benefit those who reside in the surrounding area and those who live in the town itself. Indeed, the bypass is predicted to reduce the traffic on the High Street by about 50 per cent and the number of heavy goods vehicles going through the town by 90 per cent.

I, too, recognise those who have pursued a bypass for Maybole over many years and how they have conducted themselves when engaging in the exercise. I pay tribute to and congratulate them on how they have pursued the issue, particularly the Maybole bypass committee for its

important contribution to securing the investment to deliver the bypass, which will benefit future generations. I offer my thanks to it for its contribution.

Members have raised issues about the wider transport infrastructure in the south-west of Scotland, particularly in relation to the A75 and the A77. I recognise that those roads are extremely important in providing key links to the ports at Cairnryan for daily commuters, businesses, freight, leisure journeys and those who are travelling to the Isle of Arran.

Members will appreciate that, in taking forward plans for significant investment in our trunk road network, a process must be gone through in order to identify the best option for pursuing any such investment. A key part of that is to make sure that the investment will deliver the outcomes that we are looking for. That process is under way. We have started to draft the new national transport strategy, which will set out our vision and the outcomes that we want to achieve with our strategic investment into Scotland's transport infrastructure, including for the south-west, on the Government's key themes of the economy, equality, the climate and health.

As we complete that process, the next step will be to finalise the second strategic transport projects review, which will set out where we will make our strategic investments over the next 20 years. That will include the transport network in the south-west. That process has started—it began with the south-west Scotland transport study survey. It is clear from the feedback that officials and I have had from meetings that there is a real interest in participating in the process. For example, at one stakeholder meeting, out of the 80 individuals who were invited, 60 attended the workshop in order to input into the process. The online survey, which is part of the study, was launched on 19 September; so far, 2,500 people have contributed to it.

The study is in partnership with Dumfries and Galloway Council, East Ayrshire Council, South Ayrshire Council, the Ayrshire roads alliance, the Strathclyde partnership for transport and the local regional transport partnership. All those groups are on the project group that is driving the work forward.

The study will allow us to look specifically at the issues that have been highlighted by those who have contributed to the survey, which have included improved community bus services, improvements to the A75 and A77, the impact that freight traffic is having on the road network and the resilience of that network when incidents occur. The study will now be able to give consideration to those important issues.

Brian Whittle: For people who are watching the debate, can the cabinet secretary give us a timescale for when the study will be finished, when it will feed into the overall strategy and when, potentially, there will be shovels in the ground?

Michael Matheson: The study should be completed by the end of the year. It will then feed into the strategic transport projects review that will commence next year and continue into 2020. That will set out the national picture of the strategic transport investments that we will make in the years ahead.

The process is ahead of a number of other areas in Scotland, in which that type of study has not been undertaken to date, so progress is already being made on the matter. I have absolutely no doubt that it will flag up a number of actions that need to be taken within the south-west of Scotland.

I am conscious of the time, Presiding Officer, but I hope that I have given an assurance that the Government is listening carefully to the views of those within the south-west of Scotland as to what the priorities should be. The study that we commissioned over the course of the past few months will capture those views and voices, to ensure that we make the right decisions about transport investment in the south-west of Scotland.

I am pleased to confirm that, despite many decades—in fact, generations—during which people have waited for a bypass to be delivered for Maybole, this Government will deliver it and we will set that out in the weeks ahead.

Meeting closed at 18:07.

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