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Thursday 7 March 2019

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 7 March 2019

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

General Question Time

NHS Boards (Budgets)

1. Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Government under what circumstances a national health service board would limit the amount of necessary operations that a patient requires due to budgetary concerns. (S5O-02963)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): No clinically necessary operation should be curtailed because of budgetary or other financial concerns. Funding for NHS Borders will increase to £207.7 million, which is a 44.8 per cent increase in real terms since 2006-07. In addition, NHS Borders will receive £987,000 to target specialties such as ophthalmology and radiology as part of the first tranche of funding to reduce waiting times.

Michelle Ballantyne: I was contacted by a constituent who had gone through the whole process of being referred and put on the waiting list for a double hip operation. He was asked whether he would be willing to go to the Golden Jubilee hospital for his treatment and he agreed to that. I have to say that the treatment was very good, the operation was successful and he was very happy, although only one hip could be done at a time—we know that that is the clinically recommended approach. However, at his 12-week assessment he asked when he would be admitted for the operation on the other hip and he was told that there were no plans to do his other hip and that he would have to go back to the beginning and start again.

My question is not about my constituent himself but about the concern that he raises. When he tried to find out why NHS Lothian—it was that health board—had not approved having both hips done, which is the treatment for which he was referred, the only whisper that he got back was that the budget that was allocated was for only one hip. That raises some concerns.

Will the cabinet secretary assure others who might face that issue that they will not have the same experience?

Jeane Freeman: If Ms Ballantyne emails me with some of the details of that case, I will look into the issue specifically. I am pleased that her constituent's first operation went well. The

situation that Ms Ballantyne described does not make sense to me and it does not sound correct. If she sends me the details I will look into it and, as soon as I have an answer I will ensure that she has an answer, too.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To go back to the first question that Michelle Ballantyne asked, on budgetary considerations, does the cabinet secretary agree that it is a bit rich for the Tories to talk budgets when their proposal to cut tax for the richest would have taken £500 million out of our budget, which pays for an awful lot of medical staff?

Jeane Freeman: Ms Grahame is correct to say that the Tories' proposal would have reduced our health budget by that amount. Fortunately, the Parliament took a different view. That money represents a significant number of nurses, doctors and allied health professionals, all of whom are committed to delivering the quality of healthcare that the Government is committed to and to ensuring the reduction in waiting times that I intend to see over the next period, as I have made very clear.

Cosmetic Procedures (Non-medically Qualified Practitioners)

2. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on non-medically qualified practitioners providing Botox and other similar treatments. (S5O-02964)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): I put on record that I have a family member who is a qualified beautician.

We are currently considering a range of options for phase 2 of the regulation of independent clinics, which focuses on cosmetic procedures, including Botox and dermal fillers, that are provided by non-healthcare professionals within non-regulated sites—those procedures are principally, although not exclusively, administered by beauty therapists or hairdressers.

Colin Beattie: Given that desperate circumstances sometimes force people to undergo such risky treatments, what steps is the Scottish Government taking to improve access to such services on the national health service and to better regulate the industry?

Joe FitzPatrick: Botox injections and similar procedures are not provided by the NHS for cosmetic rather than medical reasons. In April 2015, the Scottish cosmetic interventions expert group published a report on the regulation of independent healthcare and its recommendations were accepted by ministers. Phase 1 of the

regulations, which came into effect on 1 April 2016, focuses on independent clinics run by a doctor, dentist, nurse, midwife or dental technician that administer cosmetic procedures such as dermal fillers and lip enhancement drugs such as Botox, which is a prescribed drug. Those clinics are required to be registered with Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

Road Improvements (A84)

3. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when the feasibility study on junction improvements on the A84 near Blair Drummond Safari Park will be completed. (S5O-02965)

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): Transport Scotland commissioned its operating company to undertake a feasibility study and to outline the design for potential improvements at the location. That has taken longer than anticipated, as new information relating to historical accidents came to light during the final evaluation stage. That information is currently being reviewed to see how it relates to the completion of the study. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Michael Matheson, has asked Transport Scotland officials to conclude the report at the earliest opportunity.

Dean Lockhart: I thank the minister for that response and update. Community representatives first met in December 2017 to discuss options to improve safety at the junction. The feasibility study was meant to appear in summer 2018 but has since faced the delays that the minister mentioned. Does he share my frustration about the delay to the report and does he share the concerns of local communities about the junction?

Paul Wheelhouse: First, I absolutely recognise the strong community interest in the issue. I know that Mr Lockhart and Mr Crawford have raised the issue in the course of their work and I understand the frustration of the local community about any delay to such a key study. As I said, the cabinet secretary is keen for the final report to be presented to him at the earliest opportunity and I am sure that he will be keen to communicate it to Mr Lockhart.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Although I am grateful for the information that the minister provided to Dean Lockhart, I hope that he will understand my disappointment that it has taken a parliamentary question for the delay to emerge from Transport Scotland. In October last year, I was informed that the study would be available in a number of weeks, and I informed the community of that response.

I hope that the minister will also understand that there will be considerable frustration about the delay in the Blair Drummond community, because the people there have been gallantly campaigning on this important road safety issue for a number of years.

Paul Wheelhouse: I absolutely accept the concerns that Mr Crawford raised and—for what it is worth—I apologise to Mr Crawford for the delay in the production of the report. As I explained in my initial answer to Mr Lockhart, the reason for the delay is the presentation of additional accident data. I hope that Mr Crawford understands the need to take that on board to ensure that the final report reflects that data if necessary. However, I am sorry that the delay was not communicated to Mr Crawford and that he has had to wait to hear that news today. I am sure that Mr Matheson will be keen to ensure that all members who have an interest in the issue are communicated with as soon as possible once the final report has been produced.

Neonatal Expenses Fund

4. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the progress of the neonatal expenses fund. (S5O-02966)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): A mid-year evaluation report will be published by the end of this month. An evaluation of the full year, following the end of March, will be published in autumn 2019. To date, over the first four months of the scheme, £60,000 has been spent, which has helped 435 families.

Mark Griffin: The cabinet secretary will know of my interest in the operation of the fund because of my experience of the time that my daughter spent in a neonatal ward. How does the number of applications to the fund compare with the number of admissions to neonatal or special care wards, and is there any variation across health boards? Some health boards perhaps need an extra push to ensure that parents know about the fund.

Jeane Freeman: I cannot give Mr Griffin that information at the moment—it will be part of the first full-year evaluation that will take place at the end of March. Although that evaluation is not due for publication until autumn 2019, I will look specifically at that data in advance of publication to address those questions.

We are also conscious of other areas in which improvement is needed. In particular, we are looking at the availability and appropriateness of accommodation for parents in those circumstances, and at the quality and reach of the information that is given by our health boards to

parents who should qualify for such support but who might not be aware of it.

We will look at some of that information in advance of the full-year evaluation, and I will ensure that Mr Griffin understands the basis of what we are looking at. Given his keen interest and pivotal role in the issue, we will see whether he thinks that there is anything more that we might do.

Pupil Equity Funding (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn)

5. Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how much pupil equity funding has been given to schools in the Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituency. (S5O-02967)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Schools in the Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituency have been given almost £2.9 million of pupil equity funding in both 2017-18 and 2018-19. In the forthcoming financial year, schools in the constituency will receive over £2.9 million as part of the more than £22.3 million that is allocated to schools across Glasgow.

The funding is to be spent at the discretion of headteachers and will continue to the end of this parliamentary session as part of our commitment to invest £750 million to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap.

Bob Doris: I commend the imaginative use of pupil equity funding by Chirnsyde primary school in Milton, in my constituency, where the social enterprise Highballs Low CIC works with students to improve physical literacy and build confidence in a fun way. More importantly, teachers see improvements in children's readiness to learn.

How does the Scottish Government disseminate around Scotland examples of such good practice? Given the success in my constituency and the benefits to my constituents of such initiatives, I hope that the Scottish Government will consider continuing to extend pupil equity funding not just in this parliamentary session but into the next one.

John Swinney: I would love to be in the position to continue pupil equity funding into the next parliamentary session under the leadership of a Scottish National Party Government, but the public will, of course, make their choices on that question in 2021.

I commend Chirnsyde primary school in the Milton area of Mr Doris's constituency. A tremendous amount of imagination has been deployed in the utilisation of PEF. Mr Doris cites a good example of how schools acknowledge that some young people face barriers that have to be

overcome before they can participate in effective learning.

We look for solid, sound, evidenced examples of good practice and share them widely through, for example, the regional improvement collaborative events that are taking place this spring. On Tuesday, I was at the first event in Murrayfield for the south-east collaborative. We will ensure that, through networks such as glow and the national improvement hub, there is a wider understanding of the effective ways in which young people's performance can be enhanced as a consequence of the utilisation of pupil equity funding.

Practice of Medicine (Gender Inequality)

6. Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the recent comments by the chief medical officer for Scotland, what action it is taking to tackle gender inequality in the practice of medicine. (S5O-02968)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): This month, the First Minister's national advisory council on women and girls will shine a spotlight on the issue of women's and girls' health, inviting individuals and communities to provide feedback on women's and girls' health-related questions. A summary of that feedback will be published on the advisory council's website, and responses will inform future reports to the First Minister.

In addition, with the chief medical officer, I will look at how we can strategically—but at pace—focus on necessary improvements across the national health service to tackle women's health issues.

Elaine Smith: That is a welcome answer, and I will certainly highlight this month's activities.

Is the cabinet secretary aware that women's inequality in medicine includes thyroid patients, whose diagnosis and treatment is deeply concerning? In recognition of that, her colleague, the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing, wrote to health boards, advising them that the Government expects triiodothyronine—or T3—to be prescribed when an endocrinologist initiates that.

What will the cabinet secretary do about NHS Tayside, which has blatantly ignored the Government's letter? Only yesterday, the board refused the prescription of T3 to a patient, saying that T3 is non-formulary—that is wrong, as the cabinet secretary will know, as it is on the formulary—and allowed a panel to overrule a specialist clinician who has recognised that the woman needs that life-saving medicine.

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to the member for raising that issue with me. From what she has

said, that sounds like a completely unacceptable response from NHS Tayside. I will ask the minister the pursue the matter with NHS Tayside with some urgency in order to resolve it, so that the Tayside board follows the guidelines and the clear views that we have expressed, as other health boards are doing.

The Presiding Officer: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Ferry Capacity (Highlands and Islands)

8. Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands (Con)): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve ferry capacity in the Highlands and Islands region. (S5O-02970)

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): The Scottish Government remains committed to improving ferry capacity on the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services network and on the northern isles ferry services network to support the economic, social and cultural development of our island and remote mainland communities.

The Government works closely with ferry operators to try to ensure that demands on our ferry services are met. In line with the vessel replacement and deployment plan, a number of initiatives are being taken forward to ensure that future capacity challenges are met and that ferry services are further developed.

Donald Cameron: The minister might be aware of recent reports that distilleries on Islay have raised concerns about the ferries that serve the island and the space that is available on vessels, not just for commercial reasons but because of the vital tourism that the whisky industry brings. What action is the Scottish Government taking to improve the situation on Islay and elsewhere?

Paul Wheelhouse: The introduction of the road equivalent tariff has brought significant and continuing benefits to Islay. As the member has indicated, there is increasing demand on the capacity that serves Islay. We are very much aware of that. The fact that a 35 per cent increase in demand is forecast from the distilling sector alone will put additional pressure on the capacity that serves Islay.

We have discussed how we can respond to that demand in the long term with the Islay ferry committee and the local member, Mr Russell, and I would be happy to have similar discussions with Mr Cameron. Islay is, of course, the next island that we are looking to provide a new vessel to serve. We have also had discussions with other ferry operators, including Western Ferries, that have expressed an interest in that area. We are doing everything that we can to look at all options to improve ferry capacity to serve the very

important community on Islay and make sure that its economic aspirations can be met.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The minister will be aware of the importance of upgrading CalMac's booking system to allow better management of capacity, not least during times of disruption. Can the minister provide an update on progress in that area?

Paul Wheelhouse: I certainly can. I recognise that the issue is an important one, which was raised at a summit that was chaired by Dr Allan in Uist last November, and I am grateful to him for hosting that event. I can confirm that I requested that Transport Scotland officials prioritise that area in their discussions with CalMac. The proposals for the introduction of smart ticketing that CalMac outlined in its tender bid for the Clyde and Hebrides service are under discussion with Transport Scotland. I recognise that an updated system could significantly benefit communication with customers and help with different packaging of tickets to incentivise the use of CalMac's services.

Fair Food Transformation Fund

9. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether the fair food transformation fund will continue to provide funding to community-based organisations beyond the 2019 tranche. (S5O-02971)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): We are currently reviewing the way in which organisations apply for funding through the fair food transformation fund and several other communities-related funds.

As was set out in the draft budget statement, this year we aim to launch a new, single, harmonised communities fund that will replace several current funding mechanisms including the fair food transformation fund. That streamlined application process will seek to make things easier for third sector and community organisations, which we know that the sector would value and has requested.

Throughout the review, my officials have been keeping in contact with organisations and with those who are interested in applying to the fund, and we will update them as soon as plans are finalised.

Bill Kidd: What support might the Scottish Government give to food banks that apply for funding to develop a wraparound food justice system such as the one that is provided by Drumchapel food bank, in my constituency? The food bank also provides referrals to health and social care services, including mental health and suicide prevention services, and to local money

advice services. Where appropriate, it also interacts with local education services.

Aileen Campbell: I thank Mr Kidd for raising awareness of the incredible work that is being done in his constituency. Those are exactly the sort of activities that the current fair food fund seeks to support, because they allow people to access food in a dignified manner and provide holistic, person-centred support. That is clearly the hallmark of the approach in Drumchapel. I can confirm that the new unified fund will also endeavour to support that innovative work.

What a pity it is that we are having to deal with increasing levels of food insecurity, which the United Kingdom Government has only now, finally, conceded are down to its appalling roll-out of universal credit.

The Presiding Officer: Before we move to First Minister's question time, I invite members to join me in welcoming to the gallery Dr Husam Zomlot, the head of the Palestinian mission in the United Kingdom. [*Applause.*]

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Scottish Independence (Currency)

1. **Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** Scotland does not want to be in a separate currency. Does the First Minister agree?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Scotland should have the ability to choose the arrangements on currency, and everything else, that best suit our needs and interests. That is the very essence of independence, and it is why I and an increasing number of people in Scotland support Scotland becoming an independent country.

I am always delighted to talk about independence, but there is a constitutional issue that is more immediately pressing right now. In just 22 days—three weeks tomorrow—Scotland is due to be taken out of the European Union against our will. There is still no sign of an agreement on withdrawal issues, no guarantee of a transitional phase and no clarity on our future relationship. I give Jackson Carlaw another chance to say something that people might want to hear. Will he join me today in demanding that the Prime Minister stops asking people to choose between catastrophe and disaster, and instead takes a no-deal Brexit off the table now?

Jackson Carlaw: It is the First Minister's own deputy leader who has raised the issue of currency this week.

"Scotland doesn't want to be in a separate currency."

The First Minister said that just a few short years ago, when she and her predecessor were telling us that it was Scotland's pound and nobody was going to take it. Who would have thought that, five years on, the only people who want to take away Scotland's pound are the Scottish National Party? This week, we have learned from the SNP's deputy leader that its new plan is to ditch the pound and set up a completely new and untried currency.

So, First Minister, for any home owner who has a mortgage in pounds and, overnight, a salary paid in a new, untried currency, are mortgage payments going to go up or down?

The First Minister: Until a democratically elected Scottish Parliament in an independent Scotland decided to change that, people would continue to use the pound, which of course is Scotland's currency, just as it is the currency of anywhere else in the UK.

Jackson Carlaw confidently talks about what people in Scotland want. The way to determine what people in Scotland want is to allow them to choose in a referendum. The Tories are so scared that people would choose independence at the next time of asking that they want to block them having that choice. That is deeply anti-democratic.

I say to Jackson Carlaw that I am afraid that people watching this exchange today are thinking about what is due to happen three weeks tomorrow, so let me bring him back to the here and now. Three weeks tomorrow, this country is due to be taken out of the EU against our will. We still do not know whether there will be a transition phase and we do not know anything about the future relationship with the EU. That uncertainty could be removed today if the Prime Minister ruled out a no-deal Brexit. I will give Jackson Carlaw another opportunity. Will he join me today and call on the Prime Minister to end this uncertainty and rule out a no-deal Brexit at any time—yes or no?

Jackson Carlaw: The problem is that this First Minister just does not listen. There is no majority support for a second independence referendum. If the currency were changed, here is what would happen. The Fraser of Allander institute made it clear on ITV Border this week that people would still be tied into mortgages or car loans, but they would be paying them off in an untried, unknown and as yet unnamed new currency—a clear risk of people paying more. That is the plan that the First Minister's deputy leader launched this week.

Worse still, today we read in the papers that the First Minister's deputy is also plotting another referendum on independence, no matter whether it is legal or not. Another independence referendum is the last thing that Scotland needs. Irrespective of the views of her errant deputy, will the First Minister rule out that divisive plan?

The First Minister: The legal basis for the next independence referendum should be the same as the basis for the last independence referendum. We are talking about the issue only because of the disgracefully anti-democratic stance of the Conservatives, who refuse to recognise a mandate that was won at not just one but two elections and which was endorsed by this Parliament. We can always tell when the Tories are in trouble, because pantomime Jackson Carlaw makes a reappearance. The face gets red and the arms get waved about.

People in Scotland will have ample opportunity to talk about the many benefits of becoming an independent country, but we do not have too much longer to sort out the mess of Brexit. Therefore, I will give Jackson Carlaw another opportunity. In 22 days—three weeks tomorrow, at midnight—Scotland is due to be taken out of the EU and we still do not know what will follow. That uncertainty

can be taken away if a no-deal Brexit is ruled out. For once in his life, will Jackson Carlaw stand up to his bosses at Westminster and join me in demanding that the Prime Minister rules out a no-deal Brexit and that she does it now, with no further delay?

Jackson Carlaw: The whole chamber knows that, in two short years, Ruth Davidson will be sitting where the First Minister sits today and a Scottish Conservative First Minister will be answering questions for a long time to come. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Order.

Jackson Carlaw: However, for the moment, this First Minister remains in office. According to its deputy leader, the SNP is preparing to launch a new currency, which would throw people's mortgages and Scotland's economy into chaos. According to her deputy leader—with whom she is now disagreeing publicly—the SNP plans to launch an illegal referendum within a matter of weeks.

Another week of the SNP showing that there is only one priority for this Government, and that is satisfying Nicola Sturgeon's obsession with a second independence referendum. Enough is enough. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Jackson Carlaw: The First Minister should rule it out and let Scotland move on.

The First Minister: At the start of that latest chapter in the pantomime, Jackson Carlaw had the good grace to laugh at himself, because he was being so utterly ridiculous. I was going to say that he had lost the plot, but I am not sure that he ever had the plot in the first place.

I will tell Jackson Carlaw that my obsession right now is saving Scotland from the disaster of a Tory Brexit. I do not know how Jackson Carlaw plans to spend the rest of his day. Let me tell him how I will be spending the rest of my day.

Jackson Carlaw: Not answering questions.

The First Minister: Jackson Carlaw might want to listen to this. I will be chairing a meeting of the Scottish Government's resilience committee. We will be looking at how—just three weeks from tomorrow—we can secure medicine supplies in Scotland and how we can secure food supplies, so that we can make sure that people in Scotland still have food on the table. We will be looking at how we can protect our economy from the risk of being plunged into recession. All that time, all that effort and all that expense because a Tory Prime Minister refuses to rule out a no-deal Brexit. It is

shameful that the Scottish Conservatives have not demanded that she do so.

I have been wondering why the Scottish Tories—

The Presiding Officer: First Minister, that is enough.

The First Minister: —are quite as supine as they are. Perhaps it is because they do not want to stand up for Scotland and never will stand up for Scotland.

Scottish Independence (Currency)

2. **Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Presiding Officer,

“An independent Scotland will keep the pound because it is in everyone’s best interests, and to try and suggest otherwise flies in the face of the facts.”

That is what Nicola Sturgeon said in 2013. If it was true then, why is it not true now? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Can we please have some quiet for the questions and the answers.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Let me share a quote with the chamber:

“People in Scotland need a strong party of labour that speaks for working-class people and working-class communities. And they are not doing that”.

Richard Leonard’s strategy is

“a recipe for failure.”

That was from Gary Smith of the GMB, on Scottish Labour. Perhaps it is about time that Scottish Labour stopped being a pale echo of the Scottish Conservatives and started standing up for Scotland as well.

Richard Leonard: I did not discern an answer in that, so let me ask another question. Last night, the Scottish National Party Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy, Kate Forbes, told the BBC:

“The currency you use the day before independence will be the same currency you use the day after independence.”

However, under the First Minister’s plans, that is simply not true, is it? What Kate Forbes left out last night, and what the First Minister left out in her first answer, is that the SNP plans to use the pound without a central bank. It is the SNP’s very own no-deal exit, and it would mean building up substantial foreign exchange reserves. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work, Derek Mackay, could not tell this chamber yesterday afternoon how much that would cost, but the people of Scotland deserve an answer, so, this afternoon, can the First Minister provide us with an answer?

The First Minister: The position of Labour and the Tories on these questions is utterly ridiculous. Remember that in 2014 they told us that an independent Scotland could not use sterling in a currency union. Now they tell us that we cannot use sterling without a currency union, and they tell us that we cannot have our own currency either. Scotland must be the only country in the entire world that could not have any currency—that is ridiculous and the people of Scotland know it.

Let me tell Richard Leonard exactly what the position will be in an independent Scotland. Until a democratically elected Scottish Parliament decides otherwise, we will use the pound, which is our currency just as it is the currency of other parts of the United Kingdom.

Richard Leonard is again asking questions about independence. I am happy to talk about independence any day, but people across Scotland are worried right now about Brexit. Yesterday, a member of his back benches told us that Richard Leonard is so desperate that he is trying to stop his own party conference openly debating Brexit. Will Richard Leonard join me now in calling not just for no deal to be ruled out, but for people to have a chance again to reject Brexit? Will he do that today?

Richard Leonard: Yes, I will—I said that on Tuesday afternoon.

The answer to the question that I asked is that £40 billion of foreign exchange reserves would be required, and that is before we look at the reserves needed to ensure bank deposits and before Derek Mackay’s austerity programme to halve the deficit in five years. That is not just a programme for austerity; it is a programme for turbo-charged austerity, at the very time when the people are crying out for investment.

That is not about the best interests of the people of Scotland, is it? It is only about the best interests of the SNP.

The First Minister: If Scotland was independent right now, we would not be facing being taken out of the European Union against our will three weeks tomorrow. Right now, it is because Scotland is not independent that we have to put up with a Tory Government that we did not vote for. It is because Scotland is not independent that we face being ripped out of the EU against our will. Until Richard Leonard and Scottish Labour find it within themselves to stand up for Scotland instead of standing up for the continuation of Tory rule, the party will never recover in Scotland, and it will never deserve to recover in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: We have some constituency supplementary questions, the first of which is from Angus MacDonald.

Duncan Adams Ltd (Administration)

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): The First Minister will be aware that, yesterday, administrators were called in to Grangemouth haulage firm Duncan Adams Ltd, which has operated at the port for nearly 60 years. One hundred and thirty-two employees were made redundant yesterday, following the devastating news, with 12 employees having been retained in the short term to assist with the closure of the firm. The priority in the immediate term must clearly be focused on supporting the staff and their families through this difficult period.

Falkirk Council has been in touch with Skills Development Scotland regarding partnership action for continuing employment support and Unite the union has arranged an advice session for the workforce on Sunday. Will the First Minister help to ensure that everything possible is done to provide follow-up support to the families who are affected and also ensure that plans are in place to avoid a backlog of containers at the port of Grangemouth?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank Angus MacDonald for raising this important issue. I was very concerned to learn of the development at Duncan Adams haulage and the impact that it will have on the workers there, their families and, of course, the surrounding communities. I confirm that, through our PACE initiative, we have already been in contact with the administrators, who have agreed to issue PACE guides to all 144 employees. PACE representatives will also attend a meeting on 10 March at the Leapark hotel in Grangemouth, which has been organised by Unite the union and which is open to all redundant employees.

The local PACE team is considering what further support can be provided and I confirm that we are in touch with the port authority to assess the impact on port operations. I would be very happy to ask the minister who is involved to keep Angus MacDonald fully updated.

Edinburgh Tram Network

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the First Minister whether she agrees that no decision should be made by the City of Edinburgh Council to extend the Edinburgh tram network until the findings of the Edinburgh tram inquiry are published and all lessons learned?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I think that decisions of the City of Edinburgh Council are for the City of Edinburgh Council to take and I am sure that it will take account of all relevant factors. It is important that the inquiry concludes and it is important that any lessons that come from the inquiry are learned. The Scottish Conservatives

used to be in favour of localism and they used to demand that the Scottish Government did more to support localism, so I am going to do that today—even if they have changed their minds—and say that matters for the City of Edinburgh Council are for the City of Edinburgh Council to determine.

Air Traffic Controller Strike (Highlands and Islands Airports)

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): Air traffic controllers who are employed by a company that is owned by the Government and who operate across the Highlands and Islands plan to strike next month. I am sure that the First Minister will recognise that that would stop air travel and create tremendous disruption for passengers across the network, including those who are potentially flying to hospitals for appointments. Will the First Minister set out to the Parliament what her Government has done on this matter and what it now plans to do to make sure that the strike does not happen?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): It is of course disappointing to hear about planned strike action. Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd is covered by our public sector pay policy and it has implemented a pay rise for all staff that is a significant improvement on previous years. It has also significantly increased its contribution to the pension scheme in order to maintain the benefit for employees. In addition, ministers have authorised HIAL to develop a retention allowance as part of the “Air Traffic Management 2030 Strategy” programme. I hope that we will see strikes avoided and I encourage the union and HIAL to continue to work together to resolve the outstanding issues.

Gemini Rail Services (Springburn Closure)

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): The announcement of 120 redundancies and the looming closure of the Gemini Rail Services works in my constituency is a devastating blow for a skilled and dedicated workforce. Gemini Rail has been inflexible, unimaginative and slow to engage meaningfully in our efforts to retain jobs and operations. Will the First Minister commit to continuing to explore all options to support workers to retain jobs and operations at the site? I stress that, if the Springburn works was to win the ScotRail 170 class train tender—work that Gemini Rail has staggeringly still failed to bid for—30 jobs would be provided for three years and it would potentially kick-start the railway hub model that the Scottish Government is exploring.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I pay tribute to Bob Doris for the way in which he is

representing the interests of his constituents and I agree with the latter point that he made.

I was extremely disappointed to receive a letter from Gemini Rail yesterday that confirmed the closure of the workshops at Springburn and I know that it will be a very concerning time for workers there and their families. I stress that consideration needs to be given to potential options for keeping the site open. There will be a further meeting of stakeholders at the end of this month to discuss the way forward. The workshops have work to complete on vehicles that are leased to ScotRail until July this year and Gemini Rail has retained the lease until March next year. That means that there is time to work with industry with a view to repurposing the site for future rail use. To that end, Scottish Enterprise has already engaged independent financial advice in reviewing Gemini Rail's model for the site. We will keep members fully updated on any progress.

Burntisland Fabrications Ltd

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The BBC reported this morning that Burntisland Fabrications Ltd—BiFab—has lost out on an order for offshore platforms to yards in Belgium, Spain and the United Arab Emirates. The Unite and GMB unions are calling for a committee inquiry in this Parliament. They say that billions of pounds' worth of contracts and thousands of direct and indirect jobs are now on the brink of being lost to state-sponsored companies and companies that hold an unfair commercial advantage, or to economies that do not apply labour standards that we would recognise. This is not a level playing field.

What further steps will the Scottish Government take to secure a long-term future for the Fife yards and does the First Minister accept that we need more direct state intervention to ensure a just transition in our economy?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I agree with that last point, which is why we have established a just transition commission in Scotland, on the recommendation of the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

It is important to recognise that, notwithstanding the real challenges that are being faced, BiFab would not even exist today had it not been for Scottish Government intervention. Although there are big challenges for the Fife yards, we had the good news about the Arnish yard earlier this week.

As I indicated last week, I absolutely share the concerns that have been expressed by Gary Smith of GMB and Pat Rafferty of Unite the union that BiFab may be facing unfair challenges in relation to securing other contracts. I want the Scottish Government to work with the unions to fully

explore that. I intend to convene a summit in early course to do so. We have worked extremely well with the unions and we intend to continue doing so.

In the interim, we will continue to do everything that we can, with the unions and with the owners. The Scottish Government has a stake in BiFab and we will do everything that we can to help to secure work for not just Arnish but the two yards in Fife. I hope that we have the support of the whole chamber as we do so.

Road Safety (20mph Speed Limit)

3. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Young people are twice as likely to be injured on our roads. Some parts of Scotland have made their streets safer, healthier places, including here in Edinburgh, where a 20mph speed limit has been rolled out across the city, and in Fife, where more lives are being saved and children protected from injury, particularly in low-income areas, as a result of 20mph speed limits. Does the First Minister share my concerns that too many communities are not benefiting from this small change, which would make a big difference to tackling the health inequality that continues to blight Scotland?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I welcome Alison Johnstone to First Minister's question time. It is great to have her asking questions. [*Applause.*] I recognise and share her concern about the statistics that she has cited. Many local authorities already have 20mph speed limits in certain areas and I encourage local authorities to consider having 20mph speed limits where they think it is appropriate.

A member's bill on the issue is currently being considered by this Parliament. Of course, the Parliament will debate that and the Scottish Government will continue to listen to all the arguments that are made.

Alison Johnstone: I appreciate the First Minister's response. The Scottish Government has made brave and important public health interventions in banning smoking in public places and introducing a minimum price for alcohol. Those policies are effective because they apply at a national level, with Government leadership. The piecemeal approach will not deliver what I know both I and the First Minister want, which is for all children to have safe streets.

The health and safety of our children cannot depend on which part of the country they live in, so will the First Minister join organisations such as NHS Health Scotland and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and back my colleague Mark Ruskell's Restricted Roads (20 mph Speed Limit) (Scotland) Bill—a public health

measure that will have the greatest impact where it is most needed?

The First Minister: I give an assurance that we will listen carefully to the arguments that are made as Mark Ruskell's bill is discussed and I commend him for raising the issue.

An issue that we grapple with all the time in Government is getting the balance right between showing national leadership on an issue—which, as Alison Johnstone has said, we have done on a range of public health issues in particular—while respecting the autonomy of local councils, which is something that people across the chamber call for regularly.

It is important that we get the balance right, and paramount importance has to be attached to the safety of children. I commit to listening carefully to the arguments, as I am sure that members across the chamber will do. I hope that the Parliament reaches the right decision on this and gets that balance right.

Global (Local Radio Services)

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Is the First Minister aware that Global, which operates Heart, Capital Scotland and Smooth Radio in Scotland, plans to create a virtual radio network to compete with BBC Radio 1 and Radio 2, using local licences to do so? Does the First Minister agree that Ofcom must become involved and keep local commercial radio in Scotland local?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am a great supporter and fan of local radio. Its place in our broadcasting environment is very important. I hope that Ofcom would take into account all the reasonable points that George Adam has just made.

National Health Service (Waiting Times)

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): On Monday, my constituent Mr Phillips, an armed forces veteran, collapsed from a suspected stroke. He waited just under six hours for an ambulance to arrive at his home in Milngavie, after which he was taken to the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, where he waited a further five hours before he was seen by a doctor. He spent the night in the receiving unit, as no beds were available. Does the First Minister agree that that is an unacceptable amount of time for anyone to wait for an ambulance and an assessment from a doctor, let alone someone who has suffered a stroke? Will she look into the matter with the utmost urgency?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I agree that what the member has narrated is unacceptable. If he wants to provide greater detail

of his constituent's case, the health secretary will be happy to look into it.

What I am about to say does not take away from that case and the unacceptability of what has been described. Our Scottish Ambulance Service does a fantastic job day in and day out, and our accident and emergency services, though they face considerable challenges, remain the best-performing accident and emergency services anywhere in the UK. All the staff who work so hard to deliver that performance deserve our grateful thanks.

We will be happy to look into those individual circumstances.

Use of Statistics

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): This morning, the UK Statistics Authority reprimanded the First Minister for the misuse of statistics in response to my question on national health service waiting times at last week's First Minister's question time. The letter states:

"Waiting times are a major concern to patients and their families. The statistics informing debates about them must therefore be trustworthy, of suitable quality and useful. We are therefore extremely disappointed that it has been necessary for us to intervene in this way."

This is the second time that this has happened recently. Will the First Minister take the opportunity to apologise to the chamber and to the country for misusing statistics in this way?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will, as the Government always will, reflect carefully on anything that the Office for Statistics Regulation says. The statistics that I used were accurate and, as I understand it, are available to anybody on request and will be published by ISD Scotland. It is not the Scottish Government that decides what statistics ISD publish or do not publish; ISD decides that. I hope that we can have as much transparency and as many comprehensive statistics as possible, because that would demonstrate that the NHS is, on so many different measures, the best-performing NHS anywhere in the UK.

McGill & Co (Apprentices)

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): In Dundee, electrical apprentices from McGill, the firm that went into administration after failure of the Government to provide a modest loan, are still trying to salvage their apprenticeships. This country's skills situation cannot afford to lose apprentices. From the representation I have had from constituents, I am not convinced that Skills Development Scotland is doing all that it can. Can the First Minister guarantee today that her minister will follow up every McGill apprentice to make sure

that they secure another place to complete their apprenticeship?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We will do everything, as we always do in redundancy situations, to make sure that apprentices are placed and are able to continue their apprenticeships. Skills Development Scotland works extremely hard to do that. If Jenny Marra knows of anybody who needs further assistance, she should bring those people to us so that we can ensure that the assistance is there.

This is Scottish apprenticeship week, and right across the country people have been celebrating the success of Scotland's apprenticeship programme. A few years ago, there were around 10,000 modern apprentices in Scotland and today the figure is 27,000, as we work towards the target of 30,000. That is a success story. When companies regrettably fail, we will continue to do everything that we can to ensure that apprentices do not pay the price of that. That is an absolute commitment that the Scottish Government will always honour.

Video Games ("Rape Day")

Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): Does the First Minister share my concern that, in the week when we celebrate international women's day, we have seen the creation of a video game entitled "Rape Day", which enables players to verbally harass, kill and rape women as they progress through the story? Although it is positive news that the gaming platform Steam has decided not to distribute and sell the game, does the First Minister agree that we should send a clear message to other game developers and platform providers that such games have no place in our society in this day and age? Does she think that it is time for the United Kingdom Government to review the regulations in the area?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, I do, and I pay tribute to Shona Robison for highlighting the issue this week. The "Rape Day" video game is absolutely sickening and appalling. Violence against women, whether it is sexual or of any other form, is not a game and should never be treated in such a way. It is serious and must be treated in that way, so I hope that the game is not promoted. In my view, the matter should not be down to the individual decisions of companies. It is time for the regulations governing the area to be reviewed. Perhaps the whole Parliament can unite on the issue and call on the UK Government to do that without delay.

Stronger Towns Fund

4. **Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the

United Kingdom Government's stronger towns fund. (S5F-03121)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): To be honest, it is hard to know what our response should be, because the UK Government has been unable to confirm any details of the funding implications of the announcement for Scotland. We will continue to press the UK Government to ensure that Scotland receives its fair share of any additional funding. As with so many things related to Brexit, the UK Government's plans are, frankly, as clear as mud, but they suggest that Scotland is continually being short changed.

Keith Brown: I acknowledge the First Minister's point that much of the process is unclear. Does she share my concerns about the exclusion of Scotland and Wales from the Prime Minister's Brexit bung? Does she agree that it is yet another example of the failing fiasco of Tory Brexit, which one of the Prime Minister's Tory cabinet ministers said was like hitting an iceberg, and that it is surpassed only by the complete inadequacy of the 13 Tory MPs from Scotland, each of whom represents a constituency that voted to remain in the European Union, and their failure to stand up for Scotland?

The First Minister: Those points are important. Not only do we have no clarity on the stronger towns fund or whether Scotland will get any share of it, let alone a fair share, we still have no clarity regarding the future of structural funds or the so-called shared prosperity fund. We have also heard that the UK Government is to provide an additional £140 million to Northern Ireland, but there is no indication of equivalent consequential funding for Scotland or Wales. We welcome the additional funding for Northern Ireland, but there must be confirmation that Scotland and Wales will be treated fairly.

In sharp contrast to the Prime Minister's Brexit bung, this morning, the Scottish Government has announced the projects that will benefit from our £20 million regeneration capital grant fund. That is not money to persuade anybody to vote for anybody; it is just money to ensure the regeneration of communities the length and breadth of Scotland. That shows a Government that is getting on with the day job, and the UK Government could learn lots of lessons from us.

Bipolar Disorder

5. **Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to help people who have bipolar disorder. (S5F-03124)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Bipolar disorder is a very serious mental illness. We want

everyone in Scotland to have access to effective mental health services when they need them, which is why we set out in our programme for government a £250 million package of measures to do more to support positive mental health and to prevent ill health. That funding for a package of new measures is in addition to £150 million of investment over five years that is already under way to support the delivery of the mental health strategy. In addition, we are providing support to Bipolar Scotland, which provides information, support and advice for people who are affected by bipolar disorder and those who care for them.

Rachael Hamilton: According to Professor Daniel Smith from the University of Glasgow, bipolar disorder patients in Scotland are receiving treatments such as antidepressant monotherapy that are, at best, ineffective and, at worst, detrimental to long-term outcomes. Lithium, prescribed on its own, is the recommended first-line treatment for bipolar disorder because of its proven effectiveness in preventing episodes of depression and mania, but that treatment is prescribed to only one in 20 patients. What action is the First Minister's Government taking to address this important issue? Does she agree with Alison Cairns, the chief executive of Bipolar Scotland, that we need more patient-clinician partnerships in Scotland?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree. The Scottish Government expects all patients with bipolar disorder to have access to appropriate and evidence-based treatments, with individual prescribing decisions, of course, being made by clinicians, but in partnership with their patients. We have set a national standard in Scotland that outlines the monitoring requirements for people who are treated with lithium. Details of that were sent to health and care services in June 2017. Using that benchmark, we can improve the quality of the care and treatment that we provide, improve patient safety and reduce what is an established health inequality. Individual health boards will, of course, determine how best to undertake the monitoring, but it is very important that it is done.

British Transport Police and Police Scotland (Merger)

6. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the merger of Police Scotland and the British Transport Police has been permanently abandoned. (S5F-03140)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We remain committed to the devolution of railway policing, as agreed by all parties in the Parliament during the Smith commission. We have worked with stakeholders on options to improve the accountability of railway policing in Scotland.

There is consensus that current legislation could be used to create an arrangement that facilitates a stronger role for the Scottish Police Authority. The SPA and the British Transport Police Authority are considering how that should be done, and they aim to present proposals to their respective boards in the coming months. It would be premature to rule out any option at this time, but any proposal must enhance the accountability of railway policing in Scotland, while ensuring the safety and security of the travelling public.

Daniel Johnson: After almost two years and hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' pounds having been spent on finding a way to achieve the integration of the BTP into Police Scotland, it is clear to everyone—if not the First Minister—that integration is simply not possible. The uncertainty that staff and officers have faced will not end until full integration is permanently ruled out. Will the First Minister take the opportunity to go further than the letter that was sent to staff and officers this week, which said that there will not be a transfer, and confirm that the plan for full integration has been permanently scrapped? Will she confirm when the fatally flawed Railway Policing (Scotland) Act 2017 will be repealed?

The First Minister: As Daniel Johnson recognised, this work is challenging and complex. Considerable work has been done to assess all the risks and challenges and we have engaged with stakeholders throughout the process. A stakeholder engagement event was held in November to explore all the options.

The option that is currently being developed will involve the establishment of a new committee to oversee railway policing in Scotland, which will comprise members of the Scottish Police Authority and the British Transport Police Authority. Those authorities have been working closely on the proposed terms of reference for the new committee. They are making good progress and it is hoped that they will be in a position to present proposals to their respective boards in the coming months. I give an undertaking today that the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity will update Parliament once the negotiations are included. That is the right way to proceed to ensure that arrangements are in place to enhance the accountability of railway policing in Scotland—which, I hope, all members want—and to ensure the safety and security of the travelling public and those who work in our transport police.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank all the officers, staff, experts, academics and colleagues from across the chamber for forcing the Scottish National Party to concede that erecting a border on Britain's railways is a dreadful idea. How much taxpayers' money has been wasted in the pursuit of full integration thus far?

Will the First Minister admit that control room infrastructure cannot be replaced on the cheap?

The First Minister: At least we know that we have trains, whereas the United Kingdom Tory Government does not check that its ferry contractors have ferries. This is a serious issue. I, too, pay tribute to those who work in our transport police. The Tories here do not exactly have a consistent position. In their 2016 Scottish election manifesto, they advocated for merger, saying:

“We will create a national infrastructure police force, bringing together the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, the Ministry of Defence Police and the British Transport Police to improve the protection of critical infrastructure”.

The idea that the Tories have always supported retaining the British Transport Police as a stand-alone entity is not supported by the evidence or the facts.

We will continue to progress the merger in a proper way. The work that is being done now is extremely solid. When it is concluded, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will come back to Parliament to update members in the usual way.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): A recent academic paper by Dr Kath Murray and Dr Colin Atkinson concluded:

“While cutting losses at this stage will carry short-term political and reputational consequences, such a decision would stem the escalating financial, professional and personal costs”.

Years have been wasted on the full integration model. Why will the First Minister not take the opportunity now to rule out that option for good?

The First Minister: I have already set out to the chamber, as the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has done previously, the work that is being done to get the right solution. It is important that that work continues.

In the interests of balance, I will quote the 2016 Liberal Democrat manifesto. The party said that it would

“Transfer control of the British Transport Police to Police Scotland but seek to retain the ring-fenced expertise of officers on transport related matters”.

Members: Oh!

The First Minister: I have read out the full extract. The fact of the matter is that parties are not necessarily taking the same position now as they did previously.

That, of course, is history. What is important now is that we get it right and we will continue to support the work that is being done to ensure that that happens.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the First Minister accept that ordinary constituents in my constituency do not understand

why there should be one police force for the street outside the railway station and a separate police force for the railway station itself? My ordinary constituents want a much more joined-up approach than we have had in the past.

The First Minister: John Mason makes an important point because, whatever our individual views on the best arrangements, most members of the public, I suspect, simply want politicians to sort out the structures and arrangements so that they can have confidence in their police, wherever they need their services. If there are, for example, terrorist incidents on our transport network, Police Scotland resources are often brought to bear to help with resilience in those cases.

It is important that we have greater accountability for the British Transport Police, that we have as much integration on the use of resources as possible and that we put in place the right structures to support that. That is what we are working towards, and we are determined to get it right in the interests of everybody—those who work in the service and those who use the service.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Does the First Minister share my concern that there are hundreds of police officers here in Scotland who can exercise the power of arrest on our citizens and enter and search our premises but who have no political accountability in Scotland?

The First Minister: I have made the point about accountability on several occasions already today. It is important to improve the accountability of the British Transport Police’s Scottish arrangements. That is one of the motivations behind the work that is under way and why it is important that we allow that work to reach a conclusion.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister’s questions. Before moving on to members’ business, we will take a short suspension, to allow members, ministers and those in the gallery to change seats.

12:43

Meeting suspended.

12:46

On resuming—

European Union Settlement Scheme

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-15513, in the name of Annabelle Ewing, on the settled status scheme for European Union citizens in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the UK Government's decision to abandon its plans to charge EU citizens a fee when applying for their right to remain in Scotland through the EU Settlement Scheme; believes that it was wrong for the UK Government to oblige EU citizens who have built their lives in Scotland, and who contribute to the economy and communities, to pay for the status and rights they already have; acknowledges the persistence of the Scottish National Party, Scottish Labour, Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats in their respective campaigns to abolish the settled status fee; considers that it remains unfair to oblige EU citizens in Scotland to apply to retain the rights that they already hold, regardless of the fee; recognises what it considers the significant economic, social and cultural contributions made by EU citizens in communities across Scotland, including in the Cowdenbeath constituency, and notes the calls on the UK Government to scrap the settlement scheme for EU citizens.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to debate my motion on the United Kingdom Government's EU settlement scheme. I thank the members who added their names in support of the motion and, by doing so, facilitated this debate.

At the outset, I want to say that I find the UK Government's approach to EU nationals abhorrent. It is, as a matter of principle, forcing individual citizens who have legally acquired rights further to international treaty to make an application to the UK Government to register in order to stay in the UK—in other words, the UK Government is forcing EU citizens to apply for rights that they already have. It is nothing less than the othering of EU citizens living in our country and, as students of history will know, such othering policies are not without risk to societal cohesion. Moreover, it is nothing short of a blatant rewriting of history with regard to the role that the EU has played on these isles since the UK became a member back in 1973.

Those individuals, who number 223,000 in Scotland and 3.5 million across the UK as a whole, have lived in our country for years, and they have contributed to its economic life and social fabric. They have paid taxes into the

Exchequer, and they have paid national insurance contributions. They have their physical homes in our country, and they regard our country as home. EU nationals are our friends, our neighbours, our work colleagues and our fellow students—for many, in fact, they are family members.

This week, we heard the heartbreaking story of 87-year-old Tove Macdonald in an interview that was broadcast by STV. Although she was born in Denmark, she has lived in Scotland for almost 60 years. She has children and grandchildren here; she was married here; she has friends here; and she has built her life here. However, the UK Government has written to her, insisting that she apply to stay in her own home. She described receiving the letter thus:

"I got a letter to say that because of Brexit I had to register and I couldn't understand why. I thought 'This couldn't be right', because I've been here for so many years. I thought it was absolutely crazy. It makes me feel very sad because this is my home and I feel more Scottish than Danish ... I've got nowhere to go. This is my home."

Who would ever have imagined that they would live to hear such a statement in 21st century Scotland? That is not who we are, and it is shaming not just for the UK Government but for Ruth Davidson's Tories in Scotland, who are happily going along with this. Not one Tory MSP has seen fit to sign my motion.

The UK Government must bring this sorry saga to an end and scrap the policy, which is of dubious legality and must be viewed as motivated by the anti-immigration factions that are now rife in the Tory party across the UK. The policy is ugly and heartless and is causing considerable uncertainty, anxiety and distress.

Further to a concerted campaign by the Scottish National Party, Scottish Labour, the Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Prime Minister bowed some weeks ago to pressure to abolish the proposed fee that was to be charged for each settlement scheme application. I urge all those parties to keep up the pressure and work with the Scottish Government to see the end of this truly grotesque policy.

It is worth highlighting that many concerns have been raised about the scheme's mechanics, including the unrealistic deadline for applications, the limited means by which applications can be made and whether the already dysfunctional Home Office has the ability to administer the scheme. The House of Lords EU Justice Sub-Committee has expressed concern that there will be no physical piece of paper if applications are successful; rather, there will be an electronic link only. Given the UK Government's record on information technology and competence in general, that will be a chilling prospect for many.

Moreover, any delays in processing applications will have implications far beyond mere administrative issues. As the think tank British Future has said, such delays could result in many thousands of EU citizens being left with an insecure immigration status or no status at all. It should be noted that deportations have not been ruled out by the Prime Minister and her Tory party. It must therefore be asked whether the UK Government has wilfully learned no lessons at all from the Windrush scandal—Baroness Helena Kennedy has made that point in the House of Lords.

Here in Scotland, the Scottish Government is doing all that it can within our limited immigration powers to help our fellow EU citizens. Citizens Advice Scotland has been funded to provide a new advice service on rights, entitlements and requirements that will be available across its network, and a solicitor-led helpline is to be established for more difficult and complex cases. Here in our country—in Scotland—at this time of great uncertainty and anxiety, our Government is committed to doing all that it can to speak up for and support our EU citizens, while the Westminster Government in London is forcing EU citizens to apply to retain the rights that they already have. What a contrast that is. That contrasting tale of two Governments will not be lost on the people of Scotland, for we did not vote for this—we want no part of it and we will not put up with it.

I will repeat what Scotland's First Minister said on the morning when the 2016 EU referendum result was announced. In speaking directly to citizens of other EU countries who live in Scotland, she said:

“you remain welcome here, Scotland is your home and your contribution is valued.”

For my part, I reiterate that message and take the opportunity today to say to all the EU citizens who live in my Cowdenbeath constituency and across Scotland, “You remain welcome here; Scotland is your home and your contribution is valued.”

12:53

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I thank Annabelle Ewing for her excellent speech, which summarised the salient points brilliantly and in a measured way—that can be challenging in such debates.

I recognise the outstanding contribution of EU nationals in my Renfrewshire South constituency—of EU nationals in Barrhead, Neilston, Uplawmoor, Johnstone, Elderslie, Linwood, Brookfield, Kilbarchan, Howwood and Lochwinnoch. I recognise the contribution of EU nationals who volunteer in the third sector in

Renfrewshire South and those who work for Renfrewshire Council and East Renfrewshire Council, in our businesses and in the hospitality sector. I recognise the contribution of EU nationals in every area of our life—they are our friends and neighbours in Renfrewshire South. I recognise the outstanding contribution of EU nationals who work in the Scottish Parliament. I recognise the contribution that is made by all EU nationals across Scotland.

I am not speaking about someone different when I say “EU national”, because I am an EU national. I am an EU citizen and I am proud to be an EU citizen. I will fight to my dying breath to ensure that we retain our EU citizenship and that one day we see an independent Scotland as a full member of the European Union, in which we are all European citizens.

European citizenship is not some abstract legalism; it was born out of the ashes of two calamities that befell the continent in the first half of the 20th century. The wisdom of EU citizenship and shared identity came at the expense of the blood of countless millions of men, women and children across the continent. If we forget that and allow ourselves to lapse into a numb, unthinking and bureaucratic state of mind, we will be in a very dangerous situation, because that allows the insidious creep of intolerance and othering that Annabelle Ewing spoke about.

I deeply regret that we are in such a position today. First and foremost, we must recognise the contribution of our EU friends, brothers, sisters, neighbours, co-workers and families and how they enrich us.

One of Europe's great authors, Marcel Proust, said:

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”

In Europe, we can seek new landscapes because, through the principle of freedom of movement, we have the opportunity to travel. Through mixing, engaging and cultural exchange, we enhance and develop ourselves, and we also see with new eyes. We become better people and our EU citizenship enhances us. That is the great gift that the European Union, freedom of movement and the ability of all EU citizens to live anywhere in the continent have bestowed on us.

When we visit a country and go through passport control knowing that we have a mere three months to stay there and that we are only a visitor, our state of mind is fundamentally different from what it is when we know that we can go from Scotland to Paris, Kraków, Athens, Madrid, Lisbon or any European city and have the right not just to visit, but to settle, live and work there. That brings a sense of collective ownership and responsibility

that binds the people of the continent together and realises the vision of the founders of the European Union, which was to ensure that the continent would never again go to war. When we start to unpick the rich, ennobling tapestry that we have woven over the past 60 years, we risk another catastrophe befalling our continent further down the line.

The practical reality for Scotland is that, without EU nationals, we will not be able to build the fairer, more prosperous and more equal country that we all seek. We know the challenges that face Scottish public finances as a consequence of the demographics. Although Scotland's working-age population is just as productive as the working-age population in many other parts of the UK—if not more so—our population overall is ageing. Without freedom of movement and without sending the message to citizens throughout Europe and the rest of the world that they are welcome, we will not be able to build that better Scotland.

I thank Annabelle Ewing for lodging the motion for the debate, and I thank all those members who signed it. We will continue to fight for our fellow EU citizens and to ensure that their citizenship is restored in full as members of an independent Scotland within the European Union.

12:59

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for allowing me to leave after making my speech, as I have individuals to meet and I need to be back in the chamber to ask the first question on the rural economy. I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate and I congratulate Annabelle Ewing on bringing it to Parliament.

I value the significant contribution that migrants to Scotland make to our economy, culture and everyday lives. Recommendations with regard to the EU settlement scheme will be taken on board, which is why the scheme was initially launched as a pilot. During that time, the procedure will go through the prototype stage—just as any new scheme would initially go through that process. There will be strong opinions on particular procedures in the scheme, and the UK Government will listen to the options and act accordingly, if appropriate. That is why the application fee has been withdrawn and why any person who applied during the pilot scheme will have their fee reimbursed.

Annabelle Ewing: I hear that it is a pilot that it is moving towards a scheme and that the UK Government might or might not listen to some things—who knows? However, the fact of the matter is that there will be an EU settlement scheme. Why should citizens such as Tove

Macdonald, who has lived in this country for 60 years, be forced by the Tory Government to apply for rights that she already has?

Alexander Stewart: I acknowledge what Ms Ewing says and the representations that the individual has made. I feel uncomfortable about the situation—I am not denying that fact. The process needs to be looked at, and I have no doubt that representations will continue to be made.

The nature of permanent status means that it is vital to offer individuals the ability to come forward for it. As I said, the UK Government will continue to welcome the best and brightest to this country—and it is vital that we do that. However, as with such schemes in the past, we must ensure that we understand the benefits for both the host country and the applicant. Therefore, like others, I am delighted that the UK Government has abandoned its plans to charge EU citizens a fee when they apply for the right to remain in Scotland through the settled status scheme.

Governments in EU countries have already said that UK citizens who live in other parts of the world will be treated in a similar way to how the UK Government treats EU citizens who live in the UK, and that is rightly to be expected. It is interesting that the UK Government has, additionally, reached agreements with non-EU countries such as Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein as well as a separate agreement with Switzerland. Those countries are happy with the current arrangements, and any national of those countries will be able to apply to the EU settled status scheme from 30 March 2019.

Our new system for obtaining settled status will be streamlined and user friendly, and it will draw on existing Government data and information to minimise the burden on applicants to provide evidence. Applications will not be refused on minor technicalities without the applicant being given an appropriate opportunity to rectify the situation. Caseworkers who consider applications will exercise discretion in favour of the applicant, where appropriate. As a result, the Home Office has said that it expects the vast majority of applications to be granted, with refusals most likely to be made only on the basis of serious criminality or an individual not being an EU citizen. It is also important that, once settled status has been obtained, individuals can stay outside the UK for up to five years without losing their settled status.

I heard Ms Ewing's comments, and there is no doubt that this is a volatile issue in the current negotiations. As I indicated right at the start of my speech, I and my party recognise the importance and value of migrants coming to our country. Many have made their lives here and contribute to our

business community and our academic and political life. They are most welcome, have a right to remain and should be treated with dignity and respect. As I said, however, the case that Ms Ewing raised indicates that there is some way to go in managing the process.

EU citizens have made, and continue to make, a significant contribution to our way of life. I once again thank Ms Ewing for lodging today's motion for debate. I look forward to seeing the progress that will be achieved in this area and to seeing all of us play our part in ensuring stability and continuity.

13:04

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome today's debate on the settled status scheme for EU citizens in Scotland. I was pleased to support Annabelle Ewing's motion, and I associate myself with the speech that she gave today. However, it is ridiculous that the Tories have brought us to a place where something that seems so obvious warrants discussion.

Those who live, work and have families and homes here should clearly have an automatic right to remain and should never have been subject to the proposal of the Tory Government at Westminster to pay for the status and rights that they already have. I am glad that the proposal was hastily scrapped by the Tories amid strong criticism from MPs and campaign groups, but the fact that it was proposed in the first place only serves to highlight how much of a mess the Tories are making of Brexit. The Labour Party would never have used people living in this country in cheap negotiation tactics, and it is shameful that they were ever treated as pawns in that way.

EU citizens living in Scotland contribute greatly to our country, both culturally and economically. Diverse communities experience wide-ranging cultural benefits, especially through exchanges in ideas and customs, as well as through our world being a more connected place. Migrants from the EU contribute £2,300 more to the Exchequer each year in net terms than the average adult. Over their lifetimes, EU migrants pay in £78,000 more than they take out in public services and benefits.

It is time that we, as a country, started talking about immigration. It has become an almost taboo subject to raise, which has, in turn, resulted in those with extreme views capitalising on the lack of discussion and playing up to people's fears. We need to talk about immigration and try to disperse the myths and fears that people have about it. In Scotland, we need not less but more immigration. Scotland has an ageing population and, as a result, we will require more immigration in the

future simply to sustain public services and support the increase in the elderly population.

We have only to look at the Windrush scandal last year to see that our immigration system is broken. Theresa May has proposed a post-Brexit salary threshold of £30,000 for skilled immigrants, which is just ridiculous. Given that so many of our carers and national health service staff are migrants and that many of those skilled workers will be blocked from working in the UK, how can we possibly maintain the required level of service? Our health service and social care system are already struggling with funding problems, so what will removing access to a huge workforce resource mean for those in need?

Brexit has highlighted, quite starkly, that we need to work on dispelling fears of immigration, but the Government has a huge role to play in that, and the Tories have to answer for stirring up fear with their rhetoric to score political points. It is time that they stopped using people's lives as they have been and started standing up for the country as a whole. I am happy to support the motion.

13:08

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank my friend and colleague Annabelle Ewing for securing this important debate.

The campaign, which has been successful so far, proves that, when parties work together, they can encourage or force political change. Every party in this Parliament except the Conservatives deserves some credit. The Tories, either willingly or through a blindly dogmatic approach, seem to have forgotten how important EU nationals are to Scotland and the rest of the UK. It has been a complete and utter embarrassment that the disgusting settled status scheme was instigated.

Tom Arthur spoke about the history of the EU project, and I cannot agree with him more. We must understand and appreciate why the EU came about and how important that was.

The fee was to be £65. Some would claim that, for many people, that would not have broken the bank, but the fee could have been 65p for all I care—the issue is not how much it was but the message that it sent out to people. It told them two things: first, that they were not wanted and, secondly, that they were a bargaining chip in the shambolic EU negotiations that were being led by the worst Prime Minister in history. They were being used to tell the EU negotiators that the UK would be tough in the talks. What the Prime Minister and her acolytes have done is turn Britain into a laughing stock. The so-called Great Britain that the Tories proclaim that they support and love will have a reputation that is not great across the EU and beyond. The Prime Minister and her

revolving door of ministers—apart from Chris Grayling, of course—are telling people that Britain is uncaring.

It has been claimed that the UK's negotiating skills have been reduced somewhat by its being a member of the EU. That certainly appears to be true. The EU is not kicking us out, but the UK seems to be hell-bent on leaving as sour a taste as possible as it exits the EU to make things worse for the future.

Tom Arthur: Does Mr McMillan agree that a fitting motto for the UK Government in the whole Brexit process would be “Stop the world—Britain wants to get off”?

Stuart McMillan: Absolutely.

Who genuinely thought that imposing a charge on people who are our neighbours, our friends, our family members or colleagues, and active members of society, such as teachers, nurses, doctors, engineers, footballers, rugby players and many more, was a good thing? Who genuinely thought that imposing a charge on EU nationals would build up some good will during the negotiations? Brexit is serious. It will have a huge effect on the lives of everyone who lives in the four nations that currently make up the UK, as well as on those of people who live in the EU27.

This is not a game of chicken. We are talking about real people with real lives and real futures. Not for one minute do I think that all the Tories in this Parliament supported the proposal. They will have toed the line to support their London masters. I get that—I understand that we have internal party discipline. Every member will get that. However, on such an issue, forcing people who live here—many of whom have been here for decades—to pay for the privilege of being able to remain in their own homes, with their families, in their communities and in their jobs was the worst kind of dog-whistle politics. The Scottish Tories did not need to sign up to that. They could have been different, but they proved that, whether in Scotland or across the UK, the nasty party is well and truly back.

I truly welcome the Prime Minister's U-turn on the £65 fee, but the damage has been done. I am a firm believer that prevention is better than cure. Every Government will make mistakes; this one was a howler of epic proportions. The sour taste will linger for many years, long after Brexit. That comes on top of the Windrush scandal, in which members of the population were told that, if they were different, they would remain different. It stinks and is deplorable. I understand why people were rightly angry, and I understand why people such as the former MSP Christian Allard were so vocal about the scandal. Every Tory who supported the scheme should hang their head in

shame. The Tories need to apologise to our friends, our neighbours and every EU national who lives in and contributes to society, including those among the staff of the Scottish Parliament.

13:13

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I had written a speech, but I have listened carefully to what members have had to say, some of which I accept. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to work together on such issues. We had a lengthy four-hour debate on Brexit the other day. There was a lot of theatre involved, but a lot of sense came out of the debate, too. My colleague Jackson Carlaw spoke about some of the issues that Ms Ewing mentioned to do with how people feel about the process. I share his sentiment and Ms Ewing's sentiment on some of those issues.

There is a lot to agree with in the motion, but there are a few things that I do not agree with. If members will allow me to, I will explain why I did not sign the motion. I do not intend to talk about the wider issues of Brexit, what EU citizenship means to people who are Scottish or British, and what might happen with regard to Scottish independence. I want to talk specifically about the processes by which we will achieve what we all want to achieve, which is to secure the rights of EU citizens.

I welcome the U-turn on the fee. We did not have a specific role to play in that policy: it was a Home Office decision. Did it sit uncomfortably with some members? Perhaps it did. Was the decision to abolish the fee the right one? Yes, it was.

However, I have a conundrum about the process by which we secure EU citizens' rights. Anyone who knows me, and members from across the chamber with whom I have discussions about immigration, including members on the Government front bench, will know that I think that there is a positive case for inward migration to Scotland, and that there is a sensible conversation to be had around that. However, people who are already here, and those who wish to come here after 29 March, need security and certainty that the process that they follow will give them the rights that they need—or, indeed, will maintain those that they already have.

Let me explain why that is important to me. I have lived in Europe—in Spain, the Netherlands and France. I have been through the process of turning up in a new country to live and work, but I have also been through and respected those countries' domestic processes for applying for residency. I went through those processes because I wanted to enjoy the employment benefits that the citizens of those countries enjoy. I wanted to be able to pay tax locally and to be a

meaningful part of the economies of those countries. I have had to apply for identity cards and registration of my citizenship.

This is partly why we are where we are: we are not in the Schengen area, we do not have domestic identity or residency cards, and no other country has ever left the European Union. It is against that backdrop that we have a conundrum about how we will guarantee the rights of people from a union of which we will no longer be a member. The motion

“calls on the UK Government to scrap the settlement scheme for EU citizens.”

If we do so, what legal means would we have available to us to secure the rights of EU citizens who are already here? It is not an automatic process, because the constitutional changes that will have taken place will mean that some form of process is needed.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: I have very little time and a lot more to say.

Annabelle Ewing: You are refusing to take an intervention.

Jamie Greene: For the record, I am not refusing to take an intervention. I will take an intervention if I have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Ewing, all interventions should be through the Presiding Officer. The member has every right not to take an intervention. He only has four minutes or thereabouts, and it is for him to decide.

Jamie Greene: I wish that we had longer. I would love to take an intervention, but I simply do not have time.

If the logic is that there should be no settlement scheme for EU citizens in the UK, surely we, as a Parliament, should be insisting that there be nothing for UK citizens in Europe. Spain has offered reciprocal rights for UK nationals, but has said that they will need to apply for something called a foreigner identity card. What do we do as a Parliament? Do we welcome that, because Spain has offered that reciprocal right, or do we condemn it because it involves a card, a process or some form of registration? That is the conundrum that we face. I want bilateral agreements that secure the rights of UK citizens in the EU, and I want to secure the rights of EU nationals in the UK, but let us ensure that it is as simple, fair and respectful a process—in both directions—as it can and should be.

There is much to agree with in the motion, but I cannot agree that there should be no process whatever, because that would make it difficult to

secure the outcome that I think we collectively want to achieve—to secure the rights of EU citizens who are already here. I want them to stay and I welcome them. I do not believe that any Conservative member does not want them to stay. Any suggestion otherwise is not just unfair, but deeply saddening.

13:18

The Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development (Ben Macpherson): I, too, congratulate Annabelle Ewing on securing this incredibly important debate. I say so with regret, however, because Scotland is a remarkable outward-looking and welcoming European country, and we should not have to have this debate.

My message to EU citizens, as it has been from the majority of members who have spoken, is this: “Scotland is your home. You will always be welcome here. We want you to stay, and the Scottish Government will do all that it can to support you to stay.” We can none of us say that enough to our EU citizen friends, neighbours, colleagues and loved ones.

We must never lose sight of the fact that behind all the talk of amendments, withdrawal agreements, negotiations and abolition of fees lie people whose lives are directly affected by the situation. Tove Macdonald was mentioned; after 59 years of living in Scotland, her awful situation is that she must now apply for the right to live in her home. When I saw Tove’s interview, I thought of so many other people—from Poland, Italy, France and other EU countries—whom I have met and spoken to over recent months and years. They are real people with real stories—people who have made their homes here, have brought up their families here, pay their taxes and are valued members of their communities but are now being forced to apply for the right to stay in their homes. That cannot be right.

In response, the Scottish Government is clear about the need to ensure that EU citizens feel valued and welcomed in Scotland. That has been at the heart of everything that we have done since the EU referendum in 2016—but we are working against the backdrop of a deeply unhelpful narrative from the UK Government. Its hostile environment policy is hurting people.

Before Christmas, Parliament debated the rights of EU citizens, and one of our key asks was that the settled status fee be abolished—an argument that was rejected at the time by the UK Government. However, within a short time, and after pressure from the Scottish Government, this Parliament—with key partners including

the 3 million—played a central role in getting the fee for settled status scrapped.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I have been listening to the debate. I, too, am concerned for the many EU citizens in my region. Members have been talking about the settled status scheme; I am also interested in the seasonal agricultural workers scheme that is being developed for fruit and vegetable pickers. Does the minister acknowledge that the UK Government's design of the seasonal agricultural workers scheme has completely disregarded dairy farms, 48 per cent of which are in the south-west of Scotland? The work on dairy farms is not seasonal—it is all year round, and the jobs probably do not even meet the tier 2 £30,000 salary requirement for staying in this country.

Ben Macpherson: I thank Emma Harper for that question. The seasonal agricultural workers scheme is useful in some ways, but it is inadequate and will not be a substitute for freedom of movement. That is why the Scottish Government is pressing the UK Government to rethink its white paper proposals on immigration. We are also putting forward proposals for flexibility for devolution within a UK framework, in order that we obtain solutions for Scotland in the post-Brexit environment. We do not want Brexit to happen; we would prefer to maintain freedom of movement, but in the face of what is coming, we are trying our best to stand up for the interests of Scotland, including the interests of dairy farmers.

With regard to the settled status scheme, let me make it clear that the scrapping of the fee was just a small concession from Westminster. Demanding that our colleagues, neighbours, friends and family members pay to remain in their homes should never have been suggested in the first place. The proposal to charge a fee was always unacceptable, but it is not the only issue with the settled status scheme.

EU citizens should not have to apply. I noticed that one of the Tory members talked about “the applicant” a number of times. They are not applicants. They are people who are embedded in our communities and are welcome citizens of our country. People should not have to apply for the rights that they already enjoy. To answer one Conservative member's question, I say that they should and could instead have automatically been granted settled status, unless there was a very good reason not to grant it. The responsibility for obtaining that status should lie not with individuals, but with the UK Government that has imposed this wrong-headed scheme.

The UK Government could and should have chosen to secure EU citizens' rights as a priority after the vote for Brexit—separate to any withdrawal agreement. It could have done that: it

could have led on it and it would have been the right thing to do.

Jamie Greene: I hear what the minister is saying. By that logic, is it the Scottish Government's official policy that the EU27 should—without any process or registration—give automatic residency to all UK nationals who are living in Europe at the moment?

Ben Macpherson: My understanding is that the matter became a live issue in the negotiations only because it was one of the Prime Minister's red lines. If the UK Government had shown leadership—ethical leadership, in particular—by securing the rights of EU citizens, she could have encouraged the remaining EU27 to do the same. That should have been done years ago; it is certainly something that we would back now. The security of EU citizens in all EU member states should be paramount. We absolutely support that.

Despite assurances from the Home Office that the settled status scheme would be simple, with a presumption of acceptance, there are serious and mounting concerns about its operation. The UK Government has left a vacuum where it should be providing information, advice and support to EU citizens across the UK.

Many EU citizens simply do not know that they need to apply, because the UK Government has not done nearly enough to raise awareness of the scheme or to provide much-needed assistance with applications. That is why, in the weeks and months ahead, the Scottish Government will redouble its efforts to reach out and provide EU citizens with the information and support that they need. We have already made provision for an advice and support service to be delivered through Citizens Advice Scotland, which will provide assistance over and above anything that the UK Government is doing, despite that clearly being the UK Government's responsibility.

The concerns do not end there. The UK Government's insistence that all applications be made online does not work for significant numbers of people. The issue with Apple devices not being able to be used for applying for the scheme has been much debated. However, for many people it is not a question of which device they use; it is about having the digital skills and confidence to trust their future to an online application.

I know that many EU citizens are concerned about their ability to access services, housing and employment in the future. I hear consistently that many individuals want physical proof of their status—something that they can show in order to evidence their rights. The UK Government should listen and, in addition to the proposed electronic proof of status, provide individuals with a physical document evidencing their status. Again, that

could have been proactively provided through a declarative process, rather than an application process.

The Home Office says that the vast majority of those who have applied during the test phase have been granted status, but there is no information on the number of people who were incorrectly granted pre-settled status instead of settled status. The Home Office must look at that as a matter of urgency. We acknowledge that those who have been granted pre-settled status face many more months, or even years, of uncertainty. The onus will be on them to remember, perhaps in several years, that they need to reapply for settled status. It is incumbent on the UK Government to make sure that that does not happen. The Home Office must notify individuals when they become eligible to apply for settled status.

My overarching concern is the same as that of Tove Macdonald—a grandmother who fears being the victim of another Windrush scandal. The UK scheme is unprecedented in its nature and scale. Entrusting its delivery to the department that was responsible for Windrush is wrong-headed in the extreme. The UK Government must look again at the fundamentals of the EU settled status scheme and address the urgent concerns that I and many others have raised, all of which could critically undermine the ability of our friends, neighbours, colleagues and family members to continue their lives here in Scotland.

I will conclude by saying again that this Parliament, and Scotland, welcomes and supports the many EU citizens who have built their lives here and call Scotland their home. We are better for having them here. We know that they love Scotland: we love them, too, and we want them to stay and continue to feel welcome as part of our communities.

13:28

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Economy

Crofters' Incomes (Impact of Wildlife)

1. **Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to a recent news release by the Scottish Crofting Federation stating that many crofters believe that their incomes have been significantly affected by wildlife. (S5O-02955)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): I recognise that some wildlife species can have an economic impact on crofters. The Scottish Government works collaboratively with Scottish Natural Heritage and a range of stakeholders to manage and reduce adverse impacts of wildlife on farming and crofting in Scotland. A range of strategies and control measures is in place to help support crofters, for example the sea eagle management scheme.

Alexander Stewart: What steps will the Scottish Government take to ensure that a balance can be reached, so that wildlife does not have a detrimental impact on crofting incomes?

Fergus Ewing: The member raises a fair point. There needs to be a balance. I just came from a meeting with Malcolm and Chris Cameron from the monitor farm in Lochaber, who mentioned that sea eagles are causing the loss of their stock of lambs. I am aware that it is a very serious issue and there is a sea eagle management scheme in place. Finding a balance is the right measure and I am glad that the member has approached the matter in that way. We need to constantly ensure that the measures are sufficient to allow farmers to manage their stock and protect it against what is a source of not just financial loss but personal loss and misery for farmers who care deeply about their livestock.

Sheep Farming (Brexit)

2. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out of the potential impact on sheep farming of Brexit. (S5O-02956)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): A no-deal Brexit is by far the biggest threat to farming and to our successful food and drink sector. A wealth of Government and independent research concludes that the sheep sector will be worse off in every possible alternative trade arrangement.

Emma Harper: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, the United Kingdom Government promised, and has failed, to publish its tariff rate quotas. What impact will that failure have on our trade with the European Union of key food products such as Scotch lamb?

Fergus Ewing: It is disgraceful and quite extraordinary that we are so close to 29 March yet still do not know what the tariffs will be. As I understand it, they were supposed to have been published for the past three weeks, but publication has been delayed by the UK Government. It is a very serious point. The sector of farming—and, arguably, of the whole economy—that is most at risk is sheep farming. That is because the EU is a vital export market and, if there is no deal by 29 March, as things stand, we will not even have the legal right to export at all. Even if that right is secured, the tariffs will be above 40 per cent. If the pound depreciates as experts on the economy believe, the combination of the depreciation of the pound and the imposition of a tax of 40 per cent will see a massive loss of market in Europe and a loss of income to primary producers. The saddest thing of all is that Michael Gove understands and agrees with all that, but the UK Government will still not remove a no-deal Brexit from the table. It is not too late to do that and I repeat the First Minister's call urging the UK Government to do so, not least for the sake of our hill farmers in Scotland.

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): As the cabinet secretary will be aware, the UK Government confirmed this week that, because of the uncertainty of Brexit, it is unlikely to introduce a change to sheep ageing for the purposes of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies control. Under the proposed new system, sheep producers would have received far greater certainty on the price that they receive from the abattoir for sheep. Will he take the matter up with his good friend Michael Gove, to see whether the UK Government could instead go back to the previous arrangement that the UK Government assured us that it would achieve?

Fergus Ewing: I am glad that Mr Scott has raised this important matter. We have been working with the UK Government to remove the teething test. I am not a farmer myself so I have had to learn about this test, but every single lamb needs to have their mouth opened to check whether their adult teeth have come through as a proxy to tell how old they are. If a farmer has 500 sheep scattered all over mountains and hills, that is not the easiest thing to do.

My colleague Mairi Gougeon has been working with the UK Government on this and we were confident that a scheme would be agreed to remove the need for the test in a way that was

perfectly practical and consistent with animal welfare standards. However, in the past few days, without consulting us, the UK Government has said that it will not go ahead with such a scheme. I find that extraordinary and I very much hope that the UK Government will reconsider its approach. In the meantime, we are having discussions with the National Sheep Association and others. I am keen to keep Mr Scott and others advised on how those discussions proceed. There may be difficulties in pursuing a Scotland-alone project in this case; it would be far preferable if there were a UK solution for the matter.

Wholesale Food Sector (No-deal Brexit)

3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what preparations it is making for business continuity with wholesale food providers in the event of a no-deal Brexit. (S5O-02957)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): As it will for all parts of the food and drink supply chain in Scotland, a no-deal Brexit is likely to have serious consequences for the wholesale sector. As it happens, I had a meeting just this morning with the Scottish Wholesale Association, as the member may know. In an interesting discussion the association told me specifically about the disadvantages that are already being experienced because of the possibility of no deal.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Bidfood is a large wholesale provider that is based in Newbridge, in my constituency. These are anxious times for that company. Can the Scottish Government reassure Bidfood that it will get information as soon as it becomes available for contingency planning and that the Scottish Government will do what it can to ensure continuity in the supply chain so that Bidfood can continue trading in the way that it does now?

Fergus Ewing: I am happy to provide that assurance, which I provided to Bidfood's representative at the meeting this morning.

The wholesale sector says that storage costs are already rising and there is hardly any, if any, chilled storage capacity. There are already price impacts and some instances of stockpiling by major players. I agreed that we would of course keep the wholesale sector, which is an important sector of our economy in the member's constituency among others, fully advised as far as we are able to. However, we can advise the sector of information only once we have it. Sadly, there has been an information deficit from the United Kingdom Government of late.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will have seen

reports that some overseas customers have already started buying produce from elsewhere. Does he share my concern about the impact that that could have on exporters and on livestock farmers in particular who, according to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, could face European Union tariffs of 70 per cent on beef and 45 per cent on lamb post-Brexit? What is the Scottish Government doing to help our exporters of food and livestock find alternative markets in that scenario?

Fergus Ewing: We are in regular contact with exporters and their representatives; I have had weekly discussions with them. There is a Scottish Government resilience room—SGoRR—meeting this afternoon, which my colleague Mairi Gougeon will be at. My officials are in regular contact with companies and we provide export assistance in a number of ways, including an element of financial support.

However, there is only so much that we can do and the problems are so serious that—frankly—it may be impossible to mitigate them. The consequences of no deal, particularly for the red meat sector, would be extremely serious. That is why no deal must be removed from the table. It can be removed and not to do so is not just a run-of-the-mill Government mistake. There is no Government in the world that does not make mistakes, but this is negligence, recklessness and culpability, and it needs to be sorted now.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Any delay in transporting fresh food would have a disastrous effect, with whole consignments being lost. What contingencies are being put in place to protect wholesalers and producers who stand to lose those consignments?

Fergus Ewing: Rhoda Grant is quite right. The export of, for example, shellfish from the Highlands and Islands, which is the area that we both represent, is subject to very tight timelines. The supply to markets in Italy and Spain, for example, has timelines that mean that, if there is a delay of longer than a few hours, the whole consignment becomes valueless.

Therefore, we have done a power of work to try to ensure that drivers have permits to drive in Europe—there is a real problem with that. Also, the aquaculture sector says that the number of export health certificates required would rise from 50,000 to 200,000, at an additional cost of £15 million, which is quite ridiculous. We have worked with local authorities to have a contingency plan for export health certificates, which are dealt with by environmental health officers, to deal with a four-fold increase in workload, and we have undertaken other measures to ensure that information is passed out to all processors, so far as we have it.

There is only so much that the Government can do to mitigate and anticipate without the hard information that we need from the UK Government about the impact of whatever it finally decides to do. It is impossible to fully prevent the enormous damage that will be caused, not least to our inshore fishermen and all those who rely on them.

Red Meat Industry

4. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of the red meat industry and what was discussed. (S5O-02958)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): I regularly meet representatives from the red meat sector. Last week, I met the National Sheep Association Scotland and Scotbeef, and in the week beginning 18 February, there was a debate between me and Michael Gove, which NFU Scotland, the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers, the National Sheep Association and Quality Meat Scotland all attended. On 19 February, I chaired a food resilience group meeting, at which I held discussions with the industry. Prior to that, I spoke at the NFUS annual general meeting, and last Saturday night, I had the pleasure of dinner at the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association. At lunch time today, I met several farmers in the meat sector from Lochaber.

Monica Lennon: I thank the cabinet secretary for that detailed answer. Some producers have adopted alternative treatments to nitrites to process meats, in light of the 2015 World Health Organization report that concluded that nitrites can cause cancer. However, nitrites continue to be widely used, and a recent investigation by *The Herald on Sunday* found that three quarters of Scotland's councils include nitrite meats on school menus. What is the Scottish Government doing to help the industry to remove nitrites from processed meats?

Fergus Ewing: I understand that my colleagues Mr Swinney and perhaps Mr FitzPatrick are dealing with that primarily. It is not my portfolio area. I am advised that nitrites play an important role in food safety and in helping to reduce the growth of harmful micro-organisms. There are, however, strict maximum permitted limits that can be used by manufacturers in ham, bacon or gammon product recipes.

The European Food Safety Authority reviewed nitrites as food additives in April 2017 and concluded that there was no need to change statutory safe levels. Scottish red meat is a completely appropriate food to serve in school and does not have added nitrites. I know that those matters are under consideration by Mr Swinney, following an extensive consultation that took place

last August. We are analysing the responses on those matters carefully. I am sure that Ms Lennon will contact Mr Swinney to get the up-to-date detail on that.

Impact of 20mph Speed Limit on Rural Economy

5. Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the rural secretary has had with the transport secretary regarding the impact on the rural economy of the proposals in the Restricted Roads (20 mph speed limit) (Scotland) Bill. (S5O-02959)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): To date, I have not had any formal discussions with the transport secretary regarding the impact of the bill. However, the member will be aware from the evidence that my colleague Michael Matheson, the cabinet secretary responsible, gave to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee yesterday that Transport Scotland officials are working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Society of Chief Officers of Transport in Scotland to better understand the current barriers to implementation, including the traffic regulation order process, in order to assist and encourage more local authorities to introduce 20mph limits and ensure greater consistency across authorities.

Mike Rumbles: Yesterday, the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee heard evidence that the costs of the bill would impact disproportionately across rural Scotland and could lead to the expenditure of tens of millions of pounds of public money. In the interests of joined-up government, will the cabinet secretary express to his Cabinet colleagues those concerns about the disproportionate financial impact on the rural economy?

Fergus Ewing: Yes, I am happy to relay Mr Rumbles's comments. I will study the *Official Report* of the evidence that was given yesterday so that I fully understand it—as yet, I have not had an opportunity so to do. I am sure that Mr Matheson will want to give those matters very careful consideration indeed.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): In that discussion between the two cabinet secretaries, will the rural secretary acknowledge that the financial modelling for the bill was developed with the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland and that it fully acknowledged the differing characteristics of rural roads? Will the cabinet secretary also acknowledge that dozens of rural community councils support the bill and that a significant number of councils, including Highland Council, Shetland Islands Council, Orkney Islands Council, Angus Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council,

Stirling Council and many urban councils, back the bill because they believe that it will be a cheaper and more effective way to save lives?

Fergus Ewing: I have not studied the modelling to which the member refers, but I am sure that Mr Matheson will give serious consideration to those matters. I listened carefully to what the First Minister said in response to the member's colleague Alison Johnstone at First Minister's question time today. It is appropriate that careful consideration is given to all of those matters, for which, as the member knows, I am not directly responsible.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary may be aware of evidence yesterday from Police Scotland that enforcing 20mph zones is not necessarily a priority and that, in rural areas, the majority of accidents happen on country roads where drivers drive at high speeds. Does he therefore agree that any shift in focus from those accident hotspots would affect the overall efficacy of the bill and the policy?

Fergus Ewing: I would need to think about that, so I will not give the member a direct answer, if he does not mind. However, I will say that I have always thought that it is very sensible to listen carefully to what police road traffic experts have to say about road safety. They have to deal with matters that none of us would wish to deal with, and particularly the horrific consequences of road traffic incidents where there is loss of life. As individuals and citizens, and as representatives of the people of Scotland, we need to do a whole raft of things to ensure that road safety is given the priority that it rightly deserves.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): With regard to road haulage, can the cabinet secretary advise how many ECMT—European Conference of Ministers of Transport—permits road hauliers in Scotland have applied for and how many they have received back? What impact might that situation have on post-Brexit export and import of key foodstuffs, including in relation to wholesale providers and seafood and fish exporters such as those in north-east Scotland?

Fergus Ewing: We are worried about that matter. We understand that businesses in Scotland have applied for 680 permits for individual lorries that, as I understand it, in most cases are currently used for export purposes. From those 680 applications, only 48 permits have been received, so 632 were unsuccessful. That is a stark illustration of the lunacy of not ruling out a no-deal Brexit. Without those permits, the drivers will not be able to drive to Europe with our shellfish, lamb and other exports. That is a ludicrous and preposterous situation, and I am grateful that the member has given me the opportunity to highlight it.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I am pleased that the minister knew the answer to that question.

Tree Planting Targets

6. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in meeting its tree planting targets and creating 10,000 hectares of new trees in 2019. (S5O-02960)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): We are making good progress.

Jamie Greene: Is it good, but undefined, progress? Perhaps I can drill down a little further. The Parliament agreed to the sale of national forest estate land, provided that the revenues that were received would be properly reinvested, so perhaps the cabinet secretary could be more specific in his answer to my supplementary question. Given that 50,000 hectares of land has been sold, how much land has been acquired—in numerical terms? Of the more than £100 million of revenue that has been raised through the sale of that land, how much has been spent on acquiring land and planting trees?

Fergus Ewing: I gave a direct answer to the question that was asked. We are making good progress.

Mr Greene now raises an entirely different issue. As I understand it, I have already provided that information to the committee of which he is a member. I do not know whether the convener has passed on the letter, but it is there.

The apparent attack on Forestry Commission Scotland and Forest Enterprise Scotland seems to be completely groundless. They are reputable, responsible bodies that do a great job and which will be fully devolved very shortly. They sell and purchase land for a variety of purposes, and they invest the money for the purposes for which they were established: to promote forestry in Scotland. If the member is suggesting that money is siphoned off for other irrelevant purposes, I am afraid that there is no evidence to back up that suggestion. I refer Mr Greene to the letter that has answered the matter in great detail.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): How does land coverage by forestry compare in each country of the United Kingdom? How much of the UK's new planting is done in Scotland?

Fergus Ewing: From memory, I think that forestry cover accounts for 18 to 19 per cent of land in Scotland. The figure is significantly less down south so, proportionately, forestry is much more important in this country than it is in the rest of the UK. I am very pleased that we are making

good progress in the forestry sector, which is playing a big part in helping to provide employment in rural communities. A couple of weeks ago, I was pleased to meet a series of young apprentices who are being taken on by the public sector in forestry at Balloch. I think that the industry will be taking on many more young people, which is good and a sign of its success.

Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019 [Draft]

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-16170, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019.

14:23

The Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy (Kate Forbes): The purpose of today's debate on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019 is to seek Parliament's approval of the guaranteed allocations of revenue funding to individual local authorities for the next budget year. It is also to seek agreement to the allocation of additional funding for 2018-19 that has been identified since the 2018 order was approved at this time last year. Although elements of my speech and the debate will be quite technical, this is about ensuring that local authorities can deliver real services for real people the length and breadth of the country.

The 2019-20 budget delivers a fair settlement for local government under the most challenging circumstances. The funding package in 2019-20 provides local government with a real-terms increase in revenue and capital funding to invest in our public services and to deliver our key priority of achieving sustainable economic growth in partnership with local authorities.

In 2019-20, the Scottish Government will provide councils with a total funding package that is worth £11.2 billion. That includes revenue funding of £10.1 billion and support for capital expenditure of £1.1 billion. Today's order seeks Parliament's approval for the distribution and payment of £9.5 billion out of the revenue total of £10.1 billion. The remainder will be paid out as specific grant funding or other funding and will be distributed later, as agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Next year's overall funding package includes an additional £90 million to protect spending on day-to-day services, which was announced on 31 January during the Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill stage 1 debate; an additional £40 million of support for social care, for the implementation of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 and to extend free personal care for under-65s; an additional £120 million from health to local government, to support health and social care; an additional £210 million of revenue and £25 million of capital, to support the expansion of early learning and childcare to 1,140 hours by 2020; an additional £88 million to maintain the pupil teacher ratio and secure a place for every probationer who requires one; and the

flexibility to allow local authorities to increase council tax by up to 3 per cent in real terms, which is worth an estimated £124 million.

The settlement and the other sources of income that are available to councils through increases in council tax mean that the overall potential increase in spending power to support local authority services amounts to £621.4 million.

An additional £65 million of revenue funding will be distributed once the necessary information becomes available, and that will be included for approval in the 2020 order.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The minister has listed the moneys that are available. Why, then, is every council cutting millions of pounds from its budget? Why are some councils making hundreds of people redundant?

Kate Forbes: Of course, at stages 1 and 3, the member voted against the Budget (Scotland) (No 3) Bill, which is ensuring that additional resources are going to local authorities. That is real money going to real people for real services the length and breadth of the country. The member need not believe me; he can believe the Scottish Parliament information centre's independent analysis, which makes it clear that the overall funding going to local authorities is going up. He can also look at the comments made by the president of COSLA after stage 1, when she welcomed the empowerment of local authorities as part of the budget.

We work in partnership with COSLA and local authorities, recognising that they have commitments and that they have identified challenges, and we have ensured that, in this funding package, the finances are available to deliver on the many priorities that I have outlined. Those include extending free personal care to under-65s, expanding early learning and childcare and ensuring that local authorities have the basic capital that they need to invest in infrastructure. As I said, there is undistributed revenue funding. It is important that, when it comes to distributing it through the teachers induction scheme, discretionary housing payments and mental health school counselling services, we do so in conjunction with COSLA.

In addition to the revenue funding that is covered by the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019, specific revenue funding amounting to just over £507 million—including, as members will be aware, £120 million of pupil equity funding, £86.5 million of criminal justice social work funding and funding for the early learning and childcare expansion, for the northern isles ferries and for Gaelic—is paid directly by the relevant policy areas under separate legislation. The 2019 order also seeks approval for £54.1

million-worth of changes to funding allocations for last year, which have been made to fund a number of agreed spending commitments.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Obviously, the minister understands—we all do—that one council has to be at the bottom of the league table, but Aberdeen City Council has been in that position for a number of years. When does she expect Aberdeen City Council to receive a fairer funding settlement that will move it off the bottom of the table?

Kate Forbes: On the contrary, all local authorities receive their needs-based formula share of the total funding that is available from the Scottish Government, and they keep every penny of non-domestic rates to ensure that there is adequate funding. Although every local authority probably has a unique case to make on why it should get additional funding, it is up to COSLA to consider the distribution methodology. If all local authorities could agree to revisit that methodology, that would be a totally different question.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): The minister is technically correct in saying that councils keep every single penny of additional business rates income, but does she accept that the Government claws back every single penny of additional business rates income from the general revenue grant?

Kate Forbes: It is technically correct to say that Aberdeen City Council and every other council keeps every penny of non-domestic rates. That is reflected in the funding settlement that they receive and the money that they have with which to deliver their core services. Every local authority has the ability to keep every penny of council tax and non-domestic rates, and the general revenue grant reflects a commitment to their keeping those rates.

On capital funding, although it is not covered by the order, the settlement for local government includes a capital budget of £1 billion, which is an increase of £207 million, or 24 per cent, on last year's budget. That represents a significant boost to support local authorities' investment in their schools, roads and other infrastructure.

I have already touched briefly on business rates. The distributable amount of non-domestic rates income has been set at £2.8 billion in 2019-20. I have said this already, but I confirm again that all local authorities will retain every single penny of non-domestic rates income that is collected in their area, and the Scottish Government will continue to guarantee each local authority the combined general revenue grant plus non-domestic rates income.

I realise that the debate can be quite technical, but what we are doing will ensure that local

authorities have the funding to deliver the services that need to be delivered to the people of this country, who rely on them day in, day out.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

14:31

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019 comes at the tail end of the budget process. Given that we have spent weeks debating the Scottish Government's tax and spending choices, it might seem at this point that there is little more to add. Nevertheless, this is still an important part of the parliamentary process.

The order before us allocates funding to each of Scotland's 32 local authorities. We do not intend to oppose it, as that would simply deprive local government of much-needed resources for the coming year, but we have concerns about the overall allocation of cash to local councils.

I will start by being generous to the Scottish Government. As the chamber knows, I am a very fair-minded person, and, as such, I accept—with one important caveat that I will come to—the minister's basic proposition that overall support from the Scottish Government to local councils has increased compared with last year. According to SPICe, it is up by 1.1 per cent in real terms, which amounts to some £110 million for revenue, and, once the capital budget is included, the increase is 2.8 per cent in real terms, or some £298.9 million.

However, that is not the full story, as the Scottish Government well knows. Some of that additional money is ring fenced for specific purposes and cannot be spent flexibly by local councils. Although the total budget has increased, the core budget, which councils have discretion over how to spend, is down on last year's budget by 2.5 per cent in real terms, or £230 million. Those are the figures from SPICe, and they are indisputable.

Mike Rumbles: Given that the Conservatives obviously do not agree with the order, I am puzzled by Mr Fraser's statement that they are not going to vote against it. After all, if they voted against it and it did not pass, the Government would have to introduce a new one.

Murdo Fraser: I think that it is reasonable for us to abstain on this. The Liberal Democrats might want to vote it down, but if the whole Parliament were to do so, there would be a real danger that councils, which in any case have set their budgets for the coming year, would be left in a black hole. I am not sure, therefore, that voting the order down

is a particularly wise tactic—given that it is being put forward by the Liberal Democrats, it is not going to matter anyway.

Having set out in a very fair-minded fashion the overall picture, I am sure that the minister, who is equally fair minded, will, in her winding-up speech, accept the basic facts as I have set them out, including the fact that the core grant is down. In case there is any doubt about that, I point out that we are seeing it right across the country. If we open any local newspaper in any part of the country, we will see councils having to make cuts to the number of teachers, the length of the school week and school-crossing patrollers as well as closures of public conveniences, libraries and leisure centres. Those choices have not been made lightly by councils; they have been forced on councils by the Scottish Government.

At the same time, councils are having to choose whether to increase taxes and charges. Let us not forget that the Scottish Government was elected on a manifesto commitment that council tax increases would not be above 3 per cent, yet we now know that at least 11 councils of all political persuasions are going to increase their council tax by the maximum permitted level of 4.79 per cent.

Kate Forbes: Will the member explain why Tory councillors across the country have supported the maximum council tax rises?

Murdo Fraser: I do not know whether the minister has checked, but the finance secretary's council—Scottish National Party-run Renfrewshire Council—is to increase council tax by the maximum of 4.79 per cent. I will not criticise any council that has, when given an unpalatable choice between increasing taxes and cutting vital services, made a difficult choice to protect the services that local people rely on.

Councils are looking at what other revenue they might raise—for example, from a tourist tax, which the SNP said it would never introduce, or from the new car park tax, which would hit the lowest earners hardest as it is a regressive form of taxation. Councils are concerned that, if they decide not to introduce the new charges, the Scottish Government will penalise them for that in future years. It would be good to hear confirmation in the minister's winding-up speech that the Scottish Government will not seek to claw back money from councils that choose not to impose the tourist tax or the car park charge.

That is all against a background of the Scottish Government's block grant from Westminster going up in real terms compared with last year, so there was no need to make such cuts to local government funding and no need for the hard choices to be forced on local authorities.

We would have taken a different approach. It was interesting that the finance secretary said at the weekend that an independent Scotland would eliminate its deficit in "a few years" by growing the economy more quickly. That gives rise to the question why the Scottish Government is not growing the economy more quickly now, given all the powers that are at its disposal. If the Scottish Government thinks that it can eliminate a deficit of £13 billion in a few years by growing the economy, it can hardly say that it is unreasonable for us to argue that, by growing the economy just a bit faster than it is currently growing, we could generate additional tax revenues to provide better funding for local authorities.

We should never forget that, under the fiscal framework, it is our economic performance relative to the rest of the United Kingdom that matters. The Scottish Fiscal Commission's projections show that, for each of the next four years, economic growth in Scotland and income tax revenues as a consequence are expected to lag behind the UK average. That means that we will have less money to spend, which is why the focus on growing the economy is vital.

As I said at the start, we will not oppose the order, because we do not want to penalise local government. However, that does not mean that we support the funding settlement. It will have a negative impact on councils across Scotland. We are already seeing increased council tax, increased charges and poorer services, and the responsibility for that rests firmly at the door of the SNP Government.

14:38

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): The minister tried to put a good gloss on the figures that are being presented in the local government settlement, but the reality is that, despite the money that will be allocated as a result of the order, councils face increased responsibilities for delivery on childcare and through health and social care partnerships. That means that core funding for day-to-day responsibilities that councils have had to deliver year on year will reduce by £230 million in real terms.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The member seems to criticise the increase in childcare provision. Will he confirm that he opposes the 1,140 hours of childcare?

James Kelly: What Mr Mason says is inaccurate. I merely described the increased responsibilities for childcare delivery that councils will have; I was criticising the £230 million decrease in core funding.

The reality is that the funding that the Government has allocated means that councils

are having to make cuts to their budgets. We can see the evidence of that across the country. That is undermining some of the Government's main policy commitments. The Government is committed to creating jobs and growing the economy, which Scottish Labour agrees with, but analysis from Unison shows that since 2011, 30,000 jobs have been lost. That is 30,000 fewer people working in communities, local businesses and shops and making a contribution. That is detrimental to the economy.

The Government and the First Minister have made great play of education being the number 1 priority. However, in Dundee, the education budget has been cut by 3 per cent, which will reduce teacher numbers by 26 in that city council alone. In Moray, library closures are proposed—on world book day, of all days. That undermines the educational effort that the Government has been so keen to promote and that Scottish Labour supports.

The Government is also, rightly, keen to support vulnerable people in Scotland. However, in Clackmannanshire, support to citizens advice bureaux and food banks will end, undermining help for vulnerable people. Health and wellbeing is another big policy area for the Government. However, in Moray, we see that the sport development programme will be closed down. That undermines efforts to promote health and wellbeing and tackle issues such as obesity. In several key policy areas, the local government settlement will undermine the Government's aim to make progress and achieve its targets.

As Murdo Fraser pointed out, we are now reaching the end of the process and it is useful to consider how we can move forward. Throughout the budget process, Labour has consistently argued that we should be more progressive on taxation. This is the first year of the new budget process, which tries to take a longer-term view of the budget and it is fair to say that it is still settling in. In the year ahead, we need to avoid the approach where all the budget effort is concentrated between December and February.

Kate Forbes: On that point, and in relation to parties making budget proposals, costing them and being clear about the tax proposition, there are many things in our budget and the Labour Party might welcome some of them, so how does Labour suggest that we improve the budget process when it comes to next year's party negotiations?

James Kelly: I am glad that the minister made that intervention, because I am just coming to that point. The reality of the budget negotiation process this year was that the Government focused its efforts on the Greens because it had concluded

that that was the party with which it was best placed to do a deal.

I met the cabinet secretary and outlined Labour's budget priorities and the areas where I thought that tax should be more progressive in order to fund them. However, the cabinet secretary afforded me only 10 minutes. That does not show proper respect for the process.

We must all acknowledge that, year on year, local government funding has been reduced, which has made it difficult for local communities. If we want to adopt a different approach that will help local government, as well as helping the Scottish Government to achieve its policy objectives, the negotiations and discussions need to start earlier. I am prepared to be part of that. The Government must respect all the Opposition parties in the Parliament and not focus on just one.

Kate Forbes: Their proposals must have substance.

James Kelly: I take the point, but the Government needs to respect the other parties in those discussions.

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Mr Kelly.

James Kelly: A 10-minute discussion is simply disrespectful; it is not taking the process seriously. Let us have a different approach from everyone next year.

14:44

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): First, I thank James Kelly for his comments regarding the budget process and negotiations. As he will be well aware, I outlined my thoughts about that in the stage 3 debate and I hope that we can work together, if not to ensure that all parties support the budget next year, then to give a far greater prospect of the different priorities that different parties attach to the budget being secured.

As Murdo Fraser said, this is an important debate. Although it comes at the end of the process, we are asked to approve an order that allocates almost £9.5 billion to local government. As the minister said, that money will be used to deliver a wide range of vital public services, from education to social care, leisure, recreation, transport and housing.

As members know, following last year's budget, the Greens made it clear that no negotiations could take place this year unless a serious, credible and substantive process was begun to increase the financial autonomy of local authorities, reform local taxation, shift the balance of funding from the centre to the local and put in

place for local government the same sort of fiscal framework that exists between the UK and Scotland in relation to devolved budgets.

That is why, on 21 February last year, we wrote to the First Minister to outline why we need local tax reform. It is why, last March, we published a paper outlining what a fiscal framework for local government might look like. It is why I will introduce a member's bill to incorporate the European Charter of Local Self-Government into Scots law, and it is also why we will support the motion, as we agreed a deal with the Scottish Government to do so. In any event, to vote against the motion is to deny revenue support to local government.

Following the Greens' engagement with the budget process, the settlement mitigates some of the planned cuts to the general revenue grant and distributable NDR. It does not eliminate cuts, but that is not for want of trying. This year's negotiations were genuinely difficult, and those parties with alternative ideas about how things could realistically have turned out differently need to reflect on how much effort was made and what they might have achieved that we could not.

I stress that the settlement is not a funding allocation that we would like to vote for. It is fundamentally wrong that so much of the revenue and capital budgets of local government is determined by this Parliament. In 2014, COSLA's commission on strengthening local democracy published its final report, in which it argued that

"The case for much stronger local democracy is founded on the simple premise that it is fundamentally better for decisions about these aspirations to be made by those that are most affected by them."

That is a familiar argument—I am sure that the minister will recognise it from the 2014 independence debate, when much the same argument was made by those who supported Scottish independence. However, for more than 50 years, local democracy in Scotland has been eroded to the point where Scotland is one of the least democratic countries in Europe, with the weakest structure of local governance and the least fiscal freedom. Across most European countries, at least 50 per cent of the budgets of municipalities and communes is raised locally. That delivers a sense of accountability that is entirely missing in Scotland and means that the local government politicians who decide about raising and spending money are elected by people who meet them every day, on the street, in the shops and in the school playground.

It is a particular affront to local democracy that the limited and regressive tax power that it has—the council tax—remains the most regressive tax in the UK, is based on a tax base that was last assessed 25 years ago, and has in place rate

capping that in my view is unlawful and would not be allowed in most other European countries.

I do not feel comfortable sitting in this Parliament and voting on how much money local government should receive. However, we are where we are, we reached a deal, and we will support the order at decision time.

14:49

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): This year was supposed to mark significant movement on the reform of local government finance. It was supposed to empower local councils and mark the end of harsh budgets. It was also supposed to mark the end of the council tax, but the council tax has not been scrapped—it has been increased. That is Green Party folly number 1 in the budget process.

The budgets for councils were set to be cut by £230 million as a result of this budget. The Greens said that that could be fixed with £90 million. That is Green Party folly number 2.

Andy Wightman: Will Willie Rennie take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

Social care budgets are under threat to the tune of £50 million. Apparently, that is flexibility, but it could be a cut to social care. That is Green Party folly number 3.

Andy Wightman: Will the member take an intervention now?

Willie Rennie: I will take one in a second.

What about the supposed new tax powers that were dressed up as reform? That is the grandest folly of them all. Handing councils a bunch of taxes that they do not want, that will not work and that will not raise the money that they need is certainly not reform. It is another example of this Government treating councils with disrespect. The Greens have sold out local government, because they are too afraid to stand up to their allies in the SNP.

Andy Wightman: Mr Rennie mentioned the council tax. He is well aware that it is defined in law and that primary legislation would be required to get rid of it, so there was never any prospect that this budget would scrap the council tax. The budget deal reached an agreement and I hope that Willie Rennie and his party will join us in sitting down to agree a future that can lead to published legislation and a commitment to legislate in two and a half years' time.

Willie Rennie: Mr Wightman predicted what I was about to raise.

The Greens sold out for a ropery promise on local government finance reform, as there is no commitment from the SNP. It is a promise to hold yet more talks and to do some more work, and a promise that new legislation might be possible—possibly after the next election—if there is a possible agreement. If that is a cast-iron agreement, it is very rusty. The Greens should be ashamed for selling out and accepting that deal.

Kate Forbes: Will Willie Rennie take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

The SNP and the Greens tell us that they have got more money for local government, but, if that is the case, why is SNP-run Dundee City Council increasing the cost of breakfast clubs from £1.25 a day to £10 a week? If there is more money for councils, why is Conservative-run Moray Council charging families £370 a year for school transport? If there is more money for councils, why is SNP-run Fife Council slashing education spending by millions of pounds? If the local government settlement is so good, why is SNP-run Falkirk Council increasing charges for childcare and social care meals?

Kate Forbes: What have the Lib Dems delivered through budgets in the two and a half years of this parliamentary session? The Greens have delivered a lot more than the Lib Dems have.

Willie Rennie: The Greens have sold out local government, while the Liberal Democrats have stood up for a variety of things, including ensuring that mental health services are the top priority, despite the Government's opposition to that proposition.

The Greens have sold out for that ropery promise on local government finance reform. I say to the minister that of course we will work together for change. We want to see the end of the council tax. We want local government finance reform, so that councils have the freedom to raise the majority of the money that they spend, just as the Parliament in Holyrood does.

However, we refuse to be duped again. We wasted our time in the previous talking shop, when the SNP ignored 16 of the 19 recommendations. If, and only if, the SNP sets out precisely what it is prepared to support, and if that support is for substantial change, will we sit down and take part.

We have talked endlessly over the past decade and seen nothing for it. The SNP has shown no signs of changing, and it is about time that it recognised that.

I turn to the subject of Aberdeen and Edinburgh councils, which has been my favourite subject during the past few financial settlements for councils. We were promised that Aberdeen and

Edinburgh councils would receive at least 85 per cent of the national average funding for councils. For years, the SNP flouted that promise and commitment, and provided them with less than 85 per cent of the average. What did the SNP do? It did not give more money to Aberdeen and Edinburgh; instead, it fiddled with the figures and changed the formula. It took out the highest spending councils so that the average is lower. That is a con for Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and the SNP and the Greens should be ashamed of that.

14:54

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Today, Parliament will, I trust, approve the guaranteed 2019-20 revenue funding allocations for local authorities, thereby ensuring that we will deliver the settlement that has been reached through the work that has been undertaken at all three stages of the Scottish budget process.

The Scottish Government is being pushed towards ever more difficult choices when it comes to public spending and finance, thanks to successive Labour, coalition and Tory UK Governments, whose cuts have ensured that we now have a budget that is £2 billion less in real terms than it was in 2010. In that challenging context, the Scottish Government will, in 2019-20, provide councils with funding of £11.2 billion, which is a £287.5 million, or 2.9 per cent, increase on this year.

The settlement will also add £54.1 million to this year's funding, which will allow councils to continue to deliver, to the most vulnerable people in our communities, front-line services in a range of areas, including health and social care, transport, environmental health, leisure, recreation, housing and education.

The funding includes an additional £88 million to maintain pupil to teacher ratios, and £25 million in capital to fulfil our commitment to expanding early learning and childcare to 1,140 hours by 2020. It will finance the new £50 million town centre fund to support economic improvement in our towns and drive inclusive growth.

In the current year, council tax at band D is, on average, £453 a year lower than it is in England and, from April, it will be £456 a year lower than it is south of the border.

Those are just some examples of how the Scottish Government is not determined merely to maintain the status quo, but is working to build a fairer and better Scotland. Of course, some members would rather exclude some funding from their calculations, but funding of important day-to-day services such as nursery provision should never be considered in any other way.

The finance order means that the resource and capital that will be available to North Ayrshire Council will increase by £26.66 million—from £279.842 million to £306.502 million, which is a 9.5 per cent uplift. In Cunninghame North, my constituents will also benefit from increased health spending, as NHS Ayrshire and Arran's budget is to increase by 3.6 per cent to £720 million.

The 2019 budget also seeks to empower local authorities. For example, it will give them the power to apply a transient visitor levy. COSLA made a strong case for councils to have that power, and it was a key issue for the Greens. An amendment to the Transport (Scotland) Bill will also enable local authorities to exercise a workplace parking levy, and devolution of empty property rates relief to local authorities will deliver more fiscal freedom and enable decisions to be made closer to communities.

In recognition of the need for longer-term budget stability for local authorities, the Scottish Government has also committed to working with COSLA to move towards three-year budget settlements from 2020-21, which will furnish councils with the ability to pursue longer-term and more sustainable financial planning. When I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Aileen Campbell, last week about Scottish Government action to protect local government from the near collapse that has been experienced in England and Wales, she pointed out that whereas councils in England and Wales have faced real-terms budget cuts of 28 per cent between 2011 and 2018, the Scottish Government has sought to treat local government fairly.

This week in Cardiff, which has a population of a third of a million people, the Labour Cardiff Council cut 55 jobs, to add to the 1,632 that have been lost in the past seven years. It will cut a further £93 million from its budget over the next three years, adding to the £218 million that has been cut over the past decade. That council will also put the council tax up by 4.9 per cent in April. We would say that Tory austerity is to blame, but even when the Welsh Labour Government is forced to reduce council budgets, I expect Labour MSPs to blame the SNP Government. It is grossly hypocritical for Labour and Tory MSPs to claim that SNP ministers are squeezing Scottish councils, when their parties are crippling local authorities in England and Wales.

“Strong and stable” has become a much-maligned phrase in recent years, but we have delivered stability. A local authority settlement that delivers certainty to our public services cannot be underestimated at a time when the UK Tory Government appears to be self-destructing. We are using our powers in a progressive way to protect and invest in our public services, and we

are boosting funding for North Ayrshire Council and councils across Scotland. That means greater resources for our schools and hospitals, and for all the vital services that protect the most vulnerable people in our communities. By voting for the finance order, we will vote to protect Scotland's local government services and their recipients.

14:58

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): I declare an interest as a councillor on Aberdeen City Council.

In a year in which the Scottish Government has more money, in real terms, to spend on public services, the situation that local authorities face is difficult, to say the least. Across the board, councils are facing funding gaps. They are not just numbers on a page—we are talking about people's jobs and about the services on which we rely.

It must be mentioned that the failure to produce a revised finance circular before our debate seriously hampers the ability of the Parliament and MSPs of all parties to scrutinise Scottish Government decisions properly and effectively. That is not acceptable, so I urge ministers to review how that process operates before the Government makes its budget deal with the Greens next year.

However, we must work with the figures that are available. According to the version of the finance circular that we have, every single council in Scotland faces a reduction in its revenue support grant—every single one, that is, except Renfrewshire Council. I forget which constituency the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work represents, but I am sure that it has nothing to do with that.

In any case, the information that we have indicates a cut to the discretionary spending support that is being made available to councils from the Government—down from nearly £6.8 billion last year to just over £6.6 billion this year. I reiterate for members' benefit that the Scottish Government has more money to spend than it had last year and that cuts to local authorities are therefore not just entirely avoidable, but have come about only through the political choice of the SNP Government.

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

Tom Mason: No.

It is rich indeed to say that councils are a priority, while leaving Aberdeen City Council in my region, for example, facing a cut of £41 million in one year alone, just to stand still. That had to be decided in just the past few days. It would have

been better if we could have kept the £28 million in non-domestic rates—

Kate Forbes: It keeps every penny—

Tom Mason: You will let us have £28 million, will you?

Kate Forbes: —every penny of domestic rates.

The Presiding Officer: All comments should be made through the chair, please.

Tom Mason: I ask the minister to ensure, in her summing up, that she guarantees that we get the £28 million back.

The result has been more than 200 jobs lost and cuts to community organisations including Sport Aberdeen, VisitAberdeenshire and Aberdeen Performing Arts. It was even proposed that £2,000 could be saved by reducing colour photocopying, which is an example of local authorities being taken back to the black-and-white era because this SNP Government will not fund them properly.

It was unfortunate, then, that when faced with such central budget cuts, the minister who is responsible for supporting local government was missing in action, even in his own area. His silence was deafening.

It is not sufficient to take an axe to central revenue funding and then invent some new and unpalatable tax ideas, such as the hated car park tax, so that councils can take the hit in cleaning up the mess that has been made by the Government.

The Conservatives will not oppose the order, but ministers should not mistake that for endorsement of their underfunding of local government. This local authority finance settlement is a story of cuts to public services—and only because this Government took the conscious decision to make them necessary. Put simply, Scotland deserves better. Instead of being treated as an afterthought, vital local services need a funding settlement that recognises their needs. I hope that, in time, ministers will reflect on that and take responsibility for the mess that they have created.

15:02

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): This debate marks the formal conclusion of the annual budget process for local government funding, but as other members have said, it is the tough decisions that councils have had to make up and down the land that are the real-life outcome of that process.

Local councillors are rightly accountable to their electorates for the decisions that they make, but this year, once again, those decisions are largely about what cuts to make to which services, rather than about how to grow or enhance the services

that they provide. That is very limited accountability. Responsibility for the larger decisions on local government finance lies here, which is why the debate can never be a mere formality. If the funding that ministers choose to provide means cuts to services or jobs, ministers as well as councillors have to be accountable for those cuts.

This year's settlement also highlights wider issues around the accountability of local councils to local people. Year on year, ministers have reduced central Government's contribution to local government funding, but they have failed to loosen their grip on local government's ability to make its own decisions.

In my home city of Aberdeen, local council tax payers, local business rates payers and citizens who pay fees and charges for council services now contribute a whopping 87 per cent of the city council's revenue budget. There is a case to be made for councils being self-sufficient. The problem is that, despite being funded almost entirely from local resources, Aberdeen City Council still cannot make its own funding and spending decisions. When an additional £28 million comes in from non-domestic rates, none of the benefit stays in the city, as the minister has acknowledged. Every penny is clawed back through a reduction in the general revenue grant.

That is the context in which the general revenue grant for Aberdeen this coming year has been cut by a third in a single year and is now on a par with the smallest mainland and island councils, rather than with Scotland's other cities.

Despite the challenges, I am delighted that, this week, Aberdeen City Council was able to protect the community projects that the fairer Aberdeen fund supports, and to reject the suggestion to make savings at the expense of staff terms and conditions. In the face of a multimillion-pound funding gap, that was the right choice to make, but tough choices still had to be made, and some options remain effectively closed by Scottish ministers.

For example, Aberdeen City Council owns the largest fleet of hydrogen-powered buses in Europe, but the buses are operated by private companies. The council would like to have the option of creating its own bus company, but—despite amendments to the Transport (Scotland) Bill to that effect being lodged—ministers have so far refused to contemplate a public bus company that would compete with private operators.

VisitAberdeenshire has been mentioned. It is an effective, innovative and well-respected agency that promotes the city as well as the shire. I am sorry that in order to avoid cuts elsewhere its funding from the city council will be cut. That

funding gap could have been filled by a transient visitor levy, were one in place by now—

Kate Forbes: Would the member take an intervention?

Lewis Macdonald: In a moment.

However, ministers spent too long resisting a tourism tax, even though it was strongly supported by many members of the minister's own party in local government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): We are already over time, so an intervention will be removed from your own time, minister.

Kate Forbes: It is just a quick intervention.

Why, in that case, did Lewis Macdonald vote against the budget and the agreement with the Greens that would have enabled Aberdeen to get that levy?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Quickly, please.

Lewis Macdonald: That was because—as the minister has acknowledged—in real terms, the money that her Government provides to the council is clawed back in another way.

We all recognise the need for local government funding—both in relation to council tax and business rates—to be reformed. More than that, the whole relationship between central and local Government must be revisited, so that councils either get the funding that they need from the centre, or have the freedom to make their own decisions—preferably both. At the moment, a dynamic and progressive council like Aberdeen City Council has neither the funds nor the freedom that it needs. If we are to have truly accountable and effective local government in the future, that must change.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are already over time. I give members due warning that I will probably have to cut the closing speeches.

15:07

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I am pleased to take part in the short debate this afternoon to confirm the cash settlement for local government this year. It will see an increase of £287.5 million in cash terms—a 2.9 per cent increase that brings the total revenue spend for local government to £11.2 billion, which is almost a third of the total Scottish budget. It also delivers an increase in capital spend of £207.6 million, which is a 23.7 per cent increase. In all, the budget will be £620 million higher.

That is being done against a backdrop of continuing austerity, which we must not forget is a political choice of the Westminster Tories that was

introduced when they were in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. We know that it hits hardest those who can least afford it. We have been told that austerity is about to end, but we have not seen a single bit of evidence for that.

Much nonsense is spread about local government funding—that nonsense has been perpetuated by Mike Rumbles again today. I do not know how many times the minister has reiterated in the chamber that councils retain all the moneys that are raised through non-domestic rates and that that is taken into account in the local government settlement and distribution to individual local authorities. I have heard that the money should not be taken into account, but we also hear that it should not be taken into account only when income from that source is rising and not when it is falling. It is essential that the Scottish Government can use its powers to deliver equity across the country.

Of course, the Scottish Government and COSLA keep the distribution formula under constant review. I hope that the minister can confirm that the distribution formula indicators are updated every year to ensure that each local authority receives its fair share of the total available funding. I have not seen any recent indication from COSLA of a desire to change the formula: indeed, at a COSLA meeting a few years ago, Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council could not even agree to support each other on that.

We have talked about the funding floor. It was fought for by my late colleague Brian Adam and implemented by the Scottish National Party Administration—not by the previous Liberal Democrat-Labour Administration.

Lewis Macdonald: Maureen Watt mentioned the 85 per cent funding floor. Does she acknowledge that this year the funding settlement for Aberdeen City Council is at 81 per cent of the national average?

Maureen Watt: I acknowledge that the percentage change for Aberdeen City Council is an increase of 5.7 per cent and for Aberdeenshire Council it is 4.34 per cent, when the Scottish average is 4.03 per cent. The people of Aberdeen can see that they have had a higher increase than the average.

Of course, it is up to local authorities themselves to decide how they spend the money. I do not know whether the Tories, Labour and the Liberal Democrats read what comes into their inboxes or read the *Public Sector Executive* online, which shows every day that councils south of the border are facing bankruptcy, which is not happening in Scotland.

I hope that the minister agrees that it ill behoves the Aberdeen City Council administration, which consists of Tories and councillors who have been excluded from the Labour Party, to moan about its settlement when it continues to mismanage its funds. For example, the council's debt repayments are £42 million—an increase of £9 million this year alone.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please come to a close.

Maureen Watt: Aberdeen City Council has been completely unable to keep projects within budget—for example, the Broad Street redesign and Lochside academy. I could go on and on. There is also an £8 million overspend on the Union Terrace gardens before the work has even started. That is what Aberdeen city residents face.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. Alex Rowley has no more than four minutes.

15:12

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I was first elected to Fife Regional Council back in 1990, and I became chair of the finance committee in 1994 and then leader of Fife Council. Over the years, I have seen local government becoming much more efficient and effective. Key to the way that local government works is that the finances and budgets are linked to policies and strategies, so that councils know what they are focusing their spend on.

I am not sure that the same could be said for the Scottish Government, which has a budget of more than £37 billion. There is room to start looking at how effectively and efficiently that budget is being spent and how it is contributing to the strategies and policies that the Scottish Government says are its priorities.

There are many examples to look at. We have strategies and legislation, but, as James Kelly said, the budget decisions undermine a lot of those strategies and that legislation. Legislation on child poverty targets and fuel poverty targets is coming forward. The Government says that closing the educational attainment gap is a key priority, yet, as Willie Rennie said, in Fife millions of pounds are being stripped out of secondary education budgets right now. Tell teachers, pupils and parents that there is a real-terms increase in the budget and they will not believe it.

Kate Forbes: I have two quick points to make. First, the local government outturn figures for 2017-18 show quite clearly that the figures for education spend were up. Secondly, on this year's budget, there has been much talk of a real-terms increase to our budget, but we have passed that

on to health, which means a cut to every other area. What does the Labour Party suggest that we should do in respect of the efficiency of the Scottish Government process? Where would we find the money to do all that the Labour Party wants to do?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you up to four and a half minutes, Mr Rowley.

Alex Rowley: I will come back to that point. The budget has increased in real terms, but Derek Mackay acknowledged when he came to the Local Government and Communities Committee that the Scottish Government has brought forward £400 million of new spending commitments that local authorities have had to pick up. That is why local authorities' core budget has been cut. Rather than politicians in the chamber arguing back and forward about whether it is a cut or an increase, the fact is that out there on people's doorsteps, across Fife and the whole of Scotland, people are seeing the cuts to local government services. They are experiencing those cuts, so they do not need to hear politicians in here going back and forward with these arguments.

James Kelly said that we should try to learn from this and move forward to look at how the parties in the Parliament can come together. Let us look at how we can have meaningful debate and discussion and ask whether the Scottish Government expenditure of £37 billion is being spent in the most effective and efficient way. Is that expenditure tuned into the Government's strategic goals and objectives when it comes to tackling poverty and increasing educational opportunity? From a local government perspective, I would have to say that the answer is no, it is not. The council cuts are impacting on the ability to deliver the very strategies that the Government has put forward.

Let us have some consensus at the end of this process. As Andy Wightman said, that consensus can be that we should look at the process of how the Parliament reaches its conclusions on the budget. Let us start to work together, because that is what the people of Scotland want. They want an end to the cuts to front-line services and they want investment in their communities. We can do that if we start to look at working together on the budget process. That is the challenge that the minister and the cabinet secretary need to address in moving forward.

15:16

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As my colleague Murdo Fraser indicated in his opening remarks, we will not be opposing today's local government finance order. I make it absolutely clear, however, that that is to ensure

that councils receive their funding and it certainly does not mean that we agree with the content—far from it.

As I have mentioned in the chamber many times before, the Scottish Government's attitude towards local government has been one of disrespect and contempt. While funding to the Scottish Government from the UK has increased, the SNP has continued with its programme—

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

Alexander Stewart: Time is tight; I want to make progress.

Despite repeated cuts to their core budget, councils are still being asked to do more. A report in *The Herald* in January suggested that 58 per cent of funding for councils is now ring fenced. Although in many ways ring fencing protects services that we rely on, such as education, childcare and health and social care, it means that there are funding reductions in other areas—culture, roads, economic development and planning are all being hit. It is unbelievable that many such council functions are being eroded and removed as a result of the money that is available.

The local government benchmarking framework shows that between 2010-11 and 2017-18 there was a 22 per cent reduction in culture and leisure services, a 34 per cent reduction in planning budgets, a 15 per cent reduction in spending on roads and a 10 per cent reduction in environmental services. Those cuts are having a massive impact on communities across Scotland, although it is difficult to know the current full impact on non-ring-fenced services.

Taxpayers want a fair deal. The minister talks about having a fair settlement, but taxpayers did not get a fair settlement—they will pay more to get less. The SNP has simply passed the buck to local authorities to make up the funding shortfall by raising taxes and increasing fees and charges. New taxes such as the workplace parking levy and the tourism tax are being introduced. Clearly, the SNP has broken its 2016 election manifesto pledge by allowing councils to raise council tax beyond the 3 per cent cap. Many councils have suggested that the reduction in core funding has forced them to propose increases beyond the 3 per cent cap, directly at the behest of the Government. In some cases, council tax has increased by the new maximum amount: an eye-watering 4.79 per cent. When it comes to local government, the SNP is taking with one hand and asking councils to take with the other.

Councils have been forced to borrow more for their capital projects and the overall level of council debt across Scotland increased to £15.1 billion by the end of 2017-18, which was an

increase of 4.3 per cent on the previous financial year. Such debt leads to increased borrowing costs and puts yet more pressure on the already difficult revenue budget situation.

This funding settlement is neither fair nor necessary. While funding to the Scottish Government has increased, core funding to councils has decreased. The present crisis around local government finances is entirely of the SNP's making and it is forcing councils and councillors to take the blame for the Scottish Government's cuts.

As I have said, the Scottish Conservatives will not oppose the order—not because it is a good one, but because we want to ensure that local government at least gets something from this deal. Education, tourism, culture, social care, leisure and planning have all been affected in my region. Perth and Kinross, Stirling, Fife and Clackmannanshire are all suffering from this Government's cuts. They believe that they are being sold out and many constituents I meet across my region are telling me that too, so I cannot accept that the SNP Government believes that it is a fair settlement. It is not.

15:20

Kate Forbes: This has been a good debate and I am delighted to say that it is the last debate in the budget process, so congratulations to us all for getting to this point.

There has been much talk about the overall quantum of funding that is going to local authorities. For the Opposition parties to make their point about cuts, they have to deliberately exclude ring-fenced funding, which presents a distorted picture of the resources that are available to local councils. That funding is real money to be spent on real day-to-day services—for example, in our schools and nurseries. Those are areas that have been identified by councillors and COSLA as areas of challenge and we have ensured that funding is available for them.

It is important to view the settlement package as a whole. SPICe has confirmed that it provides an increase in local government day-to-day spending for local services in cash terms and real terms.

Murdo Fraser: If the situation is as rosy as Kate Forbes just painted it, why is it that in every local paper in the land, we hear about the sort of cuts that we have heard about this afternoon from many different members, in which councils have to make really tough choices about cutting what people would regard as vital services?

Kate Forbes: I am certainly not trying to present a totally rosy picture. I said in my opening statement that these are challenging financial circumstances for us all, including the Scottish

Government. There is talk about the Scottish Government's budget going up, but if we remove the health uplift, the Scottish Government's block grant funding is going down by £340 million—1.3 per cent in real terms.

That means that we have to make difficult decisions when it comes to other areas, but we have ensured that we protect local government funding and we have ensured that local authorities have the spending that they need to deliver core services. We have treated local government fairly.

Andy Wightman: Is it not somewhat contradictory to, on the one hand, argue that if we ring fence Barnett consequentials, it means a cut to the Scottish budget, and on the other hand, not apply the same argument to the revenue grant for Scottish local authorities?

Kate Forbes: I missed the word that was used, but when it comes to areas of challenge, we recognise that health is a challenge, so we are delighted to pass on the health consequentials to the health service. However, that means that we have to ensure that we use the other finances that we have available well and wisely, and that we work in partnership with local authorities to deliver the services that the people of Scotland expect us to deliver.

There has also been talk about Aberdeen and Edinburgh and the 85 per cent funding floor. It is this Government that introduced the 85 per cent funding floor; all local authorities receive at least 85 per cent of the Scottish average revenue funding per head. We want to ensure that every local authority in every part of this country gets a fair deal, which is why all local authorities receive their needs-based formula share of the total funding available from the Scottish Government.

A few points have been made about council tax. It is important to note that the increases come after a 10-year freeze that was put in place in order to protect families, and that the rises this year are still lower on average than the council tax rises that have been seen in England.

In a challenging fiscal environment, we have tried to protect local authorities, we have tried to ensure that they get their fair share of funding, and we have tried to ensure that the services that people rely on are protected.

There has been much talk of action to empower local authorities. When it comes to this budget, the Government has agreed that we will consult on a number of different actions to empower local authorities—there will be perhaps the most significant empowerment of local authorities since devolution. Those actions include a locally determined transient visitor levy, an amendment to the Transport (Scotland) Bill and the devolution of non-domestic rates empty property relief. They will

also include cross-party talks on replacing the current council tax.

I want to conclude with a point about process that was well made by James Kelly and Alex Rowley. My request to the other parties is this: if you want a better process next year, will you commit to bring forward sensible, costed proposals that we can all consider well and early in the process? That would certainly improve the process from the Government's perspective.

International Women's Day 2019

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-16171, in the name of Christina McKelvie, on international women's day 2019: balance for better.

15:27

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I am delighted to open this year's international women's day debate. I thank Gillian Martin, who had planned to hold a members' business debate on international women's day but who has kindly agreed to participate in the Government's debate instead. I look forward to hearing her speech.

International women's day is a day on which to celebrate women's social, economic and cultural contributions to society and to raise awareness of the structural inequalities, discrimination and violence that are experienced by women and girls in Scotland and around the world. It is a day on which to reaffirm our commitment to women's rights and to galvanise our collective efforts to end gender inequality.

When I was considering the theme for this year's international women's day, balance for better, it struck me that here, in stark global statistics, is a reflection of the on-going inequality that women face. Women constitute just under half of the world's population and perform nearly two thirds of the work, yet they receive one tenth of the world's income. Research from organisations working internationally also reveals that 75 per cent of the world's illiterate people are women, that only 24 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide are held by women and that violence against women causes more deaths and disability among women aged 15 to 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or war. If we add women's responsibility for caring and community cohesion, the picture is clear: women's contribution is immense but is not reflected in status, reward or position in society. Women are a long way short of equality, and the need to pursue this agenda is as important as ever.

That is no less the case in Scotland, where one in five women experiences domestic abuse by a male partner in their lifetime; where women earn, overall, 15.6 per cent less than men and occupy the lowest-paid jobs in the lowest-paid occupations; where women are underrepresented in boardrooms and on decision-making bodies; and where women are discriminated against in employment and in access to services. It is very clear to me that we do not have gender equality and that we are still far away from achieving

balance. The issue has not passed its sell-by date, it is no less important than other equality issues and it demands the attention of all of us. We inherit the legacy of centuries of discrimination, ingrained sexism and patriarchy, and we should not underestimate the difficulty of overcoming that.

However, it would be pessimistic and greatly disrespectful to the thousands of women in Scotland and worldwide who have fought, struggled and dedicated their lives to achieving equality for women not to recognise the tremendous steps that have been taken and the progress that has been made. It is fitting to acknowledge today the work of the women's sector in Scotland in holding us to account and in pushing the Government to break down the systemic inequality that women and girls face. Organisations such as Engender, Rape Crisis Scotland, Scottish Women's Aid, Close the Gap, the Scottish Women's Convention and Equate Scotland provide us with a gendered analysis of women's experience and challenge us to go further so that women can achieve the position in society that they deserve.

One way in which we can challenge the myths and raise awareness is by remembering, recording and celebrating the contribution and progress of women. Virginia Woolf once said:

"For most of history, Anonymous was a woman."

We cannot achieve equality for women without identifying and eradicating the discrimination and disadvantage that they face. That is why the First Minister established her national advisory council on women and girls. The First Minister's ambition for the council was that it would act as a catalyst for change to address gender inequality by providing independent strategic advice to the First Minister. The advisory council's vision is of a Scotland that is recognised as a world leader in its commitment to and action towards realising an equal society in which all women and girls can reach their true potential.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary recognise that, as the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport said at general question time today, this month, the advisory council is taking contributions on women's health inequalities? That issue has featured prominently in Parliament over the past few weeks.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Elaine Smith is right to point to that. I was in the chamber for the health secretary's answer on that issue, which is an important matter to which the Government and society as a whole must give sufficient attention. I thoroughly endorse her remarks on that.

On 25 January, the advisory council published its inaugural end-of-year report for 2018, in which

it sets out 11 recommendations for realising gender equality in areas from justice to women's political representation, childcare and education. The council's recommendations are ambitious and thought provoking, and they are intended to drive systemic change. They reflect the First Minister's ask of the council to be bold and even to make the Government feel a little uncomfortable. We are actively considering those recommendations, and I am pleased to announce that it will be my portfolio's responsibility to ensure that they are given the priority that they deserve.

Over the past year, women's political representation has been high on the agenda. Of course, 2018 was the centenary of women's suffrage and women gaining the right to stand for election to Parliament, and a range of events and activities to celebrate the centenary took place across the United Kingdom. In Scotland, a small grant scheme supported 50 projects across the country. I am pleased that the Scottish Government is supporting YWCA Scotland, the young women's movement, and the Parliament Project to deliver the #ScotWomenStand campaign, which encourages women to consider standing for election and uses a range of online tools and resources to provide practical support and advice.

I do not have time to do justice to all the work that is being done, but I want to highlight some of it. In my portfolio, the Scottish Government has given a commitment in its social security charter that policy development will advance equality, non-discrimination and human rights, which is in line with the principles that are enshrined in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. Women are twice as dependent on social security as men and have less access to resources, assets and occupational pensions. That is due to a number of factors, including the fact that women are more likely to give up work to care and more likely to earn less than men and challenges in accessing childcare. The situation is even more acute in households in which women experience domestic abuse.

Research assessing the UK Government's social security reform highlights its disproportionate negative impact on women, which has resulted in women being placed at greater risk of deeper and more sustained poverty. The driver for the reform has been austerity, and it has not taken gender equality into account. The design of a social security system can have an impact on the gender pay gap in a number of ways: it can equalise access to income or it can exacerbate inequalities; it can act as an enabler for women to access retraining or to fully and equally participate in the labour market; and it can force women to take jobs that are detrimental to their wellbeing and long-term earning potential. In response, we

outlined in our fairer Scotland action plan, child poverty action plan and equally safe delivery plan how we will seek to mitigate the UK Government's social security reform and make the system fairer where we can. Our system has been founded on the basis of dignity, respect and human rights. However, we recognise that we must continue to look at how we ensure that gender equality is taken into account in our social security system.

Our work to eradicate violence against women and girls continues to be a priority. We are clear that such violence is a fundamental violation of human rights that cannot and must not be allowed to continue. The Scottish Government recognises that we must challenge it, prevent it and support survivors. To help our work towards achieving that goal, we are implementing "Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls". We are investing significant levels of funding, producing new legislation and working to strengthen front-line services.

However, we recognise that we must also have a strong and decisive focus on building a society in which such violence does not occur in the first place. For that to happen, we must all acknowledge and work to address the root cause of violence against women and girls: women's inequality. That is why the equally safe strategy prioritises primary prevention and focuses on progressing women's equality, changing attitudes and behaviours, building up the knowledge and skills of individuals and, ultimately, delivering a progressive shift away from the structural, cultural and societal contexts in which the violence occurs. The strategy provides an overarching framework through which to deliver that change, but we recognise that we must also take specific actions to realise our ambitions. That is why, in November 2017, we published our equally safe delivery plan.

I have had time to touch on only some of the work that we are undertaking with our partners, but I hope that my remarks make clear the Government's commitment to tackling women's inequality in a systemic way.

As everyone here knows, this year marks 20 years since devolution. As we celebrate international women's day, it is fitting that we look back on the gains that have been made since devolution. Irrespective of our political persuasion, we can all, I hope, agree that devolution has allowed us to raise the profile of women's equality in Scotland—from the first parliamentary debate that focused on domestic abuse to the annual takeover of the debating chamber by more than 300 women to mark international women's day. Devolution has allowed us to use the powers that we have to make real change for women and girls—for example, through the Domestic Abuse

(Scotland) Act 2018 and the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018.

Another aim on which, I hope, we can all agree is to ensure that all women—regardless of their ethnic background, religion, beliefs, sexual orientation, disability or age—can access the best possible opportunities, make a full contribution to society and the economy and improve their own lives. Let us celebrate our achievements and make a further commitment to do all that we can to achieve gender equality and balance for better.

I move,

That the Parliament unites behind International Women's Day on 8 March 2019 to reaffirm its commitment to upholding and protecting the rights of women and girls, which are fundamental human rights; celebrates women's and girls' achievements and their social, economic and cultural contribution to society; notes that this year's campaign, #BalanceforBetter, is a call to action to drive progress towards equal representation and gender equality throughout society, whether in the boardroom, government, media or in terms of wealth and pay; agrees with the campaign that gender balance is essential for economies and communities to thrive, and unites in its shared commitment to advance gender equality in Scotland and to bring about balance for better.

15:38

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I feel honoured to be opening today's debate marking international women's day for the Scottish Conservatives. I thank all the organisations that sent through briefings ahead of the debate.

Although I celebrate the achievements of women and girls throughout history, I want this year to be a year in which we see real change. Too often, I stand up in the chamber knowing the challenges ahead but feeling disheartened about the pace of progress.

Society has a big role to play—I will stress that today—as, of course, does Government. Although this year's theme focuses largely on the workforce and the economy, there is so much to say on general societal attitudes, education, sport, the media and—not to forget—politics. Today, we will support the Scottish Government's motion in the spirit of the global event and reaffirm our support for upholding and protecting the rights of women and girls.

The concept of a women's day has been around since 1909. Following a march that was held in New York that year, it was suggested at the international women's conference in 1910 that 8 March—which is tomorrow—should become an official event.

Since 1996, the United Nations has selected a campaign theme to be launched on the day and continued all year round. This year's theme is, as

we have heard, #BalanceforBetter. It brings renewed focus to achieving equality in representation and the workforce; it also reminds us that there is still a long way to go and why a gender balance is essential for economies and communities to thrive.

Importantly, it is also a time to celebrate the achievements of women both now and throughout history. In my time as an MSP, I have met many women whose achievements have inspired me. Recently, I met Cara Teven, who is a local activist from Glasgow and a student at the University of Strathclyde. She has worked tirelessly on a campaign to get pubs and clubs to offer lids on drinks to deter drink spikers. Cara, using her own initiative to protect women and girls against that awful crime, now has the backing of Police Scotland as she aims to roll out the campaign nationwide.

I met Dee Bradbury who, last year, became the first female president of a tier-1 rugby nation when she took the top job in Scottish Rugby. Last year, I also had the privilege to meet Donna Kennedy, who is the most capped rugby player—male or female—and is now rightly in Scotland's rugby hall of fame. I was delighted to witness her induction.

I have had the opportunity to reflect on the changes that I have seen in my lifetime—from my time at school when the only options offered to me were either administrative or secretarial, to my niece now studying sports science at the University of Stirling. When I looked into education, I found that women are now far more likely to start a university course than men, with six in 10 first-year Scottish students being women. That is progress.

It is right that we reflect on those changes, as well as the subtler changes in wider society that are not necessarily linked to Government policy. For example, in recent months, we have seen the release and success of major films with all-female leads where the main plot line is not romance; last year, it was announced that women can apply for the Royal Marines and all other front-line military roles; and the #MeToo and #timesup movements have continued. To some, those changes may seem insignificant, but to me they are signs that society is beginning to really question traditional attitudes towards women and girls in everyday life. It is great that the status quo is being challenged and that, as a society, we are becoming more aware of what it means to achieve true gender equality.

However, today's debate also shines a light on where change is still needed. Although I have used the example of university places to highlight progress, it remains the case that some individual subjects are dominated by either women or men. In the United Kingdom, the number of women

studying a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics degree is just 24 per cent of the total; and, in 2017, only 15 per cent of engineering graduates were women, compared with 30 per cent in India. More concerning is the fact that the proportion of young women studying engineering and physics has remained virtually static since 2012, and in some areas, such as computing degree programmes, the numbers are falling.

Earlier this week, I was lucky enough to visit Walker Precision Engineering as part of Scottish apprenticeship week. Although I was blown away by the positive impact that the apprenticeships are having on young people's lives, I was disappointed not to meet a female apprentice. When I asked why that was the case, the company stated that women were not applying. It is clear that more needs to be done to change traditional views on what women and men should do educationally and in their careers.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Annie Wells mentioned STEM subjects and apprenticeships. In my area, Ayrshire College ran the #ThisAyrshireGirlCan campaign, which encourages young women and girls to go into STEM subjects. Is that the sort of thing that Annie Wells thinks would be helpful?

Annie Wells: Absolutely, and I look forward to hearing more from the member about that, because we need campaigns like that to be rolled out across the country.

On the point about STEM and apprenticeships, I ask the minister to comment on what action is being taken to overcome the barrier that women and girls face educationally and in their careers. More broadly speaking, it is incumbent on all of us to have discussions about that issue day to day.

All that, of course, feeds into the types of jobs women do. Women still largely represent those in low-skilled, low-paid jobs, and women earn an average of 14 per cent less than men, a figure that rises to 30 per cent for part-time workers.

In business, although there are examples of good practice with companies such as the FDM Group in Glasgow, systemic change is still needed. As will be said time and again, childcare is imperative to that. Women are still faced with the overwhelming societal expectation that they should lead on childcare, and we must encourage companies to incorporate organisational designs that recognise the pressures that women face.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Annie Wells: No—I want to make some progress.

In politics, there has, of course, been progress. Last year marked the centenary of some women

being given the right to vote, and in 2017 a record number of female MPs were elected to the House of Commons. However, I know as well as anyone that vast improvements are needed. In the Scottish Parliament, only 35 per cent of the MSPs who were elected in 2016 were women, and in my party the percentage is even lower.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Annie Wells: I am just in my last minute, and I have a wee bit more to say.

I acknowledge that situation; indeed, I and other colleagues have set up the Women2Win campaign to ensure that work continues to be done to get more women involved. The campaign is working hard to identify, recruit, assess, support and mentor female candidates, but we will not be able to see the results of that work until the next election.

I want to finish by expressing my gratitude to the women and girls who have devoted their lives to upholding and protecting our rights. I wholeheartedly support the sentiment behind international women's day; I feel privileged to have been able to speak in this debate every year; and I hope that, by continuing to shine a light on this issue, we can inspire women—and men—to achieve the change that we still desperately need.

One last thing: I cannot let this debate go by without mentioning my mum, Maria, who continues to inspire me every day.

15:46

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): We will be celebrating international women's day this weekend, and I am pleased to speak in support of the Government motion. This year's theme of #BalanceforBetter is about ensuring gender balance in all areas, equal representation at every level and equal pay in every occupation.

I am especially proud that the Scottish Labour Party has taken positive action to back up our commitment to having 50:50 representation; indeed, we have achieved that a number of times in the Scottish Parliament. However, if we have learned anything, it is that positive action is needed and that no achievement can be taken for granted. If we let down our guard, things slip back. Unfortunately, in other areas such as the councils and the UK Parliament, we are still struggling and have yet to achieve 50:50, and I ask other parties to join us in taking positive action to increase women's representation both in this Parliament and at every level of government.

People argue that representatives should be selected and elected on merit alone, and I agree with them. I so look forward to the day when

women get elected on their own merit, because it certainly does not happen today. Men are much more likely to be selected and elected not on merit but simply because they are men. Until women can compete on merit alone, we need to take steps to deal with the gendered discrimination that favours men. We all know people who argue that the system works on merit now, but what they are actually saying is that women have less merit than men. Such people discriminate against women, are sexist and need to address their behaviour.

We have seen men favoured throughout society. We have seen it in politics, on boards in the public and private sectors and in our legal system, and we must act to stop it. Given that the Scottish Government appoints public boards, it must ensure that women's voices are heard on them. More important, their voices must be heard on the appointment boards. After all, like recruits like, and we need women in those positions to ensure that they can recruit other women.

Although all women face an uphill struggle, women from ethnic minority groups face even greater discrimination not just on the basis of gender but on the basis of race. I therefore pay tribute to the work of Talat Yaqoob, a founder member of the Women 50:50 campaign, who has worked for the cause of women both personally and professionally. With her measured but absolutely uncompromising approach, she is an inspiration to all women.

Equality is not an end in itself—it is not simply a numbers game. We all lose out if we do not hear women's voices. We have seen the difference that women make when empowered; their knowledge and personal experience add to the debate, and decisions are made on a broader base with a diversity of views. That is why we must strive for councils, Parliaments, boards and the like to reflect society with regard to gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality.

Gillian Martin: Rhoda Grant talked about public boards. Does she agree that there is an awful lot more to do in the private sector and that having 50:50 representation offers great potential for the private sector?

Rhoda Grant: I agree absolutely, not just because of the numbers game but because diversity leads to better decision making and reflects the views of all the people who are represented in society. For instance, would we have the laws that we have now on violence against women without women in the Parliament? Would we have a campaign against period poverty without women in the Parliament? I think not.

Equality does not stop with representation—it must go further. Equal pay has been law for decades and yet, even in public organisations, we

have not achieved it. Equality applies not just to pay for the job but to promoted posts. In professions where women dominate, such as primary school teaching and nursing, men still dominate the promoted posts. Why is that? Is it because women are being forced to choose between family and career? Is it because we as a society expect women to take on the caring roles? In Scandinavian countries, maternity leave is shared and both parents can take career breaks to look after children. To get equality, we need to have equality at home as well as at work.

Governments are also contributing to inequality. Austerity has had a disproportionate impact on women. Women make up the majority of single-parent households and they have been particularly badly hit. Philip Alston, the UN's special rapporteur on extreme poverty, said that the UK welfare system is so sexist that it could have been compiled by

“a group of misogynists in a room”.

What an indictment that is. Is sexism so entrenched in our society that even our welfare system reflects it?

That is why we in the Scottish Labour Party have targeted poverty. Our budget asks were to increase child support and remove the two-child cap. We sought adoption of those focused policies to mitigate negative aspects of welfare policy that target women.

Sadly, violence against women continues to increase. Domestic abuse levels continue to grow even though, given the actions of the Parliament since its inception, we would have hoped to see a decline. Back in the first parliamentary session, my colleague Maureen Macmillan piloted the first committee bill through the Parliament, which provided protection against domestic abuse. Since then, every Government and every Parliament has continued in that vein, yet we appear to have had little impact on the overall situation.

We need to teach boys respect. We need to stop their access to violent pornography, which forms their sex education and warps their understanding of relationships. It is for all of us—not just parents—to do that. We need to look at how we regulate online pornography. The digital platforms have had long enough to put their house in order; they must now be forced to take action to protect future generations.

We must protect children from abusive parents. No parent has a right of access to their children. When a parent abuses their partner, they also abuse their children, which means that they must lose access to their children. However, too often, that does not happen and access is used to continue abuse. That needs to stop.

We all know that a child's life chances, health, wealth and education are directly linked to those of their mother. We cannot tackle child poverty without tackling mothers' poverty. We cannot build a child's self-esteem while leaving them subject to domestic abuse. On international women's day, we need to redouble our efforts to tackle those issues and to create a truly equal society for our children to inherit.

15:53

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): It gives me pleasure to speak on the Scottish Green Party's behalf in this international women's day debate. In preparation for today, I read Rhoda Grant's speech from last year, in which she said:

"I wish that my role as women and equality spokesperson did not need to exist. I wish that international women's day did not need to exist."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 2018; c 56.]

I agree because, although the day is a global day to celebrate women, it is also a call for action to fight against patriarchy and deliver genuine equality. As such, its continuing need is disappointing, to say the least.

Like other members, I thank those who have provided us with briefings for today's debate, which remind us—as the minister did—of issues around care, the media, health, representation and violence that still require serious action if we are to overcome inequality.

I also commend Engender for its recent shadow report on measures necessary to give effect to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The UN treaty was adopted 40 years ago, in December 1979. Article 1 of the treaty defines discrimination as:

"any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

The recommendations that are made in the Engender shadow report, which covers the treaty's 15 substantive articles—observance of which is a devolved matter—are worthy of close attention. I hope that the Scottish Government will respond to them in due course. We might hear something on that in the cabinet secretary's closing speech.

In opening the debate on international women's day in 2017, Angela Constance said:

"It is a stark fact that, in 2017, women nowhere in the world can claim to have the same rights and opportunities as men. No country has eradicated violence against women and girls, eliminated pay inequality or erased

discrimination and prejudice." —[*Official Report*, 7 March 2018; c 30.]

We know that international women's day has its origins in New York, Denmark and pre-revolutionary Russia and was a product of socialist organising. It is significant that it was on 8 March 1917 that women celebrating international women's day joined those protesting against food rationing, leading to riots across Petrograd. Women organised and recruited more than 50,000 to strike against the food shortages and the Tsar and for the end of the first world war.

One hundred years later, women and girls remain the world's most numerous and discriminated against human beings. For example, in 2006 I moved to Ethiopia. During a long walk through the Simien mountains in northern Ethiopia, we rested for a moment on top of a high escarpment, overlooking a green valley. Even at some distance, we could hear shouting and screaming. We took a close look through binoculars and saw a young girl who was running and being chased by men. They caught her and beat her with sticks before dragging her back to the village from which she was running. She was one of tens of millions of girls in Ethiopia—40 per cent of women aged 20 to 24—who have been forced into so-called marriage before the legal age of 18. Running away affords the slim chance of a better life but is fraught with danger. Many young girls end up on the streets of Addis Ababa, begging or forced into prostitution.

In India, too, there is a long history of endemic discrimination and violence. As Vicky Allan wrote in an award-winning article in *The Herald* in 2015,

"Being conceived as a girl in India ... puts you at risk of foeticide, infanticide, neglect, abandonment, bride burning, wife-torturing, dowry killing, and domestic violence."

In short, in many parts of that country, girls are not wanted.

The struggle for true equality between the sexes is the biggest on-going social struggle facing us all. Women across the world have been bravely leading the campaign to eradicate the patriarchy, but men, too, have a special responsibility to see, listen and learn about and act on the systematic and structural ways that women and girls face discrimination on a structural level never experienced by men.

15:58

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): This is the third occasion on which I have had the honour to speak for my party about international women's day. On previous occasions, I have risen with some embarrassment because representing the views of a group of five blokes in a Parliament that should reflect the

society that we all seek to serve is an embarrassing situation.

However, since I was elected, the party has made strides in remedying that. In Westminster, we now have a front-bench spokesperson team that is 50:50. In the snap general election, we returned a Scottish parliamentary team that is made up of two men and two women. In the poll that was published this afternoon, which puts us on 10 MSPs, the internal party structures that we have in place would see five of the seats being given to women. I am grateful that we are making progress, although we still have a way to go.

In September last year, a man attended a job interview. It was surprisingly acrimonious, for a job interview. At one point, through a veil of tears, he shouted at the panel:

“I liked beer, I still like beer”.

That astonishing admission was in part an attempt to answer allegations that the job panel had heard the day before. A day later, he attempted to justify his outburst by saying that he gets emotional and that he

“might have been too emotional”.

However, he still got the job.

Of course, the candidate to whom I am referring is Brett Kavanaugh, the panel that he was up in front of was the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, and the job was as a Supreme Court justice of the United States of America. The highest law officers on the planet, like the highest politicians on the planet, must reflect the better natures of the society that they seek to serve, yet Brett Kavanaugh had been accused of assault and harassment, in dignified detail, by Christine Blasey Ford. He had also become notorious far earlier in his career, having gained attention and notoriety for traducing the reputation of Monica Lewinsky in the late 1990s, in an attempt to bring down the presidency of Bill Clinton. I defy anyone in Parliament to state with certainty that a woman who exhibited any of the behaviours that were exhibited by Brett Kavanaugh in that process would have got that job.

The fact is that we, as a global society, still treat women demonstrably differently from how we treat men, whether that is in pay or in the pink tax. My friend and colleague Christine Jardine this week launched a campaign on how simple toiletries are cheaper for men than they are for women.

There are also the issues of women's representation in public art, sexual harassment and the fact that we still have a benefits structure—delivered by the Department of Work and Pensions—that pays single payments to households, which sometimes compounds domestic abuse.

We also still have an expectation that provision of childcare will fall to the woman. I am proud to say that, during its time in government at Westminster, my party did something to address that issue through the introduction of shared parental leave. That will—I hope—mean that, for the first time, young women who go for job interviews will not experience prejudice based on whether they are of child-bearing age, and that a woman will be no less likely to ask for leave than her male partner would be.

Coretta Scott King said that the struggle for equality is never truly won but must be won “in every generation”. In the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh and in the increasingly misogynist language in some political quarters of this world, we see where that struggle lies for our generation.

I started my remarks today with a quotation from a Supreme Court justice; I will also finish with one. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, I am sure, carries the support of all members, and we hope that she continues in her role for many years to come. I think that this quotation sums things up perfectly. She said that, when she is asked when there will be enough women on the Supreme Court and replies that it will be when there are nine,

“people are shocked. But there'd been nine men, and nobody's ever raised a question about that.”

16:02

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):

This year's international women's day message is #BalanceforBetter. Why is balance better? I will concentrate on why gender balance and women's equality are good for the economy.

Gender bias—conscious or unconscious—hurts women's life chances, of course. However, more than that, it hurts Scottish finances. I convene the cross-party group on women in enterprise. No matter what theme we are discussing at a meeting, the barriers that stop women playing their full role in our economy as business owners are the same: the assumption that the woman is the main carer in a household; lack of flexible or agile working opportunities; male-centric business support and unconscious bias from gatekeepers of support and finance; and implied lack of legitimacy if there is not a man on the scene, either as a financial backer or as a company partner. That was mentioned again yesterday by Pheona Matovu, who is the director of Radiant and Brighter Community Interest Company, and who is, I believe, in the gallery just now with ambassadors from Women's Enterprise Scotland.

The rise of women is not about the fall of men; it is about equality. If equality for its own sake does not do it for you, let me put it this way: not having gender balance across every sector and having a

gender pay gap in our economy is wasteful and is a dilution of our country's economic and global potential. The key study on the issue, which contains facts about the economic arguments for balance and closing the gender pay gap, is the McKinsey Global Institute's report, "The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth." The report points to globally operating companies that have targeted making their teams more diverse, and tracks the positive effect of that on their profitability and productivity. The results speak for themselves.

One of the things that I am most proud to have been involved with in Parliament is the work that the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee did on the gender pay gap. Our report, "No Small Change: The Economic Potential of Closing the Gender Pay Gap", drilled down into the causes of the lack of gender balance in Scottish workplaces, the economic cost of leaving things as they are, and the benefits of closing the gap. Closing the gender pay gap could add £17 billion to Scotland's economy and, according to Women's Enterprise Scotland, if the same number of women as men in Scotland set up in business and had tailored support to help them to sustain their businesses, we could be looking at a £7.6 billion influx into the Scottish economy.

A lot has to happen for those economic bonanzas to be realised: Government-funded and flexible high-quality childcare is key. Through the doubling of free childcare, the Scottish Government is making huge inroads into tackling that particular cause of women's enforced and structural economic inactivity.

A country with a stubborn gender pay gap and a lack of gender balance in all sectors is not fulfilling its potential and is, arguably, failing.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Will Gillian Martin take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): It must be brief, because the member is in her final minute.

Emma Harper: I will be very brief. Does Gillian Martin agree that, in the agricultural sector, the women in agriculture task force and the Dumfries and Galloway dairy women network are promoting the advancement of women for a fairer Scotland?

Gillian Martin: I agree. I thank Emma Harper for coming along to a meeting of the women in enterprise cross-party group, when we talked about women in agriculture, and for her continued support for the work that we do at the CPG.

I will tell one of my favourite stories that illustrates sensible policy decisions on equality and why they are good for the economy. The

former Prime Minister of Norway, Jens Stoltenberg, was interviewed by *The New York Times* in 2011, and the interviewer asked him what was the secret of Norway's economic success. I imagine that the journalist was expecting a reply about oil and gas, but Stoltenberg simply replied that it was Norway's women. He said:

"One Norwegian lesson is that if you can raise female participation, it helps the economy, birth rates and the budget."

Of course, Norway funds all childcare publicly and its tax take is the reward for that investment. Balance is better—not just for women's equality, but for everyone. Happy international women's day to you, Presiding Officer, and to everyone. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that congratulating me or wishing me something is the way to get extra time, Ms Martin. It is a good bribe. You missed what I said during the applause for your speech. Don't everybody try it.

16:07

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I thank you for that advice, Presiding Officer.

I am honoured to speak in today's international women's day debate. It is good to see some of us men stepping up to the mark in the debate.

In 2019, it is not enough to simply acknowledge the good that is being done to promote gender equality; we must work actively to promote it. I agree with the chair of the Scottish Women's Convention, Agnes Tolmie, who said:

"Issues that confront women on a daily basis cannot be tackled unless policy and decision makers listen to and take action on women's views, experiences and ideas."

We are those policy makers, and we have the responsibility to take action to ensure full gender equality. To strive for anything less would be to set our sights too low.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Commonwealth women parliamentarians—or CWP—which is a group that was founded by women delegates to increase female representation in Parliaments. Its recent initiative to promote equality included the appointment of male champions of change to ensure that male parliamentarians also carry the torch for gender equality in Commonwealth Parliaments and legislatures. I have been appointed as the CWP's male champion for the Scottish Parliament and, although it is clear that women members in this Parliament do not need a man to speak on their behalf, I am humbled by the responsibility. I am determined to do whatever I,

as a male MSP, can do for gender balance in all aspects of the Scottish Parliament.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Does that include speaking up for gender quotas to increase female participation?

Maurice Corry: Yes. That has already been talked about at CWP level. I thank Ruth Maguire for that intervention: it was an important point.

The theme for this year's international women's day, #BalanceforBetter, implies that achieving gender balance is not only morally right, but makes sense. As easy as it is simply to say that we are inclusive, some of us men must get out of our comfort zones and challenge our inherent biases. We need to support in word and deed organisations that are working hard to eradicate gender inequalities.

I commend organisations such as Women2Win, which my colleague Annie Wells started. It is dedicated to increasing the number of female Conservative candidates on the ballot. It has done strikingly well, and its support has led, in part, to an increase in the number of female Conservative candidates who have run in elections over the past 10 years. I hope that their number will increase in the near future.

Let us continue to shift our perspective and recognise that we miss out on talent in the public sector and in the workplace when we do not strive for gender balance. When there is parity in the councils of human decision making in boardrooms and councils, better decisions are made.

Inclusion of women's perspectives also benefits the national economy, as has been mentioned. A landmark study in the 1970s asserted that overlooking gender aspects of development projects led to project failure. From that time onwards, empirical research has confirmed the link between gender variables and national economic performance. Research has found that improving women's equality affects security, gross domestic product and education and health outcomes. In addition, the proportion of females in the workplace is statistically significant in relation to national economic growth. In the light of such evidence, balance truly is better.

Women's involvement positively shapes the economy. The presence of women's voices directly affects economic prosperity and the stability of the political system. Females' presence in economic decision making can moderate overconfidence and risk. In this volatile world, we need women's voices ever more.

Historically, the system has systematically excluded women from what would be defined as the formal economy. The traditional roles of women in care giving have rendered them invisible

in the economic system, but if that labour were to be factored into the economy, even at minimum wage level, it would account for some 40 per cent of world production. As a Parliament, we have a responsibility to recognise the invaluable contribution that women make, both in and out of the formal economy. We can do better here in Scotland.

Without women's voices and participation, we cannot hope to solve the most important problems of our day. Problems to do with health, the security of nations and economic stability cannot be addressed without the insight of half of our population. We must do everything in our power to include women in the conversation, including stepping aside and simply listening.

16:12

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): In "Women & Power: A Manifesto", the professor, author and broadcaster Mary Beard shines a light on how many attitudes, prejudices and strategies to silence women are hardwired into our culture. She recounts the first recorded example of a man telling a woman to shut up, as immortalised at the start of Homer's "Odyssey", when a young Telemachus, challenged by his mother, Penelope, to change his tune, says:

"Mother, go back up into your quarters and take your own work, the loom and the distaff ... speech will be the business of men, and of me most of all, for mine is the power in this household."

Three thousand years later, it is sometimes hard not to conclude that our western culture is well practised in silencing women. Classical writers had much to say about the tone and timbre of women's voices and about how tiresome their barking, yapping or whingeing was. It is not such a distant culture, is it?

The Cambridge don Mary Beard has lost count of how many times she has been described as an ignorant moron. It was not until I had reached the grand age of 44 and had been appointed as the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning that I had my first experience of being called—to my face, at least—thick. I used to get lots of emails complaining about my glottal stop, which would say, "Don't you know that there are two Ts in 'Scottish'?", which I would pronounce as "Sco'ish". It is well known that Margaret Thatcher had voice-training lessons to lower her voice, but elocution lessons were never on my priority list.

All women, irrespective of their background, have the right to be heard, and we are not some pale, stale, homogeneous group. In speaking up for all women—whether it is women with a disability, women from the black and minority ethnic community, lesbian women, bisexual

women or trans women—I quote Coretta Scott King, who said:

“Freedom and justice cannot be parceled out in pieces to suit political convenience. I don’t believe you can stand for freedom for one group of people and deny it to others.”

In the debate about gender recognition reform, I appeal for tolerance, respect and patience from everyone, without exception, because we all know that we never persuade anyone of our position by using noise or anger. These days, it is easy to become overwhelmed and utterly frustrated by the fact that real equality between men and women is still an aspiration. However, there is hope and there is progress. The establishment of this Parliament, 20 years ago, increased the visibility of women in elected politics and achieved a consensus and focus on the need to end violence against women and girls. Irrespective of what side we were on, a legacy of the 2014 referendum was the creation of a cross-party women’s 50:50 campaign. Further, I very much believe that our public services will be better for everyone as a result of balanced public sector boards.

On whether there is hope for the future, it was utterly uplifting to get a text this week from my nine-year-old nephew Robbie, who wanted to interview me for his homework on international women’s day. He asked who has inspired me. There are many people I would love to mention, but I pay tribute to two very special women. The first is a constituent of mine, Annie MacKenzie, who recently passed away. Annie was my local hero at the opening of the Parliament in 2011 due to her being a carer, a fundraiser and a campaigner on Huntington’s disease. She was a larger-than-life character who will be sorely missed. Like Annie Wells, I also pay tribute to my mother, because my life is so different from hers. I have not had to endure the struggles that she has, in large part because of her. I say to young Robbie, do not be like Telemachus; always listen to your mother.

16:17

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I learned at a very young age that real men are feminists. As the father of three boys, I hope that I can bring up my sons to be feminists, too.

I will make three points. First, I pay tribute to all the inspiring women who, over the generations, have helped to effect and deliver change—inspiring women who have made personal sacrifices through really difficult times to get change for the generations that followed. Change has not been easy; it has not come about by accident but has involved blood, sweat and tears. I therefore thank each and every one of the women—all the sisters—who helped to deliver the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act

1975 and the Equality Act 2010; who recognised the challenges of violence against women by setting up Scottish Women’s Aid; who drive campaigns today, such as the 50:50 campaign for this Parliament; and who are speaking out and challenging as part of the #MeToo movement. I recognise, too, what we, in this Parliament, have done in passing the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018.

However, there is still a lot more work to be done, which brings me to my second point. It is important to recognise that the fight against all forms of prejudice, including sexism and misogyny, cannot be left to individual communities. As men, we must stand shoulder to shoulder with the sisters in this fight. We must amplify their cause, but we must recognise that we, too, need to change. I hope that every man has reflected on his behaviour following the #MeToo campaign. The same principle that applies to women’s fight against sexism applies to the fight against all other forms of prejudice and hate. We cannot just leave it to our ethnic minority communities to challenge racism. We cannot just leave it to our Muslim communities to challenge Islamophobia. We cannot just leave it to our Jewish communities to challenge antisemitism. We cannot just leave it to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community to challenge homophobia. Each of those challenges must be seen as a fight for every single one of us. Only if we genuinely see them as our own fight will we defeat prejudice and hate in all their forms.

That brings me to my third point and the focus of my speech, which is the need to recognise the intersectionality of prejudice and hate. I have mentioned homophobia, racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism. A person is twice as likely to be the victim of a racist, Islamophobic or antisemitic attack if she is a woman. That is not a coincidence; that is deliberate, because people see women as an easier target. That leads to circumstances that I have seen myself, such as women having their headscarves pulled off their heads at train stations and women being sworn at or assaulted on our underground system. There is a particular challenge around how people are victimised on our public transport system. Therefore, my challenge again is to ask how we can work alongside those women and amplify their voices so that we can allow Jewish, Muslim and ethnic minority women to come forward and speak about their own challenges and experiences.

I will share one practical example of that. A family shared a story with me about their daughter, who, just the week after the Paris attacks, experienced horrific sexism and Islamophobia in her classroom. During her lunch hour, pupils in her class came up to her, opened their jackets and pretended to be suicide bombers. When the

teacher came in, at the end of the lunch hour, and saw that taking place, he did not reprimand the pupils; he joined in and did it with his own jacket. When the parents went to the school to say how broken the girl was by those circumstances, the explanation that they were given was that it was the only way in which the teacher thought he could control the class and get it back in order. How will that child ever have the confidence to speak out on any form of prejudice or hate if that is what she can expect in her own classroom? That is just one little example.

In a time of division, when we see an us-versus-them politics rising in our country, Europe and the world, we must redouble our efforts to fight for equality in all its forms. That is why I stand in solidarity with the sisterhood today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I must be firm with members from now on, because I have no time in hand. Speeches should be no longer than four minutes.

16:22

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): #BalanceforBetter is a call to action to address the overrepresentation of men—at the expense of women—on business boards, in political chambers and in the media. A situation in which 52 per cent of the population is underrepresented harms everyone. I have said it many times and I will keep saying it: it is not just about unfairness to the women and girls who are neither participating nor visible; it is damaging to society as a whole. Diverse groups make better decisions and policies, which results in better outcomes for our communities.

The UN special rapporteur said of the UK welfare reform that has disproportionately heaped misery on women—in particular, single parents, disabled women and the young—

“If you got a group of misogynists together in a room and said ‘How can we make a system that works for men but not women?’ they wouldn’t have come up with too many other ideas than what’s in place.”

I do not know how many women were in the room when those reforms were developed, but I know that, in 2019, in our Parliaments and council chambers, women—particularly women from black and minority ethnic communities and disabled women—are still woefully underrepresented, and if we are not at the table, we are on the menu.

In 2016, I was one of only 45 female MSPs who were elected to serve in the Parliament. That is not good enough. Neither is it good enough that we have no women from black and ethnic minority communities in the Parliament. Only this week, both at Gillian Martin’s cross-party group on women in enterprise and on my own committee, I

heard real-life examples of the structural racism that exists in Scotland. When that is coupled with sexism, we can see how crucial it is that we have more black and minority ethnic women’s voices in our institutions. At the most recent election, Scottish Labour and the Scottish National Party took action to ensure that there were more female MSPs in our Parliament. Waiting for change that moves at a glacial pace is not an option. If we believe in equality, we must take measures to redress the imbalance. Action must be taken; slogans and hashtags are not enough. There is solid evidence that, when we do that, quality does not decrease—it increases.

I ask those who are members of groups in which white, middle-aged, able-bodied men are overrepresented to reflect on the possibility that, when they use the word “merit”, it is actually privilege that they are referring to. I utterly reject the notion that men are overrepresented in public life because they are better, and I reaffirm my commitment to legislation, quotas and action—to deeds, not words, as sister suffragettes used to say.

Maurice Corry: Does the member agree that it is important that people are also assessed on their skills and suitability for jobs, irrespective of what sex they are?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Corry. Next time, it would help if you spoke into your microphone—but we heard you, nevertheless.

Ruth Maguire: There is evidence that, when we have more diverse groups of people, the quality goes up. Nobody is talking about having unqualified people. There is a perception that the overrepresentation of men is about merit, but it is not—it is about the privilege of white, able-bodied men.

The Scottish Government’s motion also talks about upholding and protecting the rights of women and girls. The rights of women and girls are fundamental human rights that have been fought for long and hard and should be defended vigorously. The fight is not over. We still have female genital mutilation, prostitution and sexual slavery. Globally, women and girls are being refused access to education and are trapped in conflicts in which rape is used as a weapon of war. Around the world, the number of deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth is needlessly high, and women and girls are prevented from making deeply personal choices about their reproductive healthcare.

As the cabinet secretary said in opening the debate, women as a sex class do not have equality and the fight is not over—not in this country and not globally. The rights of women and

girls must be defended vigorously. I am very grateful to all the organisations that the cabinet secretary mentioned and to the many individuals who defend those rights, however they describe their feminism.

In concluding, I thank my colleague Joan McAlpine for speaking up this week and for raising a matter that many of us have been uncomfortable about raising. I thank all women who do that.

16:26

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): I, too, am delighted to be speaking in today's debate. As we have heard, tomorrow marks international women's day, when people from all over the world celebrate the economic, cultural, social and political achievements of women. International women's day first officially occurred in 1911 and more than 1 million people supported it. Nowadays, it belongs to so many more.

After what seemed like years of steady progress, it feels like the past few have been a huge step forward for social and cultural change. The impact of that has been felt all over the world. Attitudes are changing at a fast pace. We have seen that across the spectrum, in politics, business, cinema and sport.

One place where we are witnessing progress is here in Scotland, in the gender pay gap, which shows the difference between the average hourly pay rates for men and women. The Office for National Statistics publishes gender pay gap information annually. In Scotland, the gap has been narrowing consistently. In the decade from 2008 to 2018, it almost halved by going down to 5.7 per cent—the second-lowest figure in any part of the United Kingdom.

There have been other areas of positive advancement in business, too. In various areas, glass ceilings have been broken and talented women have won through. The most recent women in work index report by PWC said that Scotland was the top-performing part of the UK in terms of gender diversity in the workplace.

International women's day is not just about celebrating; it is also a call to action for accelerating gender parity wherever we can. In 2017, the UK Government made it compulsory for companies with more than 250 employees to report their annual gender pay gap. Last year's figures revealed that every sector in the UK paid men on average more than women. The construction and financial sectors reported the widest pay gaps. There is always more that we can do, and more progress has to be made.

Scotland still struggles with encouraging girls into science, technology, engineering and

mathematics. As reported in June last year, just 9.1 per cent of STEM modern apprenticeship starts were female. If we move forward at that rate, there will be longer-term problems in getting women into senior positions within the STEM sectors. That underrepresentation also prevents women from developing and influencing new attitudes among others in those sectors.

Education is vital in driving towards gender balance here in Scotland and throughout the world. Each year, international women's day focuses on a different theme. As the motion states and others have mentioned, this year's focus is on the #BalanceforBetter campaign, which will run throughout 2019, asking all members of society to drive forward gender balance around the world.

The campaign emphasises that everyone, not just women, has a part to play at all times. Gender balance is essential for economies, communities and societies to thrive. Gender balance is improving: in politics, we currently have our second female Prime Minister and a female First Minister and the current and previous leaders of the Scottish Conservatives are both women. I know that the hard work of those involved in our women to win initiative will improve female representation on the Conservative benches in future.

Many aspects of the issue are improving, but there are many that need more attention. As we mark international women's day, let us welcome and celebrate the improvements, but let us also recommit to the call to action to bring about gender balance throughout our society and in the wider world. A balanced world is a better world.

I have a final point. I read this recently and I think that it is very appropriate for today:

"You're a woman and that alone makes you pretty remarkable."

16:31

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I am delighted to participate in today's debate ahead of international women's day. It is a day when we celebrate women's and girls' achievements and their social, economic and cultural contribution to society, but it is also an opportunity to come together and continue the conversation about how we ensure that our society is more equal. We have so much work left to do and we still do not see gender equality across society. With a shared commitment, it is certainly achievable, and I encourage everyone to reassess what they can do to help make society equal, whether that is as business owners, the media, members of Parliament or all of us as members of society.

I will spend my time speaking about my campaign for four weeks' paternity leave or shared parental leave. I am very honoured to be speaking at an event tomorrow, on international women's day, about how dads impact on gender equality. The event, which is in Edinburgh, starts at 10 o'clock and I can give the details to any members who may want to come along.

I thank Gillian Martin and Ivan McKee for their work in the cross-party group on shared parenting, of which I have recently become the convener. I also thank the members of the group for agreeing at a recent meeting to pursue the issue further.

As members may be aware, in the United Kingdom and Scotland, fathers get up to two weeks' paid leave, which the dad can take from the birth of the child. Some employers, including the Scottish Government, offer a wee bit more—up to four weeks—but the general standard is two weeks, with one week being paid and the other week unpaid. That situation only reflects and reinforces cultural assumptions about traditional gender roles, in which the father is the breadwinner and the mother is the primary carer. We all have a duty to challenge that head on. Other countries are leading the way on this. For example, Iceland, Slovenia, Sweden, Finland and Norway offer between 10 and 12 weeks of paternity leave. Research from those countries indicates strongly that where there is higher paternity leave, higher levels of gender equality are reported. That is the key: balance is better.

Statistics show that fathers are doing more of the childcare than ever before, but still not as much as mothers do. I think that the research shows that fathers do about half of what mothers do. Clearly, that is not equality—far from it—but it is progress and there is evidence that progress is being made through the generations. People of my generation are perhaps doing more than their fathers and grandfathers. However, if we want true equality we must break down the barriers that are in place. On international women's day, it is good that it is no longer assumed that the mother will do all the childcare.

I was going to intervene on Annie Wells earlier, simply to say that I have spoken out in the chamber before against the UK Government shared parental leave scheme. The scheme has its benefits and it works for some families, and I think that its intention was sound. However, I agree with many stakeholders who are speaking out about it and a recent paper from North Lanarkshire Council that says that the scheme is fundamentally flawed. That is because, in essence, it results in parents having to work out how to split the same period of leave. Many parents who use the scheme do so on financial grounds, and it sends a message that any time

that is taken from the mother to spend attaching with her child is her responsibility. That perpetuates the cultural assumptions that I have spoken about and does not take into account possible power imbalances that could exist in relationships.

There should be a separate paternity leave policy for fathers. I am working with Fathers Network Scotland and others on launching a campaign specifically on that issue and on the devolution of the relevant powers to this Parliament. It is a fact that increased paternity leave benefits everyone—it benefits society as a whole. It allows fathers to spend more valuable time with their children, lowers the rates of postnatal depression for women, allows for a quicker return to work and—importantly—helps us men to reflect on and challenge implicit attitudes about mothers being the primary caregivers.

I can see the Presiding Officer indicating that I am running out of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, so you can sit down—thank you very much.

16:35

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I appreciate the opportunity to speak today. I think that it is important that we hear men's voices on this topic.

First, speaking as deputy convener of the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee, we have been trying to make the role of women part of our inquiries in topics that we have looked at, including Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and business gateway. Previously, as I think Gillian Martin mentioned, we did a report on the gender pay gap. It is good that organisations now have to publish data, but we are not making as much progress on this as we should be.

I thank Engender for its briefing for today's debate, which talks about an average pay gap of 14 per cent, while for part-time workers the pay gap is 30 per cent. Engender also points out that 63 per cent of workers on poverty wages are women. Clearly, Scotland is not alone in having an unacceptable gender pay gap and I think that the committee was surprised to hear that it is still quite a serious problem in Sweden, which many of us would see as one of the most progressive countries. That is not to excuse our failures here, but it shows that some of the problems are deep rooted around the world.

The Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee's current inquiry is on the construction sector, which has been mentioned already. It is clear that women are seriously underrepresented

in the sector, and it does not seem that much progress is being made on the number of women starting apprenticeships. We had nine young apprentices at the committee on Tuesday, two of whom were women. It is clear that peer pressure, family expectations and perhaps stereotypes around the word “construction” mean that things are not changing very quickly.

I accept that there are glimmers of light and some individual organisations are perhaps doing slightly better than others. Just this morning, I met people from TSB. Its new chief executive officer is to be a woman—Debbie Crosbie, who I think will be the only woman heading up a major UK bank. I believe that she was also the first woman to sign a Scottish banknote.

Another piece of positive news has been the settlement—at last—of the Glasgow City Council equal pay dispute. Men and women must be paid the same for work of equal value. Of course, that applies to other organisations, and Asda is one business that is currently going through a dispute. Sadly, that still leaves the problem of a woman in one organisation being paid less than a man in another organisation for work of equal value.

Engender reminds us that 65 per cent of MSPs are men and 71 per cent of councillors in Scotland are men. I think that my party’s thinking has changed on this matter over the years. We saw talented individuals such as Nicola Sturgeon, Fiona Hyslop and Shona Robison rise to the very top and for a while we assumed that equal numbers of women would just come through automatically. However, that proved not to be the case and I whole-heartedly agree that it has been right to make the Cabinet 50:50 and take other positive action to move things forward. Of course, a slight downside is that we now have a predominance of men on the back benches.

Could we ensure a 50:50 split of men and women here in the Parliament? There are options that should be looked at, which include using the list system to create a balance, or we could go as far as saying that half the constituencies should have only female candidates from all parties and the other half only male candidates. That would ensure a 50:50 split; I do not know whether people would want to go that far.

Finally, on a different topic, last Friday—as some may know—was the world day of prayer. It used to be called the women’s world day of prayer but it has been widened out and some men are now allowed to go, although it is still organised by women. This year, the world day of prayer was organised by women from Slovenia, one of whom said:

“I am a researcher in a scientific institute. I wish, however, that the balance between family care and work would be more favourable to families and less restrictive to

women in their working place. In spite of the full legal equality, women still have to bear a double burden.”

That emphasises why we are marking an international day, because women all around the world have not had a good deal. That is disappointing, but it can be seen as encouraging in that we are not alone in Scotland; we are working with people around the world to improve things.

16:39

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): This has been a positive debate, with many interesting contributions from both men and women. As Anas Sarwar and John Mason said, men should be supporting women in their struggle for equality. Although I note what Maurice Corry said, our male colleagues’ solidarity is very welcome.

In closing for Labour, I join other members in celebrating women’s achievements. I welcome the Scottish Parliament’s commitment to making progress on women’s representation at every level of public life. We rightly celebrate women who inspire each other, their families and their communities. Annie Wells mentioned many examples of women doing that. As Annie did, I too want to take the opportunity to wish a happy international women’s day to my mum Moira. As a school teacher, a champion swimmer, a mum and a grandmother, she has been inspirational to me.

It is not enough simply to celebrate increased women’s representation; the voices of women need to be heard and acted on. That point was made strongly in the debate by Rhoda Grant, Angela Constance and Ruth Maguire. We know that that will result in better policy, stronger laws and a more equal society.

Recently, women themselves are tackling inequalities in women’s health, whether that is mesh survivors, who we heard about earlier this week, thyroid patients or endometriosis sufferers. They are making parliamentarians and governments listen to and support them. Cross-party groups are taking up issues affecting women—a point made by Gillian Martin yesterday at the cross-party group on women in enterprise, which she chairs. Pheona Matovu, from a company called Radiant and Brighter, which supports migrant communities and their specific needs, addressed the meeting. As Gillian Martin pointed out, Pheona is in the public gallery. Pheona spoke about the challenges that she faced when finding work and setting up her business after experiencing years of unemployment as a result of immigration controls and gaps in employment support provision. She emphasised how important it is to listen to migrant communities and work with them in developing the most

appropriate services that are needed, which in the main do not exist.

Several members also mentioned that black and minority ethnic women are more likely to be out of work, on lower wages or in households living in poverty. We need to acknowledge that situation and take responsibility as a Parliament for changing it.

As mentioned by other members, the statistics on women living with disabilities tell a tale of greater discrimination, pressure and stress at work, higher unemployment and few opportunities to maximise potential. Only last year, the Equality and Human Rights Commission report “Is Scotland Fairer?” concluded that women and disabled people were more likely to experience severe material deprivation. The speakers from the Multiple Sclerosis Society at yesterday’s CPG on women in enterprise reminded us that we—whether that be employers, business support services or Governments—are not getting it right yet. Too many women with disabilities are out of work or are struggling to get by. Debilitating health conditions such as MS, thyroid problems, mesh complications and endometriosis predominantly affect women.

As mentioned by Shirley-Anne Somerville and Annie Wells, last year marked the centenary of some women in this country getting the vote. Of course, since then, significant progress has been made in women’s representation in the chamber itself, among the staff who work in the Parliament and in the members of the public who come in to engage. This is a Parliament, we should not forget, with a creche facility—I understand that it is the only one of its kind in the world—to facilitate engagement. It is a Parliament that legislates on violence against women, on childcare and on breastfeeding. We should be proud of the differences it has made to women’s lives. We should also recognise, as did those women campaigning for the vote, that we still have work to do. I agree with the point that Ruth Maguire made about male privilege in that regard.

With rising numbers of children living in poverty, many of whom are growing up in households with at least one adult in work, and disproportionately high poverty levels in households headed by women, which increase still more in households headed by BME women and women with disabilities, I am pleased that the Government has used the international women’s day debate to renew a commitment to take more action.

In closing, I remind members that international women’s day has its origins, as Andy Wightman said, in the labour and trade union movement. Those origins recognise the strength of collective voice and action. Collectively, we can do better for women in many of the areas mentioned in this

debate—such as health, poverty and enterprise—and we can do better for BME women and women with disabilities.

For the last word, I want to go back to Pheona. Speaking at the CPG on women in enterprise yesterday, she said:

“In Africa, we have a saying. If you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together.”

Scottish Labour will support the motion tonight.

16:44

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): In closing the debate for the Scottish Conservatives, I wish everyone a happy international women’s day and thank members for the excellent contributions from across the chamber. The simplicity of the #BalanceforBetter strapline has been touched on today. It encompasses the value of female contribution and representation in the Parliament, the media, other workplaces, life and society. The cabinet secretary set out the stark statistics that reveal the true inequality that women face. However, we have heard today that a good balance benefits our economy and enriches and enhances every aspect of our society, and that is what we must focus on, even though the picture of global inequality is fairly depressing.

I pay tribute to a group from the Borders called CEDAR, which stands for children experiencing domestic abuse recovery. Last year, the group, which runs a therapeutic educational programme for children and young people and mothers, picked up a violence against women award. I congratulate the group on its incredibly powerful work.

We on the Conservative benches are proud to have launched Women2Win Scotland, which mentors, nurtures and supports women into politics. Last year, we also announced a diversity commission, which is led by Nosheena Mobarik and which aims to increase the number of females and BME candidates who are selected and elected. Most members will know that the Conservatives do not support mandatory quotas. To be honest, they are a pretty blunt instrument—we have had that debate previously. However, we recognise that many women count themselves out before they even get to selection or the recruitment process. We need to address those obstacles and not put a sticking plaster on them.

Ruth Maguire: I recognise that the Conservatives are doing valuable work in encouraging, cajoling and mentoring, but if that does not work, will the party take additional action? How long are the Conservatives prepared to wait for equal representation on their benches?

Rachael Hamilton: Obviously, working up to 2021, we want more women to be selected and elected. That will probably be our benchmark.

Many have agreed today that women and girls can realise their potential and aim for the top, and that that is vital to ensure that we have a balance in the workplace across society, which is an issue that Ruth Maguire highlighted. Many members spoke about STEM subjects. No subject, whether it is physics, computing studies or chemical engineering, must be out of bounds for girls at school. STEM subjects are the key to our future economy, and girls should be encouraged to participate in them without hesitation at school. However, we know that that is not the case at present.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Given the number of times that that issue has been referenced by the Conservatives, I hope that they welcome the STEM strategy, which I launched as higher and further education minister with special responsibility for STEM. That was specifically to tackle the issues that Rachael Hamilton is raising, which I absolutely recognise.

Rachael Hamilton: I congratulate the Scottish Government on its work on STEM and support it in that. However, we have to look at the statistics, and the cabinet secretary knows that, of those studying STEM degrees, only 24 per cent are women. In computer science, the growth in the number of female graduates is far behind the growth in the number of male graduates, at 3.1 per cent versus 9 per cent. Annie Wells highlighted the stark statistic that, in the UK, just 15.1 per cent of engineering undergraduates are women, whereas the figure is 30 per cent in India. Perhaps we should look at international models. Empowering women and girls through education is certainly one way in which we can help to improve that statistic on female participation.

Gillian Martin: I just want to—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Just a minute. I have a little job—I have to call you to speak. I call Gillian Martin.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Well done.

Gillian Martin: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I just want to say that the graduate numbers are not the only thing that we should look at. We should also look at the number of women who stay in engineering, because there is a leakage of women from engineering, which is just as important.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before Rachael Hamilton speaks, I say to Mr Rumbles that I do not need his assistance—that was a step too far.

Rachael Hamilton: I thank Gillian Martin for raising that relevant point, because we should be

looking at returning to work programmes for women. For women who have graduated in engineering, home life or caring for somebody else can often take over, and there is not a way for those women to get back into work. We must provide a nurturing environment and get women back into those roles.

Rhoda Grant mentioned the types of jobs that males and females do. I want to highlight a statistic that I found when looking at research from British Gas. It found that 70 per cent of girls thought that they were most suited to careers in beauty, childminding, nursing or education. Although those careers are certainly rewarding—and, indeed, we need more people to work in social care and nursing—that statistic highlights that getting more women into what would ordinarily be considered male apprenticeships could bridge the gender pay gap.

Alex Cole-Hamilton spoke about work practices, and we need to get things right for women in the workplace.

Gillian Martin spoke about the gender pay gap, which is still too high at 17.9 per cent. The Scottish Government is looking at the issue, and the UK Government is working to narrow that gap. The UK Government equalities office published “what works” guidance to help employers to close the gender pay gap by improving the recruitment and progression of women. I hope that the new south of Scotland enterprise agency, which will be set up next spring, will address the gender pay gap in my constituency.

Presiding Officer, I have taken too many interventions, because I have so much to say—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: But no time to say it, I am afraid.

Rachael Hamilton: Okay. I want to make one point about childcare. Yesterday, we highlighted some of the flaws in the expansion of childcare provision. Flexibility is key in allowing women to return to work after having children. Parents should be able to choose the setting that suits their children.

I will sit down now, because the Presiding Officer is giving me the look.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not know what you are referring to, Ms Hamilton. [*Laughter.*]

I call Christina McKelvie to close for the Scottish Government. You have until decision time, minister.

16:52

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): I thank all members for their speeches, and I wish them a happy

international women's day. I am incredibly pleased to close today's international women's day debate for the Government, in my role as Minister for Older People and Equalities.

As many members will know, over my 11-plus years as an MSP, I have been an advocate—some might say an outspoken one—for equalities issues. I am proud to have spoken in just about every international women's day debate in Parliament, because the day holds a special significance for me.

In years gone by, international women's day was one of the few opportunities when we found space to discuss women's equality and to raise awareness of the systemic change that is required for women to achieve their rightful place in society. We have heard many examples of how we can do that and many examples of the work that is still to be done.

However, I now see a Scotland where women and girls, and men and boys, are making space to discuss such issues daily—in schools and colleges, in workplaces, in people's homes and, of course, on social media. The debate on women's equality can no longer be contained to just one day, or even 16 days; it is now a debate for everyone, every day.

This afternoon's debate has been far ranging in the breadth and depth of the topics that have been discussed, but I will pick up on some of the points that have been raised.

It was great to hear Angela Constance talk about Mary Beard, who reminded us, through Ms Constance's lovely accent, that the place of women has been undermined throughout history, and that we should campaign for the freedom of others. When I went to the recent international congress of women's caucuses in Dublin, I loved meeting Mary Beard and the amazing feminist activists from Ireland who have been in the news recently.

Rachael Hamilton highlighted the work of local groups in minimising domestic violence. She will know that the Scottish Government is committed to tackling domestic abuse through the enactment of the new domestic abuse offence and our work with justice partners to ensure that we are ready for its implementation. The 2018 act will come into effect on 1 April 2019 and will send a clear message that domestic abuse will not be tolerated and can be dealt with under our law. It is vital that we take the necessary measures to ensure that the justice system is prepared and equipped to deal with cases that involve coercive and controlling behaviour. The Scottish Government has provided funding to Police Scotland to support the development of training for 14,000 police officers and staff.

On 26 February, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women carried out its oral examination of the UK. The Scottish Government was represented in Geneva as part of the UK delegation, and Engender attended alongside other UK non-governmental organisations. The committee will publish its report soon, and I am sure that we will all be happy to hear what it has to say about Scotland.

Elaine Smith raised a very important issue about women's health inequality. Who knows how successful the period poverty campaign would have been had it not been for women working together in this place? Another side of that issue is the menopause campaign, which she will know that I am involved in. I am determined that the Government improves the position for women affected by the menopause. We funded the Scottish Women's Convention to hold a conference on the menopause last month, when we heard directly from women about their experiences and what action they want the Government to take. I heard many women ask for more clinical research on the menopause, workplace policies that support women rather than discipline them for struggling with their symptoms, increased awareness raising and a consistent health response across the country. I am sure that we all want those things.

I will touch on some of the points—there were so many—that members raised today. Annie Wells, Alison Harris and Rachael Hamilton mentioned apprenticeships. They might be aware of our commitment to having 30,000 apprenticeships by 2020 and the commitments in our STEM strategy. I hope that we will soon get up-to-date information on our progress on the STEM strategy. At this point, I welcome Equate Scotland's amazing work to ensure that we fix the "leaky pipeline" and keep women in STEM jobs.

Rhoda Grant mentioned respect and consent, which is an issue that we have debated a lot over the past year in the chamber, especially in relation to the position in schools. We are working with our COSLA partners to roll out the equally safe plan, which is a whole-school approach, which I hope will go some way towards tackling the issues that boys and girls face in the school environment.

Andy Wightman, Anas Sarwar and Fulton MacGregor all talked about men as allies; Anas Sarwar said, "real men are feminists"—I agree. He talked about the responsibilities of fathers, and he also brought up a very interesting point about the intersectionality of prejudice and hate. Whether that is to do with race, gender or disability—a woman might be a victim of racism, Islamophobia or antisemitism, for example—we still have a job of work to do to ensure that we tackle that

prejudice; indeed, it is key to everything that we do.

Alex Cole-Hamilton reflected on the need for parties to have in place a better gender balance, how global society treats women differently, the pink tax and universal credit. I am sure that the member will welcome our campaign on split payments for universal credit.

Gillian Martin, Alison Harris and John Mason mentioned the gender pay gap and the work that we need to do on that, especially in relation to equal pay. I am sure that they will all welcome the gender pay gap action plan, which will be published very soon.

I was delighted to hear Maurice Corry make a commitment to gender quotas, even though I think that it shocked his front bench. I am sure that the Women 50:50 group is looking for a Conservative member and that it would welcome Maurice Corry should he want to join. [*Laughter.*]

Maurice Corry: I will correct that slightly. [*Laughter.*] I meant to caveat my point by saying that we very much believe that representation should be based on skill and what the job or position requires. Of course, we encourage as many women as possible to come forward—after all, I am the father of three daughters, so I have no option other than to say that.

Christina McKelvie: Aw, Maurice Corry has just wiped the smile off my face; I thought that we had made real progress with the Conservatives this afternoon. I look forward to trying to change his mind.

Ruth Maguire reminded us of Professor Philip Alston's words about the rape clause and how it was written by misogynists. Like Anas Sarwar and Elaine Smith, she called for better balance and representation in this place, including women from all our diverse groups. Increasing women's representation across the board is a key element of the work that we need to do.

I am sure that my ministerial colleagues, women and our male allies across the chamber will be really keen to keep working on how we progress the issue of women's equality in all areas. As we know, we make progress at a local MSP level, so we all have a responsibility, as local MSPs, to take on all the issues that create inequality.

Last year, I took part in this debate from the back benches; this year, along with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People, I am incredibly proud to be leading the Government's work on tackling gender inequality. As was referenced earlier, that includes overseeing our response to the recommendations made by the First Minister's national advisory council on women and girls.

We have come a long way along the path—I thought that we had taken the Conservatives a bit further along that path today—towards gender equality, and I look forward to taking the next step on Scotland's journey to equality.

Committee Announcement

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):

Before we come to decision time, we will have a committee announcement. I am pleased to call Jenny Marra, convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, to make an announcement on post-legislative scrutiny of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

17:00

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

Presiding Officer, thank you for allowing me to make a committee announcement in my capacity as convener of the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee.

Members might recall that in June 2017 the chamber agreed a motion stating that post-legislative scrutiny of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 should be undertaken. I want to bring it to members' attention that our committee will now be taking forward that important piece of work and that a consultation inviting written views to inform our scrutiny of the act was launched last Friday.

As members know, the 2002 act provides the public with the right of access to information that is held by public bodies, and it has proven to be a valuable tool in that respect. However, the bill for the act was passed in 2002, and the committee wishes to examine in detail whether there are any issues with how freedom of information works in practice and, if so, how best to address such issues. We also intend to consider whether the act can be improved or modernised to increase transparency in Scotland's public services. It is expected that our committee will report its conclusions towards the end of the year.

We are keen to hear a wide range of views on the 2002 act. I know that many members will have experience of using the legislation, and we are keen to hear about their experiences, both positive and negative. We would also be grateful if members could bring the inquiry to the attention of their constituents or other contacts who might wish to help inform it. I will circulate further information about the call for evidence to members shortly.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that motion S5M-16170, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

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

Against

Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

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)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 58, Against 21, Abstentions 27.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-16171, in the name of Christina

McKelvie, on international women's day 2019: balance for better, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament unites behind International Women's Day on 8 March 2019 to reaffirm its commitment to upholding and protecting the rights of women and girls, which are fundamental human rights; celebrates women's and girls' achievements and their social, economic and cultural contribution to society; notes that this year's campaign, #BalanceforBetter, is a call to action to drive progress towards equal representation and gender equality throughout society, whether in the boardroom, government, media or in terms of wealth and pay; agrees with the campaign that gender balance is essential for economies and communities to thrive, and unites in its shared commitment to advance gender equality in Scotland and to bring about balance for better.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:03.

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