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Wednesday 3 April 2019

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 3 April 2019

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

Portfolio Question Time

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The first item of business is portfolio questions. I will try to get as many members in as possible, so let us have succinct questions and answers, please. I have grouped questions 1 and 4 together.

Air Quality Improvement Programmes (Support)

1. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what funding it provides to support programmes that aim to improve air quality. (S5O-03086)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): The Scottish Government provides £2.5 million of funding annually for three local authority funding schemes. Those support air quality monitoring and modelling, implementation of air quality action plan measures, and roadside emissions testing and enforcement of idling legislation. The 2017 programme for government announced the establishment of a new air quality fund to provide additional support to local authorities for transport-related air quality measures. In 2018-19, the first year of operation, £400,000 was awarded.

Jenny Marra: Dundee has one bus operator that has more than 100 buses that fail to meet the Euro 6 standard, yet Dundee is expected to have a low-emission zone in place by 2020. Given that some of our most polluted streets are on main bus routes, can the cabinet secretary tell us how much money was awarded to Dundee bus operators in phase 2 of the Scottish bus emissions abatement retrofit programme to bring their fleets up to the Euro 6 standard and whether a third phase is planned?

Roseanna Cunningham: I understand that the 2018-19 applications are currently being assessed by Transport Scotland, so I can give no further detail in respect of that. I know that one bus company has applied, but I am not sure whether it is the one to which Jenny Marra refers. We will obviously have to keep those schemes in mind as

we move forward, because the intention is that all four major local authorities will have low-emission zones by the end of 2020.

Air Pollution in Edinburgh

4. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to tackle air pollution in Edinburgh. (S5O-03089)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): City of Edinburgh Council has produced an action plan containing a number of measures to improve air quality. The Scottish Government is working closely with the council as it implements the measures that are contained in the plan, and it is providing practical and financial assistance both to monitor air quality and to support delivery of the measures. As was announced in the 2017-18 programme for government, the council will establish a low-emission zone in Edinburgh by 2020.

Jeremy Balfour: The cabinet secretary will be aware that, in the 2015 British Lung Foundation survey of lung patients, 40 per cent of respondents said that they had bought a diesel car because it was better for the environment and 48 per cent had bought one because it was cheaper to run. Can the cabinet secretary tell me what plans the Scottish Government has to invest in schemes that will help private car owners to make cleaner decisions instead of simply charging them to go to work?

Roseanna Cunningham: Jeremy Balfour will be aware that the Government has done a great deal of work to ensure that, for example, there is a really good network of electric vehicle charging points, which will encourage the take-up of electric vehicles, and that we begin to see a reduction in the number of vehicles that contribute to poor air quality. However, notwithstanding the real issues that there are around air quality, the fact is that the average level of man-made PM_{2.5}, which is due mainly to road traffic, reduced by 22 per cent across Scotland between 2010 and 2016. Although there is a great deal still to do, a great deal has already been done.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): In its stage 1 report on the Transport (Scotland) Bill, the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee recognised that low-emission zones could result in the most polluting vehicles being pushed into neighbouring areas, causing increased congestion and air pollution. What analysis has been carried out to identify areas of potential displacement? What support will be provided to affected local authorities?

Roseanna Cunningham: The member will be aware that the introduction and management of

low-emission zones is a matter for the local authorities that are progressing them. I anticipate that information on the issue that Mr Golden raises will be among the information that local authorities gather to ensure that the creation of such zones does not create bigger problems for them. However, that will be a matter for their management. If the member has a particular proposed low-emission zone in mind, I strongly advise him to contact the relevant local authority to ask it what its proposals and intentions are.

I know that the issue of displacement could be a particular problem in Edinburgh, because of the situation there, but I am absolutely certain that City of Edinburgh Council is already considering that issue as well as the other issues that it will have to take on board before it introduces a low-emission zone.

Trail Hunting (Definition)

2. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it defines trail hunting in relation to its proposals for legislative changes to fox hunting practices. (S5O-03087)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government has not yet set out to define trail hunting in legal terms, but it might be helpful for me to outline the description of trail hunting that was provided by Lord Bonyon in his review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002. He described it as

“the hunting of a scent laid manually in such a way as best to simulate traditional mounted hunting activity. The trail is laid along the line a fox might take when moving across the countryside. Trail hunters use animal-based scent, primarily fox urine, a scent with which the hounds are familiar and with which it is intended they should remain familiar.”

Emma Harper: Would the minister be open to looking at drag hunting, which uses a pre-laid, non-animal chemical scent, such as aniseed oil, as an alternative? It would allow the cultural heritage and social aspects of such countryside activities to continue.

Mairi Gougeon: In January, I announced the Government's intention to prevent trail hunting from becoming an established practice in Scotland, to protect animal welfare. Since trail hunting has been introduced in England and Wales, we have seen that it can sometimes lead to hounds killing a fox, whether by accident or intentionally.

As we develop our proposals and move forward, if the evidence shows that drag hunting does not pose a risk to animal welfare, I envisage that we might well consider that practice to be fit to continue in Scotland.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): It is clear that we need to end the current loopholes in the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 and avoid creating any new ones, such as trail hunting, appearing in Scotland. Does the minister not accept that the Government's plans for a licensing scheme that would allow the use of more than two dogs risk creating an entirely new loophole for hunters who want to dodge the ban? Will she accept that cruelty cannot be licensed and scrap the Government's proposals for a licensing scheme?

Mairi Gougeon: I understand Colin Smyth's concern, but I reiterate what I said in my statement in January. The reasoning behind our proposals is to close any loopholes and not create new ones. I have openly said that I want to work with members across the chamber to develop the legislation.

I have talked about the potential for licensing. We do not know what the scheme might look like, because we have not developed the proposals. I want to work with Colin Smyth and other members across the chamber so that, when we introduce the legislation, we do it right and we avoid creating any loopholes.

Post-Brexit Environmental Governance

3. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what process is in place for it to identify its preferred option for delivering effective environmental governance following Brexit, including functions equivalent to those carried out by the European Commission and European Court. (S5O-03088)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): On 16 February, the Scottish Government published a consultation paper on future environmental principles and governance in Scotland. We are currently engaging with stakeholders, and the consultation will close on 11 May. We will publish an analysis of the consultation responses and develop proposals to bring before Parliament. As the consultation paper makes clear, any proposals for the future must reflect ministers' accountability to the Scottish Parliament and the role of the courts.

Finlay Carson: The expert report highlighted the risks and identified potential options and solutions. The Government has not provided its view on its preferred option for addressing the environmental governance gap in its recently launched consultation on environmental principles and governance. On what basis will it do so once the consultation closes?

Roseanna Cunningham: Fundamentally, we will do it on the basis of what the consultation

reveals. In considering how to design the consultation, we decided to proceed not by consulting on a Government-preferred scheme but by inviting real consultation on where people genuinely think the governance gaps are. I note that Wales has followed the same route. We take the view that that approach can deliver the most appropriately designed response to the governance gaps that may or may not occur, depending on what may or may not happen in the House of Commons in the next few days.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's comments on the consultation and look forward to hearing the analysis. However, does the chaos that we are seeing at Westminster not mean that it will be very difficult for us to identify what those governance gaps are?

Roseanna Cunningham: As I said briefly at the end of my previous answer, it is hard to make plans in the face of the uncertainty at Westminster. However, it is vital that effective and appropriate governance remains in place to monitor and enforce environmental standards in Scotland. For obvious reasons, and as everybody would expect me to say, my choice would be to remain fully within the European Union's governance systems, but we are trying to prepare for whatever the future brings. At the moment, we do not know what governance system might or might not apply even if there were to be a deal—and we do not know whether that will be the case either.

Deposit Return Scheme (Exemptions)

5. **Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to possible exemptions from a deposit return scheme. (S5O-03090)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Work is on-going to finalise the preferred design for a Scottish deposit return scheme, in line with the commitment contained in the 2018-19 programme for government. In doing so, we are giving careful consideration to the views that have been expressed by the more than 3,000 individuals and organisations across the country who responded to the public consultation on the proposals. We recognise the need for any scheme to properly take into account the interests of retailers while reflecting the needs of members of the public across the country, who will require convenient access to return points if the scheme is to be a success.

Liz Smith: The cabinet secretary will be well aware of some of the concerns about the issue and the discussion among the business community on whether there will be any form of

exemptions. Is she actively discussing what those exemptions might be?

Roseanna Cunningham: There is an active discussion about all aspects of our proposed deposit return scheme. Exemption proposals have been put forward by some organisations. The member is right that conversations with those organisations have been going on for a considerable time; indeed, they stretch back some years. However, I ask members to have a degree of wariness when they are thinking about and listening to some of what is said. For example, the request that exemptions should be applied to shops with a floor space of under 280m², which is one of the asks that we have received, would effectively exempt all but 17 per cent of the premises in Scotland. That would create significant issues with accessibility and could affect the potential success of the scheme. The issue is not as straightforward as some members like to imagine, as that suggestion would potentially leave huge geographic areas without a return point. That is the kind of thing that we have to balance and take on board, and we are doing so.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the issue for small retailers in urban and rural areas is not necessarily about exemptions, which she has touched on, and might be about support for good arrangements, such as those that she and I saw last summer on our visits to Norway? Will that be considered by the new advisory group?

Roseanna Cunningham: The new advisory group has not yet met formally, but I expect that all that will be part of its consideration. I fully anticipate that all potential solutions to the problems and challenges that introducing a new scheme will bring will be part and parcel of the conversation.

I remind members that we are not out here on our own on this. A huge number of other countries across Europe have deposit return schemes of one kind or another that are actively and successfully working, and we should be able to have exactly the same.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 was not lodged.

Fly Tipping (Alleviation)

7. **Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to alleviate fly tipping. (S5O-03092)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Local authorities are primarily responsible for clearing fly tipping and litter. Fly

tipping is illegal, dangerous and unnecessary. Valuable resources that could be recycled are wasted and publicly funded organisations and landowners bear the cost of the clean-up.

To tackle the issue, we support the reporting of fly tipping, through the flymapper and dumb dumpers systems, and the wider work on prevention and sharing expertise of Zero Waste Scotland, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Scottish partnership against rural crime. We have provided SEPA and local authorities with the powers to fine people who are caught fly tipping, from the minimum fixed penalty of £200 up to a maximum fine of £40,000 if the person is prosecuted.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the cabinet secretary for that comprehensive response.

Fly tipping seems to be a growing problem. In Perth and Kinross, for example, the number of recorded incidents has doubled in the past four years. Under current law in the area, the owner of the land is responsible for the cost of cleaning up after fly tipping. That goes against the polluter-pays principle. Is it time to revisit the law, so that owners of land are not held liable for the irresponsible actions of other people?

Roseanna Cunningham: I would need to see a great deal more detailed analysis of what actually happens in respect of fly tipping to be certain that changing the law would help the situation.

Fly tipping is a considerable problem, which I suspect is growing, unfortunately. At the end of the day, the responsibility lies with the individuals who are doing the fly tipping. Ideally, we would be able to identify those individuals; in the absence of that, it is indeed the landowner who is currently responsible.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary say how the Scottish Government encourages a preventative approach to reducing litter?

Roseanna Cunningham: The national litter strategy, "Towards a litter-free Scotland: a strategic approach to higher quality local environments", sets out a strategic approach to preventing littering. It focuses on a range of approaches, key to which is the underpinning message about the waste of time and money that clearing litter involves, and the harm that littering does to our communities, countryside and marine environment.

We continue to look for new ways to reduce littering. Today, I announced our intention to introduce a new offence of littering from vehicles, to target the blight of roadside litter in Scotland.

Special Marine Protected Areas (Consultation)

8. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to consult on the outstanding special marine protected areas. (S5O-03093)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government is currently preparing consultations in two areas, both of which could be covered by the member's question. First, there is to be a supplementary consultation on the strategic environmental assessment for the classification of special areas of protection for seabirds. Secondly, there is to be a consultation on the designation of four additional nature conservation marine protected areas for mobile species. Both consultations will be launched shortly after the Easter recess.

We are currently consulting on two new historic marine protected areas at Bressay Sound and Scapa Flow. That consultation is open and will run until 17 April.

Pauline McNeill: Will the minister clarify that that work will include consultation on massive deep water marine protected areas? As she knows, Rockall basin will single-handedly double the size of the marine protection network.

Will she also assure me that that consultation will be well under way so that we see conclusions before the end of this parliamentary session?

Mairi Gougeon: That is certainly the intention behind launching the consultations in the Easter recess. We want to ensure that we have as wide engagement as possible.

I will probably have to catch the member at another time about the first part of her question. We have proposals for a deep sea reserve—I do not know whether that is what her first point related to. I will happily write to her with more details about that.

Rural Economy

Farming and Food Production Policy Group

1. **Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made since 10 January 2019 with setting up a farming and food production policy group. (S5O-03094)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): The remit and membership of the farming and food production policy group are under active consideration and details will be confirmed in due course. As indicated during the parliamentary debate on 6 March, the Scottish ministers are committed to

establishing the group in a way that reflects the wishes of Parliament, and membership will include representation of farmers, environmental organisations and consumers.

Claudia Beamish: Will the cabinet secretary commit today to a timeframe for progressing the group in more detail as well as the group's deliberations and outputs? Given the parliamentary appetite for such a group, will he work collaboratively with all MSPs across the chamber who are interested?

Fergus Ewing: I do not want to commit to a specific timetable. I can assure the member and all members across the chamber that active consideration is being given to the composition of the group. It is a very important piece of work that Parliament wishes us to do, and I am always happy to take the views of members into account. I have a remit from Parliament that I intend to fulfil as soon as I can, but I find that imposing a deadline on one's self is perhaps not a prudent ministerial practice.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Given the many analyses that suggest that significant action is needed to tackle emissions from agriculture, what is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that farmers and food producers play their part in reducing emissions?

Fergus Ewing: We want Scotland to be a world-class producer of high-quality food. We believe that we are producing that food sustainably, profitably and efficiently. The agricultural chapter of the Scottish Government's climate change plan sets out our approach and we are working with the industry and with our institutes and our renowned scientific community, which contribute so much in that area.

We have reinforced our intentions with three commitments in the 2018-19 programme for government: our young farmer climate change champions, which we have delivered on; the nitrogen modelling tool, which we are on target to deliver; and the farming for a better climate programme.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my farming interests in my entry in the register of members' interests.

The cabinet secretary will be aware from recent Scottish farm business income estimates that although average farm income has risen, too many farms are still making average losses of £7,400. What support can the Scottish Government provide to farms now in terms of food production to help them to diversify in order to become more financially sustainable?

Fergus Ewing: Mr Cameron is right to make that point. Indeed, I met some farmers from

Lochaber with him just a few weeks ago. I am acutely aware that many farmers in less favoured area support scheme areas, particularly in hill farm areas in the Highlands and Islands, face acute financial pressures. That is why we have worked very hard to deliver loan payments for the basic payments scheme from October last year—two months ahead of most of the rest of the UK—and for LFASS from March. Most of the LFASS loan payments have been made.

My main job is to get that financial support out of the door and into the hands of farmers and crofters. In practical terms, we have succeeded in that, and I am acutely aware that with the pressure of Brexit and the fear of the unknown and what that may lead to, it is a very important piece of work. I can assure Mr Cameron and other members that that has my daily attention, with weekly conference calls—including this morning—with officials, to make sure that team Scotland is on the case. I believe that we have been and are.

Food and Drink Industry (Brexit)

2. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact that leaving the European Union will have on the food and drink industry. (S5O-03095)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): If the United Kingdom leaves the EU without a deal on 12 April, Scotland will experience substantial disruptive impacts across the food and drink sector, which will be felt by those who supply this vital sector. The highest risks in the immediate term are as a consequence of significant disruption to the flow of goods across the Channel. Our seafood sector, which accounts for 58 per cent of our overall food exports, is likely to be particularly affected, given the just-in-time and perishable nature of that trade.

It is also worth noting that, as James Withers of Scotland Food & Drink has stated, the impact on our food and drink sector would likely cost us somewhere in the region of £2 billion, which is a cost that we can ill afford.

Ruth Maguire: Is the Scottish Government initiative to support businesses that are affected by Brexit open to food and drink companies? How might companies in my constituency of Cunninghame South access that funding?

Mairi Gougeon: Food and drink businesses can apply for that funding. Our initiative to support businesses is being promoted through our enterprise agencies, which have produced a self-assessment toolkit and checklist and are offering access to events and expert advice. The details can be found at www.prepareforbrexit.scot.

The Brexit support grant provides 100 per cent funding—from a minimum of £2,000 to a maximum of £4,000—to help VAT-registered small and medium-sized enterprises manage a wide range of Brexit impacts. Information about the scheme has been placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre, and I encourage all members to make relevant businesses in their constituencies aware of the grant, as well as the Brexit self-assessment toolkit.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): A significant amount of Scottish lamb is exported to the EU. What will the minister do to support sheep farmers in Scotland if there is a no-deal Brexit or, indeed, if we end up in a backstop situation?

Mairi Gougeon: I thank Rhoda Grant for raising that question, because we identified sheep meat as one of the areas that would probably be worst affected, especially by a no-deal Brexit. Together with the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, I have attended the Scottish Government resilience committee meetings. As well as those meetings, we have the fortnightly food sector resilience group meetings, which involve all sectors across the industry, with the purpose of establishing exactly what the issues are and what contingency measures we can put in place to try to prevent the worst-case scenario that we could well be facing.

The point to bear in mind is that not all the issues are in our control in Scotland. We are simply trying to mitigate the worst aspects, as far as possible. We are working as closely as we can with the industry to prevent some of the worst impacts.

Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire Agriculture (Brexit)

3. **Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact Brexit could have on the agriculture sector in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire. (S5O-03096)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): Leaving the European Union will significantly impact on agriculture across Scotland, including in Mr Arthur's constituency, particularly in a no-deal scenario. The Scottish Government recently published a list of 67 known negative impacts of Brexit across the rural economy, many affecting farming and food production. Analysis shows that the impact of defaulting to World Trade Organization terms could be severe for some sectors. For example, the farm-gate price for sheep meat could fall by up to 30 per cent.

However, the loss of people is potentially the most significant issue. Food Standards Scotland estimates that around 75 per cent of vets currently working in our abattoirs are non-United Kingdom EU nationals. If we were to lose that skilled workforce, we would have serious difficulties in providing meat for domestic consumers as well as for export.

Tom Arthur: I thank the cabinet secretary for that detailed and sobering answer. Given that the UK Government has failed to guarantee future funding for farm support beyond the end of the current UK parliamentary session, which is scheduled for 2022, can he advise what he is doing to ensure that farmers and food producers get their payment entitlements this year, to help to address the stress that is being caused by on-going Brexit uncertainty?

Fergus Ewing: Who would put money on the UK Parliament lasting until the end of 2022? The guarantee may expire somewhat sooner than that.

We are doing what we can. We have operated two successful loan schemes, for the 2018 basic payments and the 2018 less favoured area support scheme payments, directly putting £370 million into rural businesses.

We commenced basic payments balance payments in March and I am pleased to confirm today that payments that were made under the 2018 Scottish suckler beef support scheme are being processed this week and will begin to reach bank accounts from 9 April, which is next Tuesday. I expect that an initial round of payments worth an estimated £33 million will be processed, with work in hand to make the remainder of the payments between now and the end of the payment window in June.

I can also confirm that we will begin to process LFASS 2018 payments next week, which means that we will close the LFASS loan scheme on 12 April, which is next Friday. Anyone who still wishes to accept a loan offer should reply by that date. So far, we have paid out LFASS 2018 loans worth £51.7 million to 8,379 claimants, which is in line with our experience of previous loan schemes.

NFU Scotland (Meetings)

4. **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met NFU Scotland and what was discussed. (S5O-03097)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): I met NFUS on 21 March and my colleague, Roseanna Cunningham, also met NFUS on that date. We meet officials and office bearers regularly.

Liam Kerr: Farmers in the north-east have been impacted by record levels of fly-tipping. As Murdo

Fraser highlighted earlier, the burden of clean-up falls on farmers, on pain of being fined. What will the Scottish Government do to support farmers in the region to respond to fly tipping? Given that just one in 600 cases in Aberdeenshire results in conviction, does the cabinet secretary agree that the law needs strengthened?

Fergus Ewing: I believe that the matter is actually dealt with by my colleague, Roseanna Cunningham; indeed, it was raised during the immediately preceding session of portfolio questions on environment, climate change and land reform. That said, I entirely agree that this is an extremely serious matter. Fly tipping is a form of criminal activity. It is selfish and it has a huge impact on farmers. People who do it should be, frankly, ashamed of themselves and I hope that those who do it are caught.

As the member knows, the evidential requirement is a difficult matter, particularly in rural Scotland, where there tends to be a lack of eye witnesses to such behaviour. I have no hesitation in condemning such behaviour. I have recently had meetings with the police in relation to rural crime and I know that they take these matters very seriously—and rightly so.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): As the cabinet secretary will be aware, NFUS has expressed serious concerns about the increasing numbers of migrant greylag geese, which are affecting a number of communities around the country, including Orkney.

Will the cabinet secretary lend his support to efforts to get Scottish Natural Heritage, NFUS and other partners to look at ways of extending the adaptive management scheme programmes, so that the issue can be dealt with more effectively?

Fergus Ewing: Again, I think that the matter is specifically within the portfolio responsibility of my colleague, Roseanna Cunningham. However, I am aware of the issue and have followed the recent publicity about the burgeoning numbers of greylag geese and the serious issue that they pose for Mr McArthur's farmers—several of whom I met on a visit in the not-too-distant past. I respect the great work that Orcadian farmers do and the high quality of the produce with which they provide Scotland. Therefore, I have no hesitation in agreeing that we should encourage all parties—including SNH—to see whether a solution that is congenial to Mr McArthur's constituents can be found.

Offshore Wind Developments (Effects on Fishing Industry)

5. Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with fishermen in Angus regarding the

impact of offshore wind developments on the fishing industry. (S5O-03098)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): Scottish Government officials regularly discuss immediate and strategic issues relating to the impact of offshore wind developments with fishermen and their representative organisations, including those from Angus. That includes discussions on projects that are going through the consenting and post-consent construction processes and on the sectoral marine plan for offshore wind—fisheries representatives sit on the cross-sectoral steering groups for that work.

My officials are currently undertaking a review of consenting instruments in order to ensure that adequate mitigation is in place to protect the fishing sector. Marine Scotland has actively sought views from the fishing industry and would welcome any further input from fishers and their representative organisations.

Bill Bowman: Arbroath and Angus had thriving fishing industries prior to the implementation of the common fisheries policy. I welcome the sea of opportunity that leaving the CFP will afford my constituents. What assessment has been made of the impact that the increasing number of offshore wind structures will have on the increased number of fishing vessels after leaving the CFP?

Fergus Ewing: I am not quite sure what causal link there is between the two topics that Bill Bowman has raised. I will stick to the topic that was raised in the question—I think that that is the appropriate process that we are engaged in.

I am very happy to say that we take extremely seriously the protection of fisheries' interests while we successfully pursue our renewable energy ambitions. I have taken a personal interest in that; indeed, when I was the energy minister, I ensured that the consents that were granted contained provisions to ensure that the fishing sector and the energy sector could work together—they are both great sectors of the Scottish economy, and it is right that we ensure that. Where conflict arises, the cross-sectoral groups on which Angus fishermen sit are a good way to resolve it. However, the consultation that I am engaged in is designed to ensure that what further—if anything—can be done to ensure that fishing interests are not prejudiced can be done. After all, the fishermen were there first.

Population Decline in Rural areas

6. Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the action it is taking to tackle population decline in rural areas. (S5O-03099)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government recognises that people are Scotland's greatest asset. Our economic action plan set out a commitment to a come to Scotland campaign, and we are developing with our partners a package of measures to attract people to and retain people in Scotland, including in our rural areas. However, Scotland needs further levers to be able to action change. Those include having a tailored approach to migration that will attract and retain people with the skills that we need to ensure the future sustainability of our rural communities.

Dr Allan: A community organisation on the isle of Harris recently raised with me its concerns about the sustainability of having more than 50 per cent of homes in certain fragile communities given over to holiday houses. There is consensus—rightly—that tourism is important to the island economy, but what assessment has the Scottish Government made of the issue? What measures can be taken to ensure that communities do not become unsustainable, depopulated or unaffordable for people to live in?

Mairi Gougeon: I completely understand the concerns that Alasdair Allan has raised. “Scottish Planning Policy” sets out that the planning system should

“encourage rural development that supports prosperous and sustainable communities and businesses”.

The Planning (Scotland) Bill was amended at stage 2 to include provision that a residential property's change of use to short-term holiday letting would be a material change of use that would require planning permission, and a further amendment to that section of the bill has been lodged in advance of stage 3. The Scottish Government is considering the effect of the amendments and will respond in due course.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

Is the minister concerned that the reduction in agricultural tenancies will reduce population levels in rural Scotland?

Mairi Gougeon: We are seeing a declining population in rural areas for a number of reasons. That is why I recently met the Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development, Ben Macpherson, to discuss the matter and to see what other measures we could take to try to sustain and build our populations in rural areas.

A number of issues have been raised with me continually in the visits that I have made in my role, including, particularly by young people, the issue of their ability to stay in rural areas. We need connectivity, infrastructure, jobs and housing. By

looking at all those things in the round, we can hope to not only maintain populations in rural areas but attract people to live in those areas.

Agriculture Bill

7. Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests: I am a farmer.

To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to introduce an agriculture bill. (S5O-03100)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): In a recent parliamentary debate on future rural policy and support, I announced that we would introduce a rural support bill in this parliamentary session. That bill will enable us to amend retained European Union law to deliver on the proposals for the period up to 2024, as set out in our “Stability and Simplicity: proposals for a rural funding transition period” consultation document. Consideration is currently being given to the timetable and I will, of course, advise Parliament of it once it has been agreed.

Peter Chapman: As the cabinet secretary knows, an agriculture bill is essential to allow the Scottish Government to continue to make support payments to our farmers post-Brexit. Last year's farm business income figures showed that more than 60 per cent of farms were making a loss, with the average farm business making a loss of £7,400, without receiving additional support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you come to your question, please?

Peter Chapman: More worrying, sheep farmers in less favoured areas were making a loss of £27,400. Those figures show how vital support payments are.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Chapman, could you come to your question?

Peter Chapman: With that in mind, can the cabinet secretary tell me when an agriculture bill will be introduced in this Parliament?

Fergus Ewing: We will introduce an agriculture bill in due course, as necessary. Let me stress one simple point: the bill will cause no difficulty with, or impediment to, the continued payment of moneys that are due to farmers and crofters. Maintaining that process is a top priority for me and commands a great deal of my time—rightly so. The money is due to farmers and crofters, and I give an absolute assurance today—as I have done repeatedly—that the agriculture bill will simply be a mechanism that will allow us to continue to make those payments. The bill will be introduced in time to enable that to happen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions. I did not reach question 8, so I apologise to Clare Adamson.

NHS and Social Care Staff (Workplace Support)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-16702, in the name of Miles Briggs, on looking after those who look after us. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:42

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I open today's debate by paying tribute to all those who work in our Scottish national health service and social care services. Every MSP, no matter what part of Scotland they represent, will have seen at first hand the dedication and commitment of our NHS staff in providing each and every one of us and our families with the care that we need, in good times and in bad. Any organisation, at its heart, is its people, and the NHS is no different.

Sometimes in politics there are cases that make us stop and think that we need to do something collectively to bring about a change. One of the most shocking and tragic cases that has stayed with me during my time as Conservative health spokesman is that of 23-year-old junior doctor, Lauren Connelly. Lauren was killed after her car veered off the M8 motorway as she drove home after a 12-hour night shift at Inverclyde royal hospital in Greenock. At the time, Dr Connelly, from East Kilbride, was just seven weeks into her medical training. The case tragically highlighted the fears about the long working hours and fatigue that are faced by so many who work in our NHS. Staff frequently work exhausting 100-hour weeks, with shift patterns of 12 consecutive days.

I pay tribute to Lauren's father, Brian Connelly, who, since the tragic death of his daughter, has campaigned tirelessly alongside the British Medical Association for the introduction of stricter limits on working hours. I spoke to Mr Connelly last night, when he told me of his wish for there to be greater public awareness of the hours that junior doctors work, the tiredness that that causes and the consequent risks, both to them and to patient care. He would welcome the support of all MSPs for his campaign to try to rectify those long-standing problems and improve the health and safety of junior doctors across our country. Mr Connelly is determined to see the First Minister's 2017 pledge to implement a 48-hour working week delivered, and I hope that all parties will agree to attend a cross-party meeting that I am organising to help take that work forward.

People who work in our NHS are superheroes in many people's eyes, but they are not superhuman. We need to understand the impact that the on-

going NHS workforce crisis, which involves high vacancy rates in nursing, consultancy and mental health posts and high absence rates across the health service, is having on staff and staff morale.

As the British Medical Association says, there are simply not enough health professionals working across all professions in Scotland's NHS today. Ninety-one per cent of doctors are working more than their allocated hours. The British Dental Association recently warned that 57 per cent of associate dentists are looking to retire from general dental practice. One in four general practitioner practices in Scotland has a vacancy and the Scottish NHS is short of 2,400 nurses and midwives.

After 12 years in charge of our Scottish NHS, Scottish National Party ministers need to accept that they have presided over a workforce crisis that is impacting on the wellbeing of NHS staff today. It is therefore little wonder that the Royal College of Nursing accused Nicola Sturgeon of

“a spectacular error of judgment”

when she cut the number of student nurses when she was health secretary, quadrupling the number of unfilled nursing posts and putting all NHS staff under pressure.

Perhaps more concerning is that the BMA also believes that official figures are continuing to underreport the actual extent of vacancies among the consultant workforce. BMA research that was published last year showed that the actual vacancy rate is likely to be running substantially higher than the official figures. Freedom of information data showed that the number of vacancies was in fact around double the level that was recorded by official statistics. That is a difference of around 375 whole-time equivalent vacancies, which means that, potentially, enough doctors to staff a large hospital are missing from our Scottish NHS today.

We need to understand the severe pressures that NHS staff are under and how that negatively impacts on their own health and wellbeing. Retention of staff has to become the number 1 priority for the Government and for the health services that we all want to perform well. That is why the Scottish Conservatives have secured today's debate.

We need our NHS working environments to take into account the wellbeing and needs of those who work in them. Therefore, the Conservatives call on ministers today to review NHS and social care staff workplace support services in order to improve and promote wellbeing. We have a few ideas, and so will, I know, members across the chamber and, perhaps more important, groups outwith the Parliament—ideas about how we can

move towards a more holistic approach to the wellbeing of our NHS staff.

One such idea is to have sleep pods and phone charging points in hospitals, where NHS night-shift staff can rest before they attempt long journeys home. Another idea is to offer NHS staff free parking—NHS staff in Dundee, Glasgow and Edinburgh continue to face unacceptable parking charges. Mental health support and financial advice should be provided to NHS staff. Salus, which is based in NHS Lanarkshire, is already offering such support to all NHS Lanarkshire staff, and I would like to see its services rolled out across the country. We could also provide free health checks at community pharmacies to help give NHS staff lots of additional holistic support services, such as weight management services.

It is important that there is a focus on NHS staff wellbeing. NHS Borders recently told the Health and Sport Committee that it has a “wellbeing Wednesday”, and we need to look at how we take forward such good practice across all our health boards.

As I said, parties across the chamber and, more important, representative bodies will have ideas about how we can achieve all of that. I hope that we can take those ideas forward.

I am somewhat disappointed with the cabinet secretary's amendment to my motion. The debate should, and can, be about how Parliament can collectively do something to support and improve the working lives of people who work in our health and social care services. When the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport first took over the role, she said that her approach to the job would involve “mature reflection”. I do not think that, in trying to delete from the motion the mention of the “workforce crisis” that we have across our health service, the approach that she has taken today is productive.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Miles Briggs: Yes, if it is brief.

Sandra White: Miles Briggs has quoted the BMA at length. BMA Scotland's GPs have spoken of the potentially devastating effect that Brexit will have, not only on our health service, but on medicines. Does Miles Briggs agree?

Miles Briggs: I have been absolutely clear about the impact of and potential challenges from Brexit, but the workforce challenges that we face across our NHS did not start with Brexit; 12 years of an SNP Government has built up those challenges. SNP ministers and members need to understand that, after 12 years of being in charge of our NHS, the SNP has no one else to blame but itself.

I welcome the constructive Labour Party amendment, which we will support at decision time.

I hope that the debate provides an opportunity for us to focus on our NHS staff and what we can do to make their lives easier. It is time that we changed the approach that is taken, to look after those who look after us.

I move,

That the Parliament pays tribute to all those who work in the NHS and social care services for the care and treatment that they help to deliver for patients and families across Scotland; notes the ongoing NHS workforce crisis, which sees high vacancy rates in nursing, consulting and mental health posts, as well as high absence rates across the health service; understands the pressures that NHS and social care staff face and believes that there is a need to improve the holistic care and support provided to them in their workplaces, and calls on ministers to review NHS and social care staff workplace support services in order to improve and promote wellbeing and look after those who look after people in Scotland.

14:49

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I thank Miles Briggs for bringing his motion to Parliament today.

I am immensely proud of our health and social care staff. The quality of care and treatment provided by our staff, and the compassion and dedication that they show, are unparalleled, and we thank each and every one of them. Whatever their role, they contribute directly to our nation's health and wellbeing, and to our society.

Of course I recognise the pressure that exists from the increasing demand on health and care services. The reasons for that are well rehearsed, but they include demographic challenges, increasingly complex care needs and advances in the care and treatment services that we are able to offer. I recognise that the pressures are felt by our staff, and that is why we have acted and will continue to act to support our workforce, increasing training numbers in nursing and midwifery, among medical undergraduates, for our medical postgraduate programme and for allied health professional pathways; promoting training pathways; supporting board recruitment and retention; promoting staff health and wellbeing; and increasing the employee voice.

Delivering sustainable services is not simply about supporting recruitment and retention. The health and wellbeing of our workforce is of fundamental importance, and that is why I am happy to support Monica Lennon's amendment. We must keep listening to staff and learning from their experience, so I also welcome the proposal in Mr Briggs's motion of a review of support, and I am happy to take that forward.

There is, however, a threat to our work to support our health and care services that cannot be ignored, and that is Brexit. Although I accept that some of the challenges that we face did not start with Brexit, we have had three years of waiting to see what will happen with Brexit, and we still do not know the answer. Since the inception of our health service, our health and care services have benefited from inward migration, and they have benefited, too, from our healthcare professionals working elsewhere and bringing their experience and knowledge back home to apply here. Free movement is vital for us to continue to attract dedicated professionals to help to deliver those services. It is simply wrong that our European Union health and social care staff should no longer feel welcome, and it is absolutely devastating that skilled colleagues who have built their lives here in Scotland should be planning to leave as a result. We will continue to advocate on their behalf and argue for a tailored immigration policy that meets Scotland's needs and reflects our values.

We are taking comprehensive action to support increasing medical, nursing and midwifery trainees through the system, including bespoke support for specialty medical training and midwifery to promote both rural training and recruitment. We are maintaining free tuition fees and increasing the nursing and midwifery student bursary to £8,100 this year and £10,000 in 2020. A non-means tested bursary was scrapped in England by the United Kingdom Government. For the seventh successive year, we have increased the number of student midwifery and nursing places.

We have provided funding for adult social care workers to be paid the real living wage, benefiting up to 40,000 care workers.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary, who helpfully met me recently to discuss payment of the living wage to overnight care workers. Despite local authorities having the resources to do so, some of them have not passed that on in full, particularly for those who are employed in the third sector. What progress is being made to ensure that that payment starts at the very beginning of the new financial year?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Ms Baillie for raising that point. She has long championed the issue, as I have done. The intention to support 24-hour care wherever it is needed is really important—I know that we share that view. I met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities yesterday to look specifically at the information that we have so far on where the payment is not being applied and to determine what further action we can take. I am not yet clear about all the local authorities that are not yet applying it; some of the data is not yet complete. However, as soon as we

have the information, we and COSLA will, between ourselves, act with those individual authorities, and I will ensure that Ms Baillie and others are kept up to date.

Our NHS staffing levels are at a new record high—up by more than 13,000 whole-time equivalent staff under this Government. To support local recruitment efforts, we have provided record levels of investment, with resource and capital expenditure this year exceeding £14 billion for the first time.

Members will be well aware that, to facilitate workforce and workload planning, we have introduced the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Bill, which is the first multidisciplinary workload and workforce planning legislation in the United Kingdom. The bill recognises the fundamentally multidisciplinary nature of health and social care services. It is an important piece of legislation: it is important for workforce planning and for our staff. I look forward to continuing to work with members across the chamber to make sure that we get the legislation right for the whole health and social care system.

It is absolutely the case that the care, compassion and support that we ask our health and social care staff to give those who need them is care, compassion and support that they should receive themselves. I do not believe that we can have one without the other. Across our health boards, we have a number of wellbeing and mental health support initiatives for our staff, but challenges remain and I am always open to good, constructive ideas that we can try to introduce to improve that approach. In fact, I will meet the BMA later today to discuss further the work that we are undertaking in respect of junior doctors.

I remain absolutely committed to high-quality, sustainable health and social care. At the heart of that system is a healthy and cared-for workforce. We are working hard to deliver on that commitment, but there is more for us to do. I look forward to the debate.

I move amendment S5M-16702.3, to leave out from “notes” to “health service” and insert

“believes that this support for staff should include support in their initial training, and welcomes that in Scotland free tuition has been retained for nursing and midwifery students, and that their bursaries are increasing by £10,000 in 2020; notes the observations of the BMA that Brexit will have a ‘potentially devastating impact’ on the health and social care workforce, and agrees with the BMA that, for staff from the EU, ‘It is simply wrong that they should feel they no longer belong here or should be planning to leave as a result of Brexit’.”

14:56

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): “Looking after those who look after us” is the title

of today’s debate and I hope that it reminds us all that we should never take our health and social care staff for granted. I am grateful to Miles Briggs for securing the debate and to the BMA, the RCN and Enable Scotland for their helpful briefings.

I associate Scottish Labour members with Miles Briggs’s remarks about Dr Lauren Connelly, who will be sadly missed by her family and her colleagues. Lauren was from East Kilbride in the region that I represent, and I pay tribute to her father and the family who continue to campaign.

Eight years on since Lauren died, the latest General Medical Council survey found that nearly one in every four UK doctors in training said that they were burnt out because of their work. A recent BMA survey found that 91 per cent of doctors work more than their allotted hours. We know that the problem is not isolated to doctors but extends to all staff who are affected by the NHS’s workforce crisis. Social care staff are at risk, too. The social care sector is fragile and staff often experience poor working conditions, sometimes on zero-hour contracts, with low pay and demanding shift patterns.

Health and social care staff are being stretched to their limits, working more than their contracted hours at times. Staff who I have spoken to feel as though they are always on call. Ahead of the debate, I was keen to look into what support is available to staff. I was interested to hear from Unison that some NHS workplaces have implemented staff wellbeing initiatives, such as lunch time yoga—something that perhaps we could all benefit from. The Scottish Conservatives have called for provision for sleep facilities, so that staff can catch up on much-needed sleep before driving home. Those ideas are all worth exploring, and any measure that will protect staff and promote health and safety in the workplace needs to be encouraged.

However, Labour members are concerned about the working conditions that allow staff to become so exhausted and stressed in the first place. Until the Scottish Government accepts that there is a workforce crisis, it will never truly address the systemic problems that our health and social care services face. Scottish Labour research has found that between 2015-16 and 2017-18, 1 million days of NHS staff absence were caused by stress. I attended the annual review of NHS Lanarkshire today, where I raised my concerns about staff wellbeing, because staff absences and vacancy rates there are above the national average. Although any measures to support staff are welcome, we must ensure that the focus remains on the root causes of poor staff wellbeing, such as too much work and not enough staff.

Research from the BMA, the GMC, Unison and others tells us that factors that contribute to stress include workplace culture, bullying and harassment. If our health and social care staff are truly valued, that must be reflected in workplaces, but we have reason to be concerned that some workplaces are not the supportive environments that we expect them to be. This year alone, we have heard worrying cases about staff bullying and concerns about how whistleblowing is dealt with. Those issues are too important to shy away from.

I acknowledge that the health secretary has said that she will appoint whistleblowing champions to every health board, but that must happen as a matter of urgency, because every day that goes by that staff do not feel able to report their serious concerns, more staff will feel demoralised, while patient safety can be put at risk. The on-going issues at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital show how patient safety can be compromised when staff concerns about infection control and cleanliness are not acted upon.

We can support the Conservative motion, because it gives us all an opportunity to show our appreciation for staff and concern for their health and safety. However, we would suggest that more extensive action is required to tackle the root causes of the issues. That is why I am pleased to hear from the cabinet secretary and Miles Briggs that they can support the amendment in my name.

We have sympathy for much of what the Government is saying about the potentially devastating impact of Brexit on health and social care and the EU citizens who are valuable members of our workforce. However, I am a bit concerned about the Government amendment, because it takes out the line about the workforce crisis, which is a fact that we must face up to.

Scottish Labour will always support our health and social care staff to get the working conditions that they deserve and the work-life balance that they need.

I move amendment S5M-16702.1, to insert at end:

“, and considers that such a review must address the underlying issues that contribute to burnout, stress, long-term sickness and to staff leaving health and social care, such as staff shortages, workplace culture, bullying and harassment and poor work-life balance.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I call Alison Johnstone. Four minutes, please, Ms Johnstone.

15:01

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I, too, thank all of those who look after all of us.

It is clear that workforce pressures are severely impacting the wellbeing of health and social care workers. That is the message that is coming from those on the front line. In May 2017, the Royal College of Nursing launched a survey of nursing and midwifery staff in the UK and received more than 3,300 responses from Scotland. The findings show clearly the impact that insufficient staffing has on staff wellbeing. More than half of respondents reported a shortfall in planned numbers of registered nursing staff on their most recent shift or day worked, with around two thirds having worked unplanned extra time. In addition, more than half of survey respondents said that care was compromised on their most recent shift. There is a clear correlation between those conditions and poor staff wellbeing. One respondent stated that

“when nursing staff are overstretched due to insufficient staffing, they often suffer the consequences personally. Not being able to stay hydrated, eat, or use the toilet impacts on their physical and emotional wellbeing.”

Conditions, therefore, are so poor that nurses are often unable to have their basic human needs met.

I acknowledge that the Scottish Government has taken positive steps to address workforce pressures, such as the new GP contract and the introduction of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Bill, and has increased nursing and midwifery student bursaries for next year. However, the workforce will not increase overnight, and there is significant cause for concern around staff wellbeing during the interim period.

There are significant pressures around the implementation of the new GP contract. Last year, the Royal College of General Practitioners commissioned a survey of its members that found that 35 per cent of those surveyed had spent consultation time explaining to patients why they had been offered appointments with other healthcare professionals instead of with a GP. That not only places strain on GPs, who have insufficient 10-minute consultations to see patients with increasingly complex health conditions, but causes distress to patients. The same survey reported that 60 per cent of respondents were aware of patients who had become distressed, angry or confused when signposted by medical practice receptionists. Changes to services as a result of the GP contract—as welcome as they may be—must be urgently communicated to Scotland’s population to ease the concerns of patients and lessen the strain on practice staff.

There are substantial pressures in the social care sector, where 15 per cent of social care workers work unpaid overtime, and 11 per cent are on zero-hours contracts. There is a significant disparity between the value of care and the

support that carers receive, and it is important that professional caring is valued and considered an attractive career. Social care workers do difficult and essential work in people's homes, in care homes and in communities, but social care remains one of the lowest-paid sectors, which fuels the gender pay gap.

Enable Scotland has called for the extension of the Scottish living wage to cover every hour that is worked by social care staff, including, as Jackie Baillie highlighted, overnight sleepover support. However, that must be properly funded by commissioners and, as we have heard, not all of them are doing so.

In February, I urged the Scottish Government to put fair work at the heart of Scotland's care sector by adopting in full the recommendations of the fair work convention's review, "Fair Work in Scotland's Social Care Sector 2019". It reported:

"Frontline workers feel respected for the work they do by their colleagues ... and their employers, but they do not feel particularly valued by Scottish Government or the wider public."

We have to change that. Equitable pay is important, but we need to ensure that social care workers feel respected and supported.

There are positive measures that we can take to address staff wellbeing by ensuring that workers in all sectors feel valued and are fairly paid, but it is key that when changes are implemented to ease workforce pressures, we must communicate them properly.

We cannot have a healthy workforce—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, please—you must conclude. I was making the signal.

I call Alex Cole-Hamilton. It has to be four minutes, Mr Cole-Hamilton.

15:05

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I echo the thanks that other members have expressed to the Conservatives for securing time for this debate and to the workforce that looks after us.

On two occasions, healthcare workers have represented the bridge between normal life and oblivion for my family. In the first case, when my eldest son was born and was not breathing, he was revived after huge complications in theatre. Secondly, and much more recently, a whole team of clinicians stayed behind after their shift had ended to operate and remove a coin that my four-year-old daughter, Darcy, had swallowed. I owe those workers the lives of my children. I am sure that I am not alone and that many people in this chamber can tell similar personal stories.

The NHS is unique in the chamber, because it attracts great love and, at times, great derision. It is important to make a separation and put on record that, as an Opposition politician—I am sure that I speak for all Opposition politicians on this—I might sometimes attack Government policy or the governance of our health boards, but I would never attack the work of our front-line staff. They are heroes in our country.

The first thing that I say in tribute to the staff is that there are not enough of them. There is a workforce crisis and it is wrong of the Government to try to amend the Conservative motion and delete the word "crisis". Since I and many of my colleagues were elected in 2016, there have been warning lights for a range of disciplines across the workforce planning dashboard.

The issue is no more profound for me and my party than in the area of mental health. We already know about the mental health waiting lists for children and young people, but mental health is an issue of great importance for people of all ages. For example, we were going to recruit 800 mental health workers, but in the two years since that policy was announced only 106 have been recruited. To put that in context, one in four appointments with a general practitioner is made because of an underlying mental health complaint. It is no wonder that GP morale is rock bottom; they are having to deal with things that would be better solved by mental health practitioners. I ask the Government to respond to our concerns about the slow uptake of those 800 positions.

Morale is extremely important, and that feeds into it, but there are many factors that lower staff morale in our front-line NHS, whether that is having to send patients a 12-week waiting time guarantee letter when staff know that there is no hope of meeting that guarantee, or closing wards to elective surgery because there are no receiving beds for in-patients in the wider hospital due to delayed discharge. A senior neurosurgeon came to one of my constituency surgeries to talk about how low morale was in his department because of the repeated closures of his ward due to the lack of in-patient beds.

We have also heard a thing or two about safety. Alison Johnstone is absolutely right to cite the concerns of nurses who say that patient care was compromised on their most recent shift. However, it is not just about patient care, as we must recognise that staff, too, have to be kept safe. That is why we have lodged amendments to the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Bill to recognise the pre-eminence and importance of our staff's safety.

Our approach to whistleblowing matters hugely, because we need our staff to understand that they are being listened to and believed and that there

will be corrective action and culture change. The national whistleblowing helpline is not a universally accepted or well-regarded service in our NHS; we can see that in the fact that clinicians will sometimes phone national newspapers about a problem before they will phone the national whistleblowing helpline, such is their concern.

We must also thank our social care workforce and those unpaid carers who look after their loved ones. We all owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I am sorry—time is tight in these short debates.

15:10

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to speak in the debate. I refer members to my register of interests: I have a close family member who is an NHS healthcare professional.

As the Parliament knows, my big passion lies in the preventable health conditions agenda. The escalating cost of the treatment of preventable conditions to the NHS is unsustainable. We are not managing the sustainability of the NHS; rather, we are managing its demise. We know the conditions that we are talking about: chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, obesity, preventable cancers, musculoskeletal conditions, mental health, stroke and so on.

If we are to maintain the long-term future of our most precious public service as being free at the point of delivery, it is crucial that policy tackles that issue. In developing a strategy, we must ensure that we have a delivery mechanism; our NHS staff will be key to that delivery.

Last year, I wrote a paper about changing Scotland's relationship with food, drink and physical activity. The first action point noted that, when we ask our healthcare professionals to look after us and deliver a healthier wellbeing message, our first step must be to look after the health of our healthcare professionals. In so many cases, our healthcare professionals work in an environment that leads them to be more unhealthy than the people to whom they are delivering the health message. We need an environment in which they are able to look after their own health and wellbeing, so that they can adopt the active healthy lifestyle that we ask them to recommend to others. That should be the foundation of any strategy.

On the face of it, some potential interventions are reasonably straightforward. We must ensure that every staff member has access to a hot meal during their shift and adequate break time in which to eat it. Some hospitals do not allow a fridge or microwave in their staff rooms, which leaves night-shift staff with a vending machine as their only

option. With regard to Monica Lennon's point about yoga classes, another example is allowing staff to utilise any on-site facility, such as gym equipment in the physio department, and giving them instruction and time to do so.

If we are asking our healthcare professionals to deliver a service that has a focus on getting the population to be more physically active and nutritionally aware, it is obvious that we need to afford them the very same opportunities. Without that step, the subsequent steps become problematic.

The quality of care in that environment, not to mention the health of the healthcare professionals could be greatly enhanced, resulting in a reduction in absenteeism for both physical and mental health issues. We believe that that would allow healthcare professionals to deliver the kind of preventative and acute care that they want to deliver.

For example, the cardiac physiotherapy department in Crosshouse hospital in NHS Ayrshire and Arran has been running an extended community rehabilitation programme that not only helps chest, heart and stroke sufferers, but welcomes people with other conditions, such as obesity and musculoskeletal conditions. The comorbidity exercise and education classes have been successful in reducing re-admissions to hospital and doctors' appointments, and they have been instrumental in increasing the quality of life for those suffering with those conditions. Those are the innovative and creative solutions that our healthcare professionals can come up with if they are given the support, room and encouragement to apply their knowledge.

It is disappointing, therefore, to read the amendment from the cabinet secretary, who toes the SNP line of trying to blame Brexit for everything. There are staff shortages, and they were there long before Brexit. Will she consider the impact on the current staffing rates of Nicola Sturgeon cutting nursing and midwifery places in 2012? That was poor workforce planning.

There are multiple Scottish applications for every training place for nurses, midwives, physiotherapists and doctors at medical schools. The reason for the shortage—especially among Scottish applications—is that the Scottish Government has capped the number of places.

Jeane Freeman: Will the member take an intervention?

Brian Whittle: I am at the end of my speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member has six seconds left.

Brian Whittle: This is a serious health debate that is long overdue in the Parliament, but has

been systematically avoided in Government debating time. Our NHS staff are the main driver to deliver a healthier Scotland. It is time that we looked after their health.

15:14

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate to highlight the work that both the Scottish Government and health boards across Scotland are carrying out to ensure appropriate levels of staffing in our NHS.

I recognise that, across NHS boards in Scotland, there are challenges with the recruitment of health professionals, particularly GPs. I have recently learned that the NHS in England is short of 100,000 employees and 40,000 nurses, so if we are going to try to recruit people to Scotland we will not be getting them from England. We will have to get them from somewhere like Europe, which will also be a challenge.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Emma Harper: I will not, because we do not have a lot of time.

We cannot fix the health staffing issues immediately, but measures are being implemented by the Scottish Government to support that. One such project, which aims to support the recruitment of GPs to rural areas across Scotland, is the Scottish graduate entry to medicine programme. ScotGEM is a partnership between St Andrews and Dundee universities and NHS Scotland. It is a course oriented towards the current NHS Scotland workforce requirements, particularly in remote and rural areas, general practice and other medical specialties. While ScotGEM graduates will be entitled to enter any branch of medicine, the course and the selection of students are designed to attract those interested in a career in a rural area. In one area of the South of Scotland, five GP practices across Dumfries and Galloway are set to take part in the pilot. I look forward to seeing its outcomes.

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting our highly skilled health and social care workforce to deliver a resilient, efficient and high-quality healthcare service that is world renowned. It is already world renowned. As a member of the Health and Sport Committee, I have been involved in the safe staffing legislation as we take the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Bill forward. It is the first multidisciplinary workforce and workload planning legislation in the UK and it is now approaching stage 3. The effective application of that legislation will support the wider workforce planning process by enabling a rigorous, evidence-based approach to decision

making on staffing that takes account of patients' and users' health and care needs.

I will pick up on a couple of points that other members have made. Prior to being elected to Parliament, I was an NHS employee for 9 years while the SNP Government was leading, and I felt positively supported in many ways. It is not the SNP's fault that there are challenges around staffing; many issues contribute to that. The required evolution of processes to support all staff takes time. I absolutely agree with Miles Briggs, who highlighted various ideas and options for supporting staff. Monica Lennon brought that up too. I would have expanded on that further, but time will not allow.

At the end of Miles Briggs's motion there is mention of a review and of promoting the wellbeing of, and looking after the people who care for us in Scotland—especially me when I have been in hospital in relation to my type 1 diabetes. Our goal is to support people while they are in work and to prevent sickness and absence. NHS Dumfries and Galloway has introduced that as well, and I encourage the Government to review current practices across health boards. We need to make sure that people across NHS Scotland are supported, because they are working really hard.

15:18

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Last year, we rightly celebrated 70 years of the NHS. This year, we need to look forward as well and consider what kind of health service we want and expect for the next generation. Some things are bound to change. People are living longer, which means there are new challenges for health and care as well as a different demographic balance.

New technologies are part of the way forward. This morning's *The Press and Journal* highlighted the potential for GP consultations going online at Countesswells in Aberdeen, where internet speeds of one gigabyte per second will provide fast and secure connections. The same newspaper also highlighted the decline in the number of GP practices in Grampian. It is down by more than 10 per cent in the last ten years. GP practice numbers have also fallen in many other areas, from Lanarkshire to Orkney and the Western Isles.

The future delivery of care in communities will require not just enough GPs but also a whole range of other healthcare professionals, from pharmacists and physician associates to occupational therapists and advanced nurse practitioners. This is, therefore, a good time to consider what primary care will look like in the next

thirty years, what staff and skills it will need and what support those staff will require. The Health and Sport Committee is doing just that, and I hope that many of our constituents who are listening to the debate will take the opportunity to go to the Scottish Parliament website to tell the committee their views.

Hospital care, too, faces real challenges right now, many of which are also fundamentally about staff. One thing that has changed very little since the inception of the national health service is the extent to which we depend on the dedication and commitment of healthcare staff. Monica Lennon and others mentioned issues that staff organisations such as the BMA and the RCN have raised. They tell very similar tales. Nurses in Scotland and across the NHS have described how often they have to cope with inadequate staffing levels and how often they have to do more than their planned shift to ensure that patients receive the care that they need. Doctors talk about going the extra mile to cover for ill or absent colleagues or long-term vacancies. Even though, through those actions, they keep the NHS afloat, they feel that they get little thanks for doing so.

All of that is bound to affect the quality of care. It also risks the kind of reputational damage that makes recruiting the next generation of healthcare professionals to the NHS all the harder. Whatever we call them, those are challenges that must be faced and addressed sooner rather than later; otherwise, we will risk exhausting the good will and commitment of the staff that are so important to the NHS.

We must acknowledge, too, the issues that the social care workforce faces. The Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Bill, which Emma Harper mentioned, acknowledges the need for parity between health and social care as part of the process of health and care integration, but as we have heard, when it comes to pay and support for staff, social care is still the poor relation of the NHS. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation says that 15 per cent of the social care workforce live in poverty. Enable describes that situation as

“Scotland’s most vulnerable people being cared for by Scotland’s most vulnerable workforce.”

It is clear that that must change.

When we look to the future, we need to think about how to close the gap between the NHS and social care at the same time as addressing the staffing challenges within the NHS. We can create the high-quality integrated health and care sector that we all want and need only if we start by supporting those who work there, now and in the future, and making the sector an attractive place to work for the next generation.

15:22

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank Miles Briggs for bringing the debate to the chamber. Credit where credit is due, as I am sure all members will agree. Credit is also due to the SNP Government, which is committed to supporting our highly skilled health and social care workforce. We want to deliver a resilient, efficient and high-quality healthcare service, and, from what I see as I go about the various areas in my constituency, the Scottish healthcare system is recognised as being among the best in the world.

We talk about staff morale, and I make this point to Miles Briggs, in particular. Do you not think that the fact that you constantly say that there is a crisis in the health service has something to do with the morale of the people who work in the health service? I have been speaking to those people for a while, and they feel that, by using the word “crisis” as you do, you are using the health service as a political football. I will leave that there.

Brian Whittle: Will Sandra White give way?

Sandra White: No. I am sorry, but I do not have time.

If Conservative members spoke to healthcare professionals and listened to organisations such as the BMA, they would discover that that is what they say.

Miles Briggs: Will Sandra White give way?

Sandra White: I am sorry, but I do not have time.

Miles Briggs mentioned staffing, but we are looking at staffing in the NHS. As the cabinet secretary said, staffing is at a record level and it has increased by 13,600—some 10.7 per cent—under the SNP Government. That is a good thing, not a bad thing. It is time that we looked at some of the positives. I am not saying that our health service is perfect, but we ought to recognise the positives. In that context, it should be mentioned, in relation to what Monica Lennon’s amendment says, that the health and social care staff experience report found that 79 per cent of NHS staff feel that they are treated with dignity and respect.

Monica Lennon: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I am sorry, but I have only two minutes left—not even that—and I want to come on to Brexit.

I mentioned the comments that the BMA has rightly made, but we also have the view of 24 health professionals in Scotland, who wrote an open letter to the UK Government in which they said:

“As doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals from Scotland, we see the damage that Brexit is already inflicting

on our treasured National Health Service. Make no mistake about it. Brexit is costing us lives.”

That is what they said, not what I said, so let us look at what other people are saying about Brexit.

EU citizens make a fantastic and vital contribution to our economy. They drive population growth and they work in all sectors. The vast majority of EU citizens in Scotland—84 per cent—are of working age and, of those, 76.8 per cent are in employment. Because of what is happening with the Tory Government at Westminster, we will lose those people.

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): Will the member give way?

Sandra White: No, I cannot—I am sorry.

Those people are already leaving because they are absolutely terrified that they will not be able to stay in this country.

Lewis Macdonald’s speech was very interesting. *[Interruption.]* If the Tory members are quiet, they might hear some interesting facts and figures. Lewis Macdonald’s points about care homes and care staff were absolutely true. As Miles Briggs knows full well, when the Health and Sport Committee took evidence on the issue, we heard that people are leaving and that they are frightened. That is all down to the Tories, so please do not just talk about a crisis. You should take responsibility for what your Government at Westminster is doing to the health service in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to use full names, even when in full flow.

15:26

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I record my personal thanks to NHS and social care staff, who work so hard to care for us. I can think of at least a handful of individuals who have helped my family so much during difficult times. It is not just about the act of providing healthcare and all the years of studying and hard work that go into that; we can all probably think of little acts of kindness that have touched us in some way at some point in our lives. That is why I hope that we can all get behind the motion. People who go into health and social care do so because they care about people and, for that reason alone, we should do all that we can to care for them.

The context of the debate is important. Our NHS is facing numerous staffing-related problems. The NHS workforce in Scotland is getting older, with the proportion of staff aged 50 and over increasing from 29 per cent to 39 per cent in the past 10 years alone. Absence rates due to sickness are at the highest level for a decade, which is in part due to rising workloads, and we are experiencing a

recruitment crisis. For example, one in four GP practices currently has a vacancy, hospitals are short of nearly 2,500 nurses and midwives and 5.5 per cent of child and adolescent mental health services posts are vacant. It is no wonder that staff are struggling.

Even without considering the factors that the Government has control over, we know that the jobs are extremely demanding, both physically and mentally. We have heard some extremely sad stories—unfortunately, they are not difficult to find. As we have heard, not only are people’s lives put into danger because of extreme fatigue, as we saw with the young medic Lauren Connelly, who died while driving home after a night shift, but the roles take an extreme toll on mental health. Statistics that were released last year revealed that the number of staff who were absent due to stress, depression and anxiety rose by nearly 18 per cent between 2015-16 and 2017-18.

Today, we are advocating the creation of a working environment that provides holistic care and support to all NHS and social care staff. There are simple measures that would make a real difference. For example, as we have heard, parking is a real issue for many NHS staff, especially in Glasgow. In recent days, we have heard more about the on-going saga of parking at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, where it has been reported that nurses have slept in their cars just to get a space. Late last year, nurses at the Glasgow royal infirmary launched a petition against the £20 charges being levelled at them just for the privilege of parking at their work.

A future Scottish Conservative Government would launch a widespread review of parking across all hospitals, for staff, patients and visitors. We would like there to be sleep pods in hospitals, so that staff could rest after their shifts, and we would like there to be health checks at community pharmacies, which would include blood pressure checks, weight management programmes and the option of free flu jabs.

Mental health support is vital, too. That is why we want every health board to have a facility where staff can get mental health support as well as financial advice.

Such simple measures could lay the foundations of a more supportive working environment.

The most valuable resource in our NHS is its people, so it is only right that workplace services are improved to promote the wellbeing of staff. The Scottish Conservatives are today calling for basic measures that will make a difference to people’s working lives. Only then can we say that we are truly looking after those who look after us.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Fulton MacGregor. After that, we will move to the closing

speeches—I was about to say “opening speeches”; that would have shocked everyone.

15:30

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I thank Miles Briggs and the Conservatives for bringing this motion to the Parliament. I agree that our NHS and social care workers are one of the country’s most indispensable resources and that staff face considerable pressure in their careers and on a day-to-day basis.

The SNP Government is backing and strengthening our workforce so that it can deliver the efficient and high-quality service that it provides day in and day out.

It is only proper that, as the constituency MSP for Coatbridge and Chryston, I pay tribute to workers in health and social care services in my constituency—at Monklands hospital, in health centres and day services and in many other services.

In particular, I pay tribute to EU workers. I am not sure why Conservative members, who were keen to lodge a motion about the health of workers, are resisting mention of the impact of Brexit on EU workers, who are going through a torrid time just now. Having to work in such circumstances is impacting those workers’ health.

As the cabinet secretary said, the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Bill is the first multidisciplinary workload and workforce planning legislation in the UK. That shows that the SNP is taking the lead in supporting our healthcare professionals. Through our groundbreaking evidence-based approach to nursing and midwifery workload and workforce planning, the bill will provide assurance for staff and service users that appropriate staffing is in place, irrespective of the health or care setting.

This will—I apologise, Presiding Officer. I have lost my place.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We did not notice. [*Laughter.*]

Fulton MacGregor: Okay. I apologise for that.

In the remainder of my speech, I will focus on a local issue in my constituency. Recently, I was shocked and astounded to learn that the North Lanarkshire integration joint board had voted on a recommendation to close the dementia day service at East Stewart Gardens in Coatdyke. That fantastic local unit provides an invaluable and critical service to many vulnerable patients from across my constituency. To give members some context, let me explain that the day service does not just cater for individuals who live with dementia

and their families. A local nursery attends weekly, to build relationships and bonds between the generations, which people find to be a valuable experience. Probably most concerning—and relevant to today’s debate—is the fact that I learned that staff, patients and their families were told of the proposal to close the service only days before the decision was due to be made. That has caused considerable distress for all concerned.

As soon as I found out about the proposal, I wrote to the board, urging it to reject the decision to close the centre and to undertake a full equality impact assessment before making further recommendations. Such decisions cannot be taken lightly, and it is unacceptable that not just service users but staff were notified only a matter of days before the decision. The news must have had a massive impact on people’s health.

I see that I am in my final minute—and I jumbled up my speech earlier.

The board went ahead and made the decision to close the service despite representations from people who were against the proposal. I give credit where it is due: the Conservative Party resisted the proposal, as did the SNP. However, the local Labour Party has seen it go through. The notice that was given placed stress on staff, and there was no engagement with the unions or with MSPs or councillors. That is not acceptable, and the issue absolutely relates to the subject of the motion.

I welcome the motion. As Sandra White said, we must all work together to deliver the best health and care services. There is further work for the Scottish Government to do—I have talked about some of the work that is being done and the cabinet secretary will talk more about that. Funding from the UK Government must be prioritised, too, and, at local authority level, councillors from all parties must put local politics to one side. In that way, we will get the best services, which are what our nation deserves.

15:34

Monica Lennon: Fulton MacGregor is always a hard act to follow, but I will try my best.

We have had a short but useful debate. Members have reflected on how important the NHS has been to them and their families. I am glad to hear that Darcy, Alex Cole-Hamilton’s young daughter, is doing well. She got us all very worried and we followed her progress very closely on social media. In our hour of need we all have something in common: we all need to pick up the phone and call for an ambulance or get the doctor. That reminds us all that we are all human beings.

What also almost unites the Parliament is the reality of the workforce crisis. There has been a failure to plan effectively for our workforce needs. Lewis Macdonald, a Labour colleague—who was also wearing his convener hat—rightly looked to the future and spoke about the challenges, the next generation of the workforce and the role of technology. He also nicely plugged the Health and Sport Committee survey, which is on-going. The closing date is 30 April: I hope that all of us will encourage our constituents to take part and have their voices heard.

We know that when people feel that they are not being listened to—whether that is patients, people who require social care or the workforce—they do not feel valued. As I said earlier, today I attended NHS Lanarkshire’s annual review, at which there was a mixture of people, some of whom were genuinely appreciative and recognised the great work and innovation that is under way, and others who felt frustration that health and social care integration is not happening quickly enough. People are not knitting together.

The cabinet secretary often hears me talk about resourcing and my concerns about underinvestment across the health and social care spectrum. However, it is not always about the money. We need to make sure that we have the right culture, and we need strong leadership at the top in all of our health boards and all of our health and social care partnerships.

We have the best staff in the world, but sometimes they feel that they are not being listened to when they raise issues and have good ideas. When I speak to colleagues in Unison, for example, their concern is that although lots of people get up the ladder and do quite well in the NHS, the training and development does not always keep up with that, which sometimes results in poor management. I know that the cabinet secretary will recognise those issues, not only from her time chairing a health board but from her time in her current position as cabinet secretary.

I think that there are points on which we can all work together, and we have to continue to do that, because this is all far too important. We are doing the people of Scotland and our health and care staff a disservice if we deny the fact that we have a workforce crisis. Therefore, Labour will not support the amendment in the cabinet secretary’s name. However, there are shared sentiments across the chamber today and we should listen to colleagues such as Emma Harper, who is a valued member of the Health and Sport Committee. We need such people here. The fact that we have a Minister for Mental Health who was a mental health nurse is a positive attribute of the Parliament. At times, we will need to step out of

our own comfort zones and our party positions to find way of working together.

At the beginning of the debate, Miles Briggs highlighted the tragedy of Dr Lauren Connelly. We cannot have any more tragedies of that kind. I have not yet had an answer from the Government on what we are going to do about the fact that in the years that I mentioned earlier, 1 million working days were lost in the NHS due to stress absence alone. Some of that will be caused by issues outwith the workplace—we get that; people do not come into work and switch off from their lives outside—but these are the big challenges that we face.

Looking at what we have agreed on in the debate, we can see that there is a lot that we can build on and develop for the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jeane Freeman to close for the Scottish Government. Cabinet secretary, you have five minutes.

15:39

Jeane Freeman: I thank all the members who have contributed to the debate. It has been a helpful one, and it was helpful to me to hear the propositions that members have put forward.

I want to cover some of the points that have been raised. Mr Briggs was right to recognise Brian Connelly’s work in response to the tragic death of his daughter. In recognising that, I want to pay tribute in passing to our colleague Linda Fabiani, who has long championed that issue.

I want to advise members of where we have got to in this work. Shortly, I will be talking to the BMA about all of the issues. However, so far, we have got to a point at which no junior doctor is required to work more than seven days in a row; working seven nights in a row has been abolished; and, by August this year, a minimum 46-hour rest period will be implemented. Further, we are continuing to work with the expert group on a maximum working week of 48 hours with no averaging. We are taking steps in that direction because, of course, the issue is vitally important.

With regard to some of the issues that were discussed, I need to make the point that I know that the BMA and others have raised with the UK Government the recent changes to pensions and the impact that they are having on many members of our medical workforce, both consultants and GPs. A GP whom I met this morning at the new Gorbals health hub raised precisely that issue with me. It is a serious matter, and, along with colleagues in the BMA and others, we will continue to press the UK Government to consider the issue again, as, I am certain, there are unintended consequences at play. I hope that our

colleagues on the Conservative benches will support us in doing that.

I thank Monica Lennon for raising again the point about the importance of culture in our workforce—she makes that point often, and is quite right to do so. Why do people enjoy their work? Partly because it is recognised and valued, partly because of how it is paid but also partly because of the culture in their workplace. It is important that people feel that their ideas and concerns and the issues that they raise are recognised and that there is no negative comeback when they talk about them. I will come back to the chamber after the Easter recess to report on the outcome of the independent Sturrock review, which is concerned with NHS Highland. In that context, I will also bring members up to date on where we are with regard to the national whistleblowing champion and on the issues to do with the board that Monica Lennon quite rightly spoke about.

I would like to make a point about project lift, which is a values-based leadership programme that operates across our health service. Values-based recruitment is an important part of that. Its aim is to address some of the issues that Monica Lennon raised around training and support as people take on additional responsibilities.

Alison Johnstone made an important point that I will follow up on about the urgent need for communication about the changes that the GP contract will bring to the patient's experience. One year on, we can use some positive examples of situations in which GPs are able to offer appointments of at least 15 minutes and in which patients feel that they have seen the right person in relation to their concern or medical issue.

Alison Johnstone was right to talk about the value of social care staff and the importance of social care being seen as a career. That is one area of work in which we are busy. We are considering how people can continue to work in social care while building up some of the practical skill-based education modules that they need in order to pursue their career in the field. Of course, that needs to be done in partnership with our local authorities and the private and independent sector providers. I believe that all of them are supportive of the approach, but we need to work out how much more we can do. Not least among what we have to do is to make absolutely sure that the funding that we have passed to local authorities in relation to paying the real living wage for 24-hours care is actually used for that purpose. I am determined that we will do that.

On the point of whether we face a crisis or a challenge, I would say that there are challenges that we face, but my point is that calling the situation a crisis does not take us one step further

forward in addressing some of the measures that we have to take. It does not help our staff in the health and social care workforce. I am not dodging the issues that we have to address—

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Jeane Freeman: No, I cannot.

Brian Whittle: You said it was Brexit.

Jeane Freeman: I say to Mr Whittle that I did not claim that Brexit was the sole reason for all of this, but I will not accept Scottish Conservatives pretending that Brexit has nothing to do with them and that it is not affecting our health and social care workforce.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, I am afraid that the cabinet secretary must conclude.

Jeane Freeman: It is not helpful for members to use this issue to try to score political points rather than doing their research, finding out the facts about what we are doing and addressing this situation maturely.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Michelle Ballantyne. You have six minutes, Ms Ballantyne. I warn members that I intend to move swiftly on to the next debate so that we do not lose time.

15:44

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): We call it “our NHS”. We use those words because every one of us is touched by it at some points in our life. Last year, the NHS celebrated its 70th birthday. In the words of Scotland's chief medical officer,

“We are now moving into a new era of ‘realistic medicine’ in NHS Scotland—moving away from the current ‘doctor knows best’ culture to shared decision-making, with the patient and their healthcare professional”.

I welcome that change and think that it is the right move. However, it will bring challenges for staff. I spent 27 years working in the NHS, first as a nurse and then in management. I can tell the chamber that, in 27 years, we never stopped changing. I doubt very much that the NHS will ever stop changing, and that brings challenges.

The cabinet secretary argues about words—is it a “challenge” or a “crisis”? Well, it is always a challenge, but it becomes a crisis when the numbers start to escalate. Absences due to stress increased by nearly 20 per cent over the three years from 2015-16 to 2017-18. Is that not a bit of a crisis? One in four GP practices in Scotland has a vacancy. Is that not a bit of a crisis? There are more than 400 vacant consultant posts. Is that not

a bit of a crisis? Hospitals are short of 2,400 nurses and midwives, according to the latest data that I have. Is that not a bit of a crisis? I agree that those are all challenges, too, but we have to use our words carefully. It is a crisis for the staff. It is a crisis every day that they come to work and there are shortages of staff on the wards. It is a crisis when they feel that they cannot deliver the standards of patient care that they want to. It is a crisis for social care staff when they find themselves with four people on a rota that requires 10. It is a crisis when the only applicants whom one can get for a social care job for a profoundly disabled person are people with no experience. That is a crisis.

I am not looking to undermine the NHS. I love the NHS. Like all the people here who talk about the NHS, of course I value and acknowledge the people who work in it. This debate is not about undermining people; it is about saying that we need to acknowledge the issues that we face—and that we need to acknowledge them together. We can argue about words, but the reality will stay the same.

The cabinet secretary described the problems that the NHS faces as “well rehearsed”. Well, we need to stop rehearsing them and come together to address them. She listed the improvements that the Government is taking forward, which we welcome. I acknowledge that a lot of them are good and need to be taken forward. However, she also indicated—several times—that she will listen and reflect. I hope that she will, because I have found while speaking to NHS staff recently that senior professionals in NHS Scotland are increasingly reluctant to speak out about their thoughts and experiences—because when they do, they are taken aside. That is not the kind of atmosphere that we need. People need to be free to write and talk constructively about what is going on around them.

A number of members including Monica Lennon and Alex Cole-Hamilton raised that issue and asked the cabinet secretary to bring forward her appointment of whistleblowing champions. The issue is not just about people who are low down in the NHS and who are finding difficulties with the management structure, but about senior people who have things to say but feel unable to say them. We must start to listen and work together on that.

Miles Briggs talked about the impacts of health staff being stressed, tired and overworked. The tragic death of Dr Lauren Connelly is a prime example of the horrific things that can happen. Although I therefore welcome the changes in relation to staffing that the Government is bringing forward, they do not go far enough and we need to keep looking at the issue. Brian Whittle stressed

the importance of making sure that those who look after our health have someone to look after their health. We need to ensure that all staff in the health and social care profession get regular clinical supervision. I have noticed that that has started to slide. They need to be able to talk about where their mental health is and how they are coping with the pressures that they experience. We need to ensure that our staff are fighting fit and able to do the work that they need to do.

I understand why Emma Harper denies that the SNP has anything to do with what is going on with NHS staffing levels, but I remind her of what Miles Briggs pointed out. When Nicola Sturgeon was the health cabinet secretary and was making decisions about nursing places, she was warned that there would be a longer-term effect. It is therefore slightly hypocritical to step away from that and say that the decisions that were made in the past have no impact on the present.

We should not use the NHS as a political football. [*Interruption.*] Jeane Freeman can cough all she likes, but that is exactly what she does. To be perfectly honest, as somebody who spent a lot of time in the NHS, I would be quite happy if the Government had nothing to do with its running. That will never happen because of the money around it, but it should be run by the people who know best.

Fulton MacGregor: Will the member take an intervention?

Michelle Ballantyne: I am in my final seconds. I have to sit down.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Indeed you are.

Michelle Ballantyne: We need to focus on the issue. There is a crisis, and denying that does not solve the problem. We have to work together to solve the problem.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will move swiftly on to the next debate, because I can see that people are in their front-bench places.

Health Education

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-16710, in the name of Brian Whittle, on health education. I would like a wee bit of quiet.

15:51

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to have the opportunity to open the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

I thank all the organisations that sent in briefing documents. I was struck by the opening sentence in the briefing that the Scottish food coalition submitted, which is:

“Our food environment promotes and normalises unhealthy diets.”

It has to be noted that our farmers produce the highest-quality food, are charged with custodianship of the countryside, pay at least the living wage and ensure the highest animal welfare standards. However, when it comes to public food procurement, we find that a high proportion of the food in our schools and hospitals—much of which could be sourced locally—is cheaper imports. I have said before in the chamber that only 16 per cent of Scotland Excel procurement contract food is sourced from food that is grown by Scottish farmers.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Brian Whittle mentioned food in our hospitals and schools. What is his view on processed meats that contain nitrites being served in hospitals and schools? Should there be a shift to nitro-free meats in our schools and hospitals?

Brian Whittle: If we followed the path of procuring food that is sourced as locally to the school as possible, that problem would be solved in one fell swoop.

The Government cannot be satisfied with the lack of support for our food producers. That contrasts with the gold standard in East Ayrshire, where nearly 75 per cent of ingredients for school meals are sourced locally. There can be no excuse.

We will support the Government's amendment but, in doing so, we note that it is rather high on platitudes and light on positive action. It is not enough to note that schools are a place of education—that is hardly a revelation. We need to afford pupils the opportunity to apply that learning. However, Education Scotland has reported that, following 109 nutritional inspections of secondary schools, it was found that some 70 per cent of school meals failed to meet nutritional standards. Platitudes will not solve that problem. We need to

create an environment in which the learning that pupils receive in schools can be applied in the real world. I am pretty sure that, if it were left to pupils to deliver the learning that they receive, the system that they would come up with would not look much like the current one.

Apart from regurgitating the point that there is a higher prevalence of fast food, alcohol and tobacco outlets in more deprived areas—that is one of the main reasons why we are having the debate—there is little substance to the Labour amendment. In fact, there is the usual one-dimensional approach. When a person drives past any fast food outlet near a school at lunch time, are the huge queues of school pupils that they see the result of a lack of money or austerity? Is the fact that so many pupils who are eligible for free school meals still choose to join the fast food queues an austerity issue? Labour has chosen to avoid the issue in favour of ploughing a tired political line in search of some kind of relevance.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Mr Whittle must surely understand that young people want to spend time with other young people. If their friends are going out for lunch, they might wish to join them. Surely the best thing for us to do is to ensure that everyone has enough income so that they are not stigmatised. Some young people feel stigmatised because it is known that they receive free school meals. That is part of the issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will let you make up your time, Mr Whittle.

Brian Whittle: I will flip that point on its head. Most people do not know who gets free school meals, because children have a card to get that school meal. We should encourage more schoolchildren to stay in school and get a healthy meal, so that they do not need to go elsewhere.

An obvious first step is to understand what drives that behavioural pattern. Key to that will be ensuring that the food on the plates in schools is of the highest quality and, preferably, is sourced from local farmers. Allowing pupil input into menu choices, as part of that education, will enable buy-in, so more pupils will stay in school. Planning has a part to play, as I think Labour tried to indicate in its amendment. We need to stop food vans from camping outside schools and to be more selective about which outlets are granted licences near schools. How else will pupils be dissuaded from rejecting school meals in favour of fast food? It is not rocket science; we just need the courage and will to act.

We all know that, along with physical activity and inclusivity, a healthy diet is one of the cornerstones of health and wellbeing. Policies on many of the issues that we debate in the

chamber—such as mental health, eating disorders, preventable cancers, diabetes, educational attainment, the preventative agenda for health, musculoskeletal conditions and obesity—should have nutrition as a key component. I have yet to hear a minister mention nutrition as being part of the solution in any of the plethora of ministerial statements that we have been bombarded with recently.

For example, the research is clear about the impact of a basic healthy diet on mental health. The Mental Health Foundation's report "Food for thought: Mental health and nutrition briefing" says:

"One of the most obvious yet under recognised factors in the development of mental health is nutrition ... There is a growing body of evidence indicating that nutrition may play an important role in the prevention, development and management of diagnosed mental health problems including depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder ... and dementia."

Getting it right from day 1 has to be the goal. It is much easier to influence people at an early age than to try to change behaviours later in life. Many health and education pathways are already set by the time children reach school age, so the importance of early good practice cannot be overstated. Education is a crucial background, not just for tackling the obvious attainment goals but for securing better health outcomes. Sir Harry Burns stated:

"the way in which we nurture children, the way in which we bring children into the world, and the way in which we look after them in the first years of life is absolutely critical to the creation of physical, mental and social health."

It is little use understanding what programmes need to be delivered if there is no delivery mechanism. It will be our healthcare professionals, our teachers and those in the third sector to whom we will turn, and the evidence tells us that, if they are given adequate support, we can provide the space for creativity and innovation.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Brian Whittle: I am sorry, but I have only one minute left.

The cabinet secretaries for health, education and the rural economy should have been sitting on the Government benches for this debate. The fact that they are not speaking in the debate highlights the Scottish Government's continuing lack of understanding of the complexities of the issue. Until the Government is prepared to deliver a whole-systems, cross-portfolio approach, it will continue to make little progress in this policy area.

We are talking about a significant system change, the benefits of which will take time to realise. Therefore, if the current Scottish Government implements that change, it will not get

the credit; subsequent Administrations will take the plaudits. However, as I said in my first speech in Parliament, we can achieve anything as long as we do not mind who gets the credit.

More than at any other time, the Parliament is capable of meaningfully affecting Scotland's long-term rising health and education crises. Nutrition is a key pillar of good health and education, which helps to tackle the much-discussed health inequalities and problems with attainment. The solutions lie entirely within the competence of this Parliament. It is time that the Scottish Government grasped the nettle, stopped the endless pontificating and tinkering around the edges, and delivered effective change.

I move,

That the Parliament pays tribute to all those who work in the NHS and social care services for the care and treatment that they help to deliver for patients and families across Scotland; notes the ongoing NHS workforce crisis, which sees high vacancy rates in nursing, consulting and mental health posts, as well as high absence rates across the health service; understands the pressures that NHS and social care staff face and believes that there is a need to improve the holistic care and support provided to them in their workplaces, and calls on ministers to review NHS and social care staff workplace support services in order to improve and promote wellbeing and look after those who look after people in Scotland.

16:00

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): I thank Brian Whittle for giving us the opportunity to debate this important subject. I wanted to go on to say how heartened I was by his contribution because, in general, when we have debated the subject in the past, we have managed to do so in a cross-party manner. I had hoped that that would be the case again today, and I hope that it will be the case for the rest of the debate, but I was genuinely disappointed by the tone of Brian's Whittle contribution, because it did not reflect how we have debated this important matter in the past. I hope that we can get back to working together across the chamber on this very important issue.

I genuinely think that we all share my ambition for

"a Scotland where we eat well, have a healthy weight, and are physically active."

Eating well in childhood impacts on the quality of our later lives. Last year, we published the comprehensive "A Healthier Future—Scotland's Diet & Healthy Weight Delivery Plan", which has a strong emphasis on the early years. If we can get it right then, we can prevent ill health in the first place. The scale of the problem that we face is significant: 26 per cent of children in Scotland are at risk of being overweight or obese, half of whom are specifically at risk of obesity. A baby who is

born to an obese mum is more likely to become obese in childhood and remain so as an adult. Those are the stark facts.

Right across Government, we are taking a joined-up approach to drive the improvements that we need. To focus minds, we have set ambitious targets: to halve childhood obesity by 2030 and significantly reduce diet-related health inequalities. However, the Government alone cannot solve the problem. We must, and will, provide leadership, but it is a shared responsibility—citizens, business, the national health service, local government and the third sector must work across society.

We want to make it easier for everyone to make healthier choices. Personal responsibility is important, but making good decisions is tough when we are constantly bombarded with messages that encourage us to impulse buy and overconsume junk food.

I am pleased that we are making progress. We have already consulted on proposals to restrict junk food promotions, Food Standards Scotland is working on proposals to improve food and drink out of home and, later this year, we will explore whether planning policy could be used to improve the food environment. I know that the areas around schools are of great concern to members across the chamber.

I will talk about ensuring that children in Scotland, no matter where they live, learn and play, eat well and have a healthy weight. Schools, nurseries and out-of-school care all play an important part. By August 2020, we will increase the number of funded early learning and childcare hours and ensure that children receive healthy meals and snacks, as well as take part in active play and learning. We have consulted on important changes to our school food regulations, informed by the latest evidence, and will publish the results later this month. We will soon consult on our plans for out-of-school care, ensuring alignment with the high standards of our school food.

I want to acknowledge the importance of education. We want young people to leave school equipped to make good choices about their health and the food that they consume. The curriculum for excellence provides opportunities for learning about food and nutrition, but our plan recognises that parents and children have contact with many other professionals. They, too, have a responsibility for promoting healthy eating, especially in the early years.

At the outset, I highlighted our ambition to reduce diet-related health inequalities. Many of the actions that I have referred to will contribute to improvements, but we must also tackle the root

causes. We are determined that people have enough money to feed themselves and their families, as too many people in Scotland face food insecurity. That is why we continue to challenge the United Kingdom Government's punitive welfare reforms, promote the living wage and take a rights-based approach to the design and delivery of Scotland's social security system.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Will the minister enshrine a right to food in the forthcoming good food nation bill?

Joe FitzPatrick: Through the good food nation bill, we will look at how we can give better effect to a rights-based approach in practice, as we have done with social security.

Improving our diet and weight at any age can make a massive difference to our health and quality of life. For people who have or are at risk of type 2 diabetes, healthy weight is of particular importance. The disease can have a devastating impact on people's lives. It is largely preventable, yet we spend about 9 per cent of the health budget treating it. Here, too, we have ambitious plans. We are investing £42 million over five years to help people to make sustained changes to their diet and lifestyle.

Finally, I acknowledge the importance of physical activity. Last year, we published our delivery plan to support people in Scotland to be more physically active. Actions include more opportunities for young people to participate in sport before, during and after school.

It is vital that we all get behind the work to deliver what I hope are our shared ambitions to improve our food environment, making it easier for all of us to make healthier choices; to give children the best start in life; and to help people to become more active, more often.

I move amendment 55M-16710.2, to insert at end:

“; shares the aim to halve childhood obesity rates by 2030, including through action to transform the food environment to support healthier choices and reduce the excessive consumption of food and drink high in fat, sugar or salt, and notes the valuable contribution that schools make to educate children and young people about all of these vital issues.”

16:06

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I congratulate the Conservative group on selecting health education as its topic for debate this afternoon. I agree with the bulk of Brian Whittle's opening speech, which stressed the importance of nutrition, not least in tackling the pandemic of obesity and type 2 diabetes. In my remarks, I want to focus on the preventative health agenda and look at the bigger picture—the role that austerity

and health inequality play in Scottish health education.

Last year, as joint convener of the cross-party group on diabetes, I was invited to visit young people at Charleston academy in Inverness to talk about diabetes. The class that I spoke to had an in-home app that could read the bar codes of supermarket products and translate a food's composition into the amount of sugar that it contained. As an experiment, the young people scanned a large box of Jaffa cakes; it contained 32 lumps of sugar, which is, of course, a major contributor to the development of type 2 diabetes.

As we have heard from Brian Whittle and the minister, being classed as obese or overweight is a significant contributing factor to developing type 2 diabetes. With our obesity crisis, it is—unfortunately—no surprise that the figures on the condition make for bleak reading: over 257,000 people in Scotland are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and a further 500,000 are at risk of developing it. As we all know, with a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes can come serious complications including a risk of blindness and amputation. As the minister said, the NHS spends almost £1 billion on tackling diabetes, and 80 per cent of that goes on managing avoidable complications.

When faced with the complexity of our obesity and diabetes problems, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. Some of us—I note that Stewart Stevenson is not in the chamber—may longingly hark back to the good old days, when food was less processed and children played outside rather than sitting playing “Football Manager”, but nostalgia is not a solution. The key is an approach that does not just restrict unhealthy foods, which is negative, but that makes a balanced diet a much more practical option. We all know that the growth of out-of-home eating means that any strategy needs to have a consistently strong approach to the labelling and marketing of foods by restaurants and takeaways.

However, the environmental shift needs to encompass more than just our food culture. Although the nature of our public health challenge may look modern, under the surface the root causes are the same old story: poverty, social deprivation and inequality are significant contributors to people being overweight, and it is the least well off who are most at risk. For example, a quarter of children who live in our most deprived areas are at risk of obesity compared with only 17 per cent in the least deprived areas. The problem was captured very well in the Health and Sport Committee's “Report on Health Inequalities” in 2015, which states:

“A boy born today in Lenzie, East Dunbartonshire, can expect to live until he is 82. Yet for a boy born only eight miles away in Calton, in the east end of Glasgow, life

expectancy may be as low as 54 years, a difference of 28 years or almost half as long again as his whole life.”

Therefore, our health inequalities are just inequalities; they cannot be explained away purely as being about the food choices that individuals make. As food prices have risen, it has become harder for families on a tight budget to buy meals that are both filling and nutritious, and evidence shows that consumers want to buy healthier food but think that it is more expensive. Regulation of product promotions needs to be more ambitious than merely reducing the number of unhealthy foods that are on offer.

Placing restrictions on the formulation, sale and advertising of food products is beneficial, but it is also complex and tricky. Reversing our obesity crisis will require a cross-Government commitment that is realistic about the impact that poverty has on individual health. It is fine to talk about active travel, but what if it is not safe to walk or cycle in a local neighbourhood? It is fine to talk about healthy eating, but what if fresh fruit and veg cannot be bought at local shops due to rising food prices?

Brian Whittle: Will the member give way?

David Stewart: I am sorry, but I am in my last minute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The member is just closing.

David Stewart: It is fine to promote a balanced lifestyle, but what if a person on the minimum wage with a zero-hours contract needs to grab a fast-food dinner during a split shift? Being serious about improving the health expectations of all our citizens means being more determined to eradicate poverty in Scottish communities. As my party and the Scottish Co-operative Party have argued, we need a right to food in a good food nation bill. That is why Labour believes that tackling wealth inequalities is at the heart of the health agenda and, indeed, all policy agendas. All that we need is to have “the will to do” and “the soul to dare.”

I move amendment S5M-16710.1, to insert at end:

“; contends that unhealthy diets are often the result of families' inability to afford fresh healthy foods; acknowledges the saturation of fast food, alcohol and tobacco outlets in Scotland's poorest communities and supports the promotion of healthy environments through the restriction of advertising of alcohol products around schools; believes that austerity and the severe welfare policies imposed by the UK Government have driven children and families across Scotland into poverty, exacerbating health inequalities, and calls on the Scottish Government to tackle food insecurity by enshrining in law an enforceable right to food.”

16:11

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I welcome today's debate and I am sure that there is much in the motion that the whole chamber will agree on.

Good nutrition and access to it should be at the core of our health, education and food systems. I welcome the mention in the Labour amendment of the "right to food", because Greens have long backed the call to enshrine the right to food in Scots law, and I look forward to upcoming debates on the food nation legislation, with which we will be able to make that a reality. It needs to be a priority of Government—of multiple ministers, from the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy to the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, and of the entire cabinet.

The right to food is not simply about delivering emergency food supplies; it is about enabling people to purchase, cook and enjoy high-quality healthy food, no matter their circumstances in life. I welcome the recognition in the motion of the need for high-quality

"local produce in early years settings"

and of the fact that public procurement can be used to boost the local rural economy, which is something else that the Greens have pushed for in good food nation legislation, with targets for local procurement and a full national rollout of the excellent food for life programme in all councils, as a minimum. However, I take issue with the Conservatives' motion in that their actions at local government level in Scotland do not match up to those fine words.

Earlier this year, the Conservative-led Perth and Kinross Council voted to close all its school kitchens, putting 50 local staff out of a job, and to prepare meals centrally in a kitchen in Dundee before blast freezing and shipping them to schools to reheat at a later date. The last time I criticised that plan in the chamber, I was invited to taste test the school meals to see how much the pupils will enjoy them—I do not doubt that; I enjoy chicken nuggets from time to time, but it does not mean that I want my children to eat them for lunch every day.

How do ready meals that are made in a central kitchen contribute to health and nutrition education in schools? How do they support local producers through public procurement or increase the amount of fresh fruit and vegetables that our children consume? How do they encourage pupil choice and involve pupils in designing menus and their experience in our schools? A local councillor in Perth and Kinross described the plan as a

"job-killing proposal that puts the viability of a mega-kitchen in Dundee above the needs of kids and our local, hardworking catering staff."

If the Tory motion today means that local councils will be instructed to reverse plans such as those, I will be delighted to vote for it, but I fear that the debate is hypocrisy from a party that puts financial saving over our children's health and wellbeing.

Brian Whittle: Will the member give way?

Mark Ruskell: I am tight for time, so I will not be able to give way in this debate.

On the wider context for the debate, learning outdoors, in a play-based environment, is a key part of an active lifestyle for our children. However, one in four Scots says that the quality of their green space has declined in the past five years, and council spending on parks and green spaces has reduced by a quarter in the past six years. The declining quality of Scotland's natural environment is taking away the right of children to take part in outdoor activity and exercise.

We also need to address the environment that our kids grow up in, where they are often surrounded by high-fat, high-sugar, ultraprocessed foods, and to consider a levy on the multiple retailers and caterers that promote poor-quality food.

Lastly, we cannot ignore the fact that child poverty and child health are inextricably linked. Families who are dependent on income support are likely to be the most in need of additional resources to ensure good nutrition. While we acknowledge the positive impact of schemes such as healthy start, there are a significant number of barriers to involvement in the scheme, including eligibility and awareness of the process.

The good food nation bill must provide the foundation stone for a healthier nation—one that links producers with citizens, and citizens with quality, healthier food. I look forward to the Government finally introducing an ambitious bill to Parliament.

16:15

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I, too, am grateful to the Conservatives for securing time for this debate on an issue of such importance to the health of our nation. I will come later to why that is the case.

I am slightly confused, though—I will just come out and say this—because I find it odd that the self-styled natural party of government, which once boasted that it was the most successful party in western Europe, should choose, at this moment of national crisis, its topic for debate to be recipe suggestions for five-year-olds. However much it

tries, the party cannot hide away and escape its disastrous Brexit policy.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am in my first minute. If I have got time, I will come back to the member.

The MP Mark Francois, who has been one of the most visible Conservative spokespeople in the past couple of weeks—given that all the moderates have left—has been comparing Brexit to the second world war. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the Scottish Conservatives are extolling the wartime virtues of locally foraged food for school dinners and digging for victory—or, if not victory, apocalypse survival. My fear is that with trade barriers and tariffs, the Conservatives may be raising a generation of children who will never get to see a tangerine or a banana until the rationing ends.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Has the member thought about what he has just said? Is there anything more important than the young people of Scotland today?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I was thinking about them with every word that I said, because there is no greater threat to young people in this country than the crisis that the Conservative Government has plunged us into.

I digress. Food matters, and while I may take exception to the timing of the motion, I take no exception to its content. As a member of the Health and Sport Committee, I remember hearing with great interest a senior physician's view that the six most important doctors are in fact sleep, exercise, sunlight, water, fresh air and vegetables. While I may pour scorn on the Conservatives, I salute them for bringing this important and significant debate to the chamber.

There is an acute imperative for us to take nutrition and healthy living seriously. We know that £4.6 billion a year is spent on the cost of obesity in our hospitals and that obesity is responsible for 10.8 per cent of case load in the national health service. As many as 300,000 people in this country are diabetic.

There is a socioeconomic multiplier to this issue. In the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, the areas ranked highest in the tables are often those that are furthest away from fresh produce and where people lack independent living skills and a basic understanding of how to prepare healthy, home-made, cheap meals on a daily basis. Therefore, I very much support the good food nation bill and the Government's efforts in that regard. Like the rest of the chamber, I want to see our aspirations underpinned by legislation. Because of their circumstances, one in five

households in deprived areas frequently skips meals or prioritises things other than putting food on the table. The Trussell Trust challenges us to consider, initially, the eradication of hunger. Sustenance is a human right, and I support the Scottish food coalition's call for a statutory right to food and ask the cabinet secretary to tell us, in his closing remarks, where that fits in the legislative context.

Food nutrition is vital, not just in society and our homes but in our caring environments. I quite publicly raised the issue of an ill-prepared hospital meal that was served to a friend's mother a few weeks ago. I thank the cabinet secretary for the action that she took; I recognise that that was an exception, but it was important to shine a light on the problem. She has dealt with it well, and I hope that we see a renaissance across our hospitals of food production and food quality.

I thank the Conservatives—I was perhaps being facetious earlier—because this is an issue that should unite the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Time is very tight, so please come in at under four minutes.

16:20

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I declare an interest as a farmer, a food producer and a founder of farmers markets in Ayrshire and the west of Scotland.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on health education. For me, the debate started as far back as 1996, when, as a minister in the Scottish Office, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton—who is still remembered with affection by some in the Scottish Parliament from the years that he spent here—first introduced the Scottish diet action plan to improve the health of the people of Scotland.

Ten years later, the Scottish diet action plan was reviewed by Professor Tim Lang for this Parliament, under the Labour-Liberal coalition Government. The problems that were caused by poor diet and lifestyle choices had worsened. The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 was passed by Parliament and, at that time, I and others encouraged the then minister, Andy Kerr, to introduce a national procurement plan, so that only local Scottish food would be used in our schools, prisons and hospitals. However, little happened. Mark Ruskell was probably alluding to that in his speech.

Around 2010 or 2011, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Richard Lochhead, looked at the problem again, and the statistics had deteriorated still further. Today, here we are wringing our

hands again and asking what is to be done, as life expectancy has now started to reduce in Scotland. We are confronting the results of inertia over the past 12 years by the Scottish Government in this area of its responsibility.

That Scotland is a country with one of the poorest records on health in Europe should be a matter of shame for the Scottish National Party Government. Children from deprived areas are currently almost twice as likely as children from more affluent backgrounds to become obese. Dietary goals have been missed for 20 years, with only 15 per cent of children eating their five a day, and Scotland has one of the worst obesity records in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, with two thirds of adults being overweight. Still, the Government does nothing.

The Scottish Government has only tinkered around the edges and has made no effort at all to improve public health through diet in the 12 years for which the SNP has been in office. The problems continue to grow.

Today, the Scottish Conservatives suggest again that, as a starting point, only locally produced Scottish food should normally be available in our schools, hospitals and prisons.

Dr Allan: Will John Scott give way?

John Scott: No. I am sorry, but I do not have time.

About eight to 10 years ago, East Ayrshire Council valiantly introduced such a policy, having recognised the huge need for improved diet in East Ayrshire and the consequences of poor diet—namely, the poor physical and mental health that were evident in what is now part of Jeane Freeman’s constituency.

“Buy local, eat local” was first used as a strapline by me on a leaflet that the Scottish Conservatives distributed more than 10 years ago. It is still what needs to be done today.

In addition, exercise is the new wonder drug, as I have rediscovered for myself in later life. Physical activity should be a core part of children’s lives from nursery school through to leaving school. Exercise improves physical and mental health, and the lack of exercise in the lives of our children and young people is one of the causes of many of the problems that are being encountered by all age groups. Exercise does not need to be overthought or expensive, and could be added to school curriculums at little or no cost. The daily mile initiative is a good example of that: I salute Elaine Wyllie for creating it.

The problems that we face today could in the simplest way and in large part be solved by better diet—preferably, of food that is produced in

Scotland—and by more exercise. It is time to get our sleeves rolled up and to get started on—for once—an uncomplicated agenda, because all the evidence points to straightforward solutions.

16:24

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank Brian Whittle for his important motion and for securing today’s debate. I am pleased to speak in the debate to reaffirm the need for people all over Scotland to have the means to live a healthy and active life—in particular, by ensuring access to our country’s finest and freshest produce.

I agree with the motion. Since my election in 2016, I have continuously worked on health and rural economy matters, so it is good to link together those two aspects of policy.

A healthy and balanced diet leads to a healthy life and, as a nurse and clinical educator with over 30 years’ experience of caring for patients, and now as an MSP in caring for and supporting constituents, I am a huge proponent of social-prescribing approaches to tackling and preventing health issues including obesity, type 2 diabetes, cancers and other diseases, as the motion says.

I support the Scottish Government’s healthy weight plan, which aims to ensure that everyone can access projects that are in place in different parts of Scotland. One of the projects is the daily mile, which John Scott mentioned. We have spoken many times in Parliament about the daily mile, which was pioneered by Scottish headteacher Elaine Wyllie in Stirling. The Scottish Government, alongside local authorities, including Dumfries and Galloway Council in south Scotland, are working to build the daily mile’s community with schools, sports bodies and other supporters. I participated in the daily mile when my sister’s weans were at Ecclefechan primary school. I am pleased that 57 out of 63 schools—more than 90 per cent—across Dumfries and Galloway are signed up to doing the daily mile.

Another social prescribing nutrition and weight-loss initiative that I have been supporting was seen on the “Fixing Dad” television programme, about which I have spoken in Parliament. “Fixing Dad” was about Anthony and Ian Whittington and their family helping their dad, Geoff, to lose more than 7 stone—almost 45 kilos—by focusing on nutrition, cycling and family support and encouragement. I encourage everyone to watch “Fixing Dad”. I would welcome feedback from the Scottish Government about its merits and the evidence that has been gathered from it.

I am pleased that we have a similarly focused established company called Our Path coming to present at the cross-party group on diabetes,

which I co-convene with David Stewart and Brian Whittle.

Decisive action must be taken to tackle the overall environment that makes it difficult for people to make the right food and nutrition choices for our kids. I was pleased that the Scottish Government published “A Healthier Future—Scotland’s Diet & Healthy Weight Delivery Plan” in July last year, following wide consultation of stakeholders, to which I contributed. The plan has 67 actions, and reiterated the ambition

“to halve child obesity in Scotland by 2030.”

The plan also committed to “significantly” reducing diet-related health inequalities, as well as acting to restrict promotion of junk foods. The Scottish Government is investing an additional £42 million over five years to support weight-management interventions for people who have, or are at risk of having, type 2 diabetes. That is all extremely welcome.

I do not have much time left, so I will highlight the importance of young people—from urban and rural areas—knowing the provenance and source of the food that they eat, as well as having access to fresh local produce. The Royal Highland Education Trust aims to provide the opportunity for every child in Scotland to learn about food, farming and the countryside. That is achieved by farm visits by schools, classroom speakers and talks by volunteer farmers. Last week, I attended the RHET event at Wallets Marts Castle Douglas Ltd, which 150 kids attended in order to see the provenance of the food that goes fae ferm tae fork.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Close, please.

Emma Harper: I encourage the Scottish Government to continue to look at social prescribing, as well as to value the importance of the Royal Highland Education Trust.

16:28

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I am happy to contribute to the debate on healthy eating, active lifestyle and the importance of health education for the wellbeing of Scots.

In particular, I will focus on healthy eating. Most of what Brian Whittle suggested in his opening speech was absolutely practical and sensible. His suggestions do not feel terribly radical. I am, therefore, surprised that he has been so aggressive to members of other parties in the debate. However, if we only said those practical and sensible things and did not work out why people do not follow the advice, we would not get very far.

I say to the Tories that the issues cannot be seen in a vacuum. Tory economic and welfare

policies have a great deal to answer for through having impoverished people, having created uncertainty as a daily reality for all too many people, and having brought about greater inequality across our communities.

We should also be aware of the consequence of a UK Government economic strategy that is based all too often on employment without job security, but with flexibility that prevents people from planning their lives and having insecurity at its core, which is a significant factor in creating ill health. Anyone who has ever watched a delivery person arriving at the door with a parcel, then running to the next place and the next, will know the impact that that has on people’s lives.

I say to the Scottish Government that if it is to be seen as being serious about tackling inequality, it must reassess its choice to target local councils for disproportionate cuts, given the potential role for local services—especially schools—in health education, in fitness and healthy eating projects and in providing support for families who need a bit of help, to address those questions. We have lost so much of that already. I think that it is because there has not been an honest conversation in Government about why local government budgets need to be protected.

In my short speech, I want to highlight a campaign by the Scottish Co-operative Party and the Co-operative Party across the UK. I declare an interest as a Labour and Co-operative MSP. The campaign for food justice is tackling food poverty locally and campaigning for a more strategic approach nationally. It brings together the practicalities that Brian Whittle talked about and expresses the importance of understanding the problem in context.

Figures tell us that 8 million people across the UK are having trouble putting food on the table and are food insecure. We know that that is a problem for all too many families in Scotland, which is why we are calling on the Scottish Government to incorporate a right to food in the proposed good food nation bill. That point has been highlighted by other members, so I hope that the minister will respond to it.

We know from Co-operative Party research on the statistics for the most recent year that are available, that more than 150,000 of the crisis grants that were issued by the Scottish welfare fund referred at least in part to the need for food. We also know about food banks. I have been privileged to see first hand the work of Glasgow South West Foodbank and Glasgow SE Foodbank. They are run with dignity and compassion and meet real need—not just for food, but for support, advice and perhaps a bit of companionship for people in very challenging times. The indignity of having to go to food banks

is addressed by the people who run them, who try to make the experience as dignified as possible. We do not want food banks to have to exist, and neither do the volunteers who work there, but while they do, I urge the Government to ensure that they are properly funded.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Johann Lamont: I urge government at every level to come together to address the whole question of food and healthy lifestyles—not just through education, but across the responsibilities of government.

16:32

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank Brian Whittle for securing the debate. It is really important that people—young and old—are educated about healthy living and healthy eating. I will concentrate on local issues and initiatives in my area, as Johann Lamont did for her area. From local, these things grow—if members will pardon the pun. They happen not just in schools but in other areas.

I want to mention some of the charitable organisations that have improved the lives of many people in my area. The Woodlands Community Development Trust has achieved lasting benefits for the area and for the people who live, work or study in the Glasgow Kelvin constituency. It helps local residents and businesses to contribute to the economic improvement of the Woodlands area and promotes the health and wellbeing of local people. It also promotes learning and education within the Woodlands community.

The trust's projects include the Woodlands community garden and cafe. Each year, 50 households grow their own fruit, vegetables and herbs in the garden's raised beds, and dozens of local people maintain and improve the garden through twice-weekly garden volunteering. The garden is open to visitors and people do not have to have a raised bed in order to volunteer. The cafe opened in 2014 and since then it has provided a space for 70 to 80 local people to meet on a Monday evening to share a healthy, home-cooked meal and get to know others in their community.

The cafe is run on a pay-what-you-can basis and is free for people on low incomes. It has been fantastically successful in helping to reduce isolation in the Woodlands area of my constituency and supports people who are going through difficult times. New visitors receive a very warm welcome and people enjoy the cookery and wellbeing workshops that are run throughout the year. The vegetarian food, which is grown in the

community garden, is tasty and nutritious. I think that that is fantastic.

The Children's Wood on north Kelvin meadow is a community-led organisation that provides safe open spaces for children and members of the local community. Children from nursery and primary schools can go to the meadow for storytelling, exercise, healthy eating and other activities. It is a fantastic place. The benefits are not just educational. Being outside in the fresh air, even just to play or whatever, can reduce children's anxiety and increase their self-esteem and their attention span, as Brian Whittle mentioned. Adults also benefit from such outdoor activity.

The Annexe healthy living centre, which has worked with the local community in Partick for a long time, delivers wellbeing initiatives from its base. In 2008—I think that Johann Lamont mentioned this—Annexe Communities received money from the NHS and local government through the local health and care partnership to deliver healthy eating initiatives in four neighbourhoods across the west of Glasgow. During that time, the organisation worked very closely with residents to make sure that they could access programmes that met their needs, building up support in those areas. With additional funding from the Glasgow community planning partnership and Glasgow City Council, it now delivers weekly health clubs across central Glasgow, runs nutrition and healthy eating courses and promotes healthy living.

One of the new kids on the block is G3 growers, which is a community garden between a couple of tenements in Brechin Street. It used to be a dumping site, but now it has five large raised beds, two greenhouses, a tool shed and a mini orchard. All the produce is grown collectively and shared among members. There are open days, too.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Sandra White: I think that that is the way forward. We should also consider the health benefits of water.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Peter Chapman, to be followed by George Adam. I ask you to aim for three and a half minutes, please.

16:37

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): I declare an interest as a partner in a farming business. Having spent my whole life on my farm, growing up there and then working to produce high-quality crops and meat, which involves being active all day, I appreciate the necessity of a healthy diet and a healthy, fit body. Eating good,

healthy food was my fuel for long days on the farm.

However, since becoming an MSP and sitting in an office three days a week, I have seen at first hand how a change in lifestyle can affect weight. A fly cup and a fancy piece each afternoon is still appealing, but now I have to make the choice not to have them. That is what this debate is all about: choices, and the need to teach our future generations to make the right choices with their diet, their exercise regime and, ultimately, their weight. People must take responsibility for their own health choices.

We have a crisis in Scotland, whereby 65 per cent of the population are classed as overweight and 29 per cent are classed as obese. Obesity is leading to a type 2 diabetes crisis, which is hitting hard and costing our NHS huge and increasing amounts of money. That is so disappointing in a country with such a rich history of quality food. Our farmers work tirelessly to produce the best food to the highest standards. Our fishermen brave dangerous seas to bring us a variety of fresh wholesome fish, and our biggest food export is salmon. We have some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world and some of the best farmers. Good local food is abundantly available, and it should be obvious that we should shop locally and eat healthily, and that fresh local produce should take precedence over imports in food procurement for our schools, hospitals and prisons.

I was impressed to see the development in Aberdeenshire Council's school meals provision of the engagement that parents can have with their kids about what they eat and why. Aberdeenshire Council uses an online payment system that enables parents to top up their kid's account and look at an online menu for the week ahead. That allows parents to sit down and talk to their child about what option to pick for a particular day and provides a great opportunity for parent and child to consider healthier choices.

Aberdeenshire Council's school catering service currently holds the Soil Association bronze food for life catering award. That means that meals contain no undesirable food additives or hydrogenated fats; that 75 per cent of dishes are freshly prepared; that meat is from farms that satisfy United Kingdom welfare standards; that eggs are from cage-free hens; that menus are seasonal; and that training is provided for all catering staff. That is all good, but there are still improvements to be made. Figures released last year under freedom of information showed that the shared national procurement service, Scotland Excel, spends just 16 per cent of its budget for school food on food sourced in Scotland. That is a shocking figure that must improve quickly. Why on

earth are we importing chicken from Thailand to feed our school kids? The figure for Aberdeenshire is higher, as 26 per cent of spend is on food originating in Scotland, but there is still a long way to go.

I appreciate the point that members from across the chamber have made that we need to educate our youth about an active and healthy lifestyle. That education can come in many forms. It can be through physical education lessons, cooking lessons or hearty school meals that use local produce; most important, it can be through children learning that good, healthy home-produced food is good for them, physically and mentally.

16:41

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate, which is on an important issue that we must all come together to tackle. We are frequently divided in the chamber, especially right now during these difficult times, but we can all agree that the health and happiness of our children—and, for some of us, our grandchildren—must be a primary concern.

Obesity is a serious public health issue that cannot be ignored, but Scotland's vision is simple: it is to be a country where everyone eats well and we are all a healthy weight. I believe that many young people are aware of the need for healthy eating and of the choices that they have. It is a work in progress, but the situation is so much better than when I was younger or when my children were younger. However, we must show leadership and continue to make progress.

As always, I will bring up what is happening in my constituency. There are many examples of successful education programmes in Paisley. In one Renfrewshire Council programme that promoted healthy choices and affordable eating, families were shown their options for buying affordable healthy food. That was really good because, in many cases, it led to families sitting down at the table together to have dinner, which they had not done before.

I have previously mentioned St Mirren Football Club's training scheme in which fathers from various backgrounds were taught to cook healthy dinners for their families in the club's corporate hospitality unit. That is a good example because, although the programme could have been done elsewhere, the core target group was more likely to get involved through a football club. The children would go out and play five-a-side football while dad learned to cook a healthy meal, and then they would all sit down and have that meal.

Schools in Renfrewshire are also getting in on the act with healthy school meals. Through the

hearty lives school menu initiative, young people are having a say on the food that is on their plates and helping to develop healthier high school menus. Healthy food choices are now more prominently displayed in serving areas and catering staff are encouraged to nudge pupils to make healthier choices. Young health ambassadors were responsible for finding out nutritional facts about different foods and then creating nutritionally themed displays in the canteen to make their fellow pupils aware of the health benefits of the food that is in front of them. Similar work is being carried out in all high schools in Renfrewshire, and work experience is being offered in some kitchens. Renfrewshire Council is working in partnership with West College Scotland to deliver a bespoke cooking skills training course that is open to all catering staff and designed around the school menu.

As a nation, we consume too much food and drink that has little or no nutritional benefit but which contributes high calories or salt to our diet. Every day, we are inundated and tempted by junk food promotions and the marketing of unhealthy food through things such as multibuys, which encourage overconsumption. That can lead to diabetes, heart disease, certain types of cancer and other illnesses, putting immense pressure on our NHS, other vital public services and our economy.

We must all do what we can to ensure that the issues of children's health and accessible healthy food remain at the top of our agenda. It is important for all of us to get together on those issues, particularly those of us who are of a certain age and should know better.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches.

16:44

David Stewart: This has been an excellent debate, with well argued and informative speeches from members of all parties.

The Labour amendment emphasises the bigger picture, such as the role that health inequality and austerity play in creating food insecurity. I should declare my membership of the Scottish Co-operative Party.

The key element in the debate, which a succession of speakers mentioned, is that nutrition plays a crucial role in fighting, head-on, the growing cost of preventable health conditions such as obesity, type 2 diabetes and many types of cancer.

As the minister Joe FitzPatrick, Mark Ruskell, Alex Cole-Hamilton, John Scott, Emma Harper, Johann Lamont and George Adam said, more

than a quarter of adults in Scotland are obese, which increases their risk of developing potentially serious health conditions. As we all know, the risk of obesity varies across Scotland. The rate among women who live in affluent areas is 21 per cent, compared with 37 per cent in disadvantaged areas.

Excellent points were made in the debate. I did not agree with all Brian Whittle's comments, but he made sense when he talked about locally sourced food. He made the interesting point that 70 per cent of school meals fail to meet nutritional standards, and he made the important point that there is a link between nutrition and the management of mental health.

I agree with the minister on the importance of Scotland being a place where people eat well and are of healthy weight, on the prevention of ill health and on the need for a joined-up approach, with informed, healthier choices.

Mark Ruskell made a strong point about the right to food, which I echoed in my speech, in the context of my comments about the good food nation bill. He also talked about the worrying decline in green spaces and the important link between child poverty and child health.

Alex Cole-Hamilton adopted a Churchillian role when he talked about digging for victory and the cost of obesity. He made important points about the need to develop independent living, particularly in schools.

John Scott, who is a very experienced farmer, made good points about the campaign to source and buy local food, with which I strongly agree, and about the magic pill of exercise, which we should use a lot more. I was not aware of the Scottish diet action plan, which is another important issue to emphasise.

Emma Harper made excellent points. In particular, I share her view on "Fixing Dad"—I was also at the presentation that she mentioned. For members who have not followed it, the programme offers an effective way of reducing, if not quite curing, type 2 diabetes. Emma Harper also talked about the important role of social prescribing and the vital importance of a balanced diet.

Johann Lamont made excellent points about healthy eating. She said that we can all talk about a practical and sensible approach; the difficulty is how we enact it on the ground. She also talked about the impact of UK economic policy and stressed the importance of the Scottish campaign for food justice.

Health inequality is at the root of this debate. Poverty, social deprivation and social inequalities are significant contributors to people being overweight; it is the least well-off who are most at

risk. Why should someone's postcode determine their life expectancy? Why should not the right to food be a basic human right? As Martin Luther King said:

"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

16:48

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): I welcome the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Government and to confirm to Brian Whittle, if he had not noticed this, that there were two education ministers and two health ministers on the front bench for the entirety of the debate.

I accept the significant role of the Government in taking forward the debate on health education, which is why issues to do with health and nutrition are central to broad general education, as part of curriculum for excellence. The curriculum recognises the importance of young people having, at every stage of their learning opportunities, from the early level that commences with early learning and childcare, and right through their school education, access to an understanding of the relationship between food and health and the importance of making positive choices about diet and their own wellbeing.

There is an extra dimension, which is the role of wider players within our society and in particular our communities. I commend my colleague Sandra White on a beautiful speech that set out the work of the Woodlands Community Development Trust. It was a vivid example of what community organisations can do to marshal a spirit of good will and constructive activity at local level, to make a profound difference and to provide the benefits that Sandra White cited of social interaction, the role of the community garden and the health and exercise regimes associated with those. It was a powerful illustration of the fact that there are players within our society and outwith Government that can contribute significantly to the debate, and I welcome that.

I thought that Johann Lamont made the very fair point that the Conservative arguments in the debate essentially glided past the social and economic impacts of austerity, and she vividly illustrated the choices that those impacts inflict upon individuals.

Brian Whittle: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

John Swinney: No doubt Brian Whittle is about to answer that point.

Brian Whittle: My whole point is that the education system is the one in which we have the

greatest amount of impact, and it is where we should be focusing the biggest intervention, and the ability for food—I am going on, but that is the point that I was trying to make.

John Swinney: That is where I started my speech and accepted that responsibility of the centrality of curriculum for excellence. However, if we are going to have a complete debate about the issues, we have to reflect on the fact that there are wider impacts on people's lives, most of which come from the austerity agenda that Mr Whittle spectacularly ignored in his contribution to Parliament today. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Swinney.

Can we stop the private arguments please? Take them outside if you wish.

John Swinney: John Scott normally makes well-informed contributions to debates, but I felt that he was pretty wide of the mark today. In his attack about young people not being as active as they should be, he ignored the fact that the percentage of school pupils benefiting from schools' commitment to two hours or periods of PE per week has risen from 10 per cent in 2004-05 to 99 per cent in 2018. He also managed to ignore the fact that almost 70 per cent of children participate in sport each week, which is a very encouraging level of participation. I cite those points to balance the debate a bit.

John Scott: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

John Swinney: Of course I will.

John Scott: In that case, why is obesity a growing crisis, and why is it a fact that many young people will die before their parents because of type 2 diabetes? That is also an acknowledged fact. What is the answer? Exercise is certainly part of the answer, Mr Swinney.

John Swinney: Part of the answer is having a complete debate about the issues. I am simply citing that there is good evidence to show that there is good active participation in sport within Scotland, and we should celebrate that. There is also good active participation in our schools and we should celebrate that—we did not hear that from the Conservatives in the debate this afternoon.

A whole host of things come together. The way in which the Government is expanding early learning and childcare and the way in which we entrench the ideas and issues around food education within curriculum for excellence are all essential to ensuring that we support young people in Scotland to take forward a healthy diet and exercise regime.

I will conclude with one other statistic: in the last ten years there has been a 41 per cent increase in the Scottish products that are included in school meals contracts—a 41 per cent increase. That is a good start by the Scottish Government. We want to go further. We want to encourage more, and that is exactly what the Government is going to do in its forward agenda.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Liz Smith to wind up the debate. Six minutes will take us to decision time.

16:54

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I begin my remarks with a reference to the countryside learning conference, which took place a couple of weeks ago. I had the privilege of speaking at it and I say to Sandra White that one of the interesting groups there was the Woodlands Community Development Trust, whose work I pay tribute to.

That conference was primarily about what we have to do to increase collaboration across all the groups that are involved in outdoor learning. However, a great deal of the focus on that day was on the wellbeing of our young people and how the rural communities are crucial in that respect. I was struck by the fact that, apart from the educational opportunities that we discussed, food and nutrition were the recurring themes throughout the conference. That is an important point. I say to Alex Cole-Hamilton that that is exactly why we picked this topic for debate. I am glad to hear people such as George Adam supporting that position, too.

Several speakers have talked about a lot of different local initiatives, but I want to emphasise in my remarks the issue of involving young people in the decision making. In the parliamentary session from 2007 to 2011, the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee spent a huge amount of time considering the subject of free school meals. The committee took evidence and examined evidence that had been presented elsewhere, including that concerning many deprived communities. We considered a project in Hull, which was cited as one in which young people had had significant involvement in the decisions that were made. For example, pupils, parents and teachers were all involved in the creation of the school menus and were given opportunities to participate in making and serving some of the food. That project—eat well, do well—was also the source of a lot of lessons that can be learned about raising attainment, behaviour and concentration. There is a lot to be said for initiatives that do just that.

Brian Whittle referred to the Mental Health Foundation's assertion that one of the most obvious yet under-recognised factors in the development of mental ill-health is nutrition. I agree with that. There is a growing body of evidence that indicates that nutrition plays a key role in the prevention of mental health problems. That is surely an important message in an age in which concerns about mental wellbeing have such prominence, and rightly so.

Of course, we know from evidence that we have taken in this Parliament that the early years are vital. The cabinet secretary and the minister are correct in saying that they should be the focus of our attention. Those are the years before children reach an age at which they know what is good for them. As the minister rightly said in his speech, the education of parents and those who care for our youngest children—people in nurseries and across childcare, as well as health visitors—matters a great deal, as their input could hardly be more important.

Several speakers have flagged up the Scottish Government's Scottish health survey, which was released in September last year and which showed the deeply worrying statistics that members have spoken about. I will not rehearse those numbers, but it is particularly worrying that as few as 15 per cent of young people are getting their recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, and that the recent statistics from Food Standards Scotland show that Scots are still eating as much sugar as they were eight years ago. Those statistics could hardly be more damning.

The issue should not just come down to cost. David Stewart made an important point about that. I would challenge anyone who says that healthy food has to be expensive. It does not. However, we need to change the culture and educate people to understand that and to be able to take advantage of the absolute richness of Scotland's local produce. Obviously, we are in an age when the buying of convenience foods is increasingly easy, so I do not doubt the extent of the challenge. We have a big job to do to ensure that people can eat healthily and inexpensively.

The Scottish Conservatives' healthy lifestyle strategy, which was released last year, concentrated very much on a cross-portfolio approach. I recognise that ministers from different portfolios have been present in the chamber, but what is important is collaboration and their joining together, as many members have said. We need to concentrate on an overall strategy. I do not think that there is a party-political divide there.

In my final minute, I will speak about some of the issues that the cross-party group on sport has taken on board, because sport and physical

fitness are part of this issue. At many of the evidence sessions of the cross-party group, it has been put to us that we must consider the availability of sports facilities. That is why we in this party have been recommending a comprehensive analysis of when school facilities are available and whether we can make better use of them at weekends and during holiday times.

I hope that it is not too late for the Scottish Government to consider what the impact of all of this might be, given some of the recommendations in the Barclay report. There has also been much debate about the access—particularly of our young children—to a PE specialist, particularly in an age in which teacher shortages have been exposed to the full. Those PE specialists can have a huge influence on our young people and their physical activity and exercise.

A third issue that has come up at that cross-party group is the need to make our leisure centres more family friendly, in relation both to the experience of being in the leisure centre and the charges for entry. I see that my time is up.

Nobody is saying that the answers are easy. However, it is important to have the debate to ensure that we are not frightened to bring up what may be the most challenging issues, so that we can work collaboratively to deal with them.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-16733, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 23 April 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Social Security Committee debate: In work poverty

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 24 April 2019

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Justice and the Law Officers;
Government Business and
Constitutional Relations

followed by Scottish Green Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 25 April 2019

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Culture, Tourism and External Affairs

followed by Final stage: Hutchesons' Hospital
Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Changing
Lives Through Sport and Physical
Activity

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 30 April 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Education and Skills Committee Debate:
 Instrumental music tuition
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 1 May 2019

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Education and Skills;
 Health and Sport
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 2 May 2019

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Communities and Local Government
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Health and Care
 (Staffing) (Scotland) Bill
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, in relation to any debate on a business motion setting out a business programme taken on Wednesday 24 April 2019, the second sentence of rule 8.11.3 is suspended and replaced with "Any Member may speak on the motion at the discretion of the Presiding Officer";

(c) that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on Thursday 25 April 2019, in rule 13.6.2, insert at end "and may provide an opportunity for Party Leaders or their representatives to question the First Minister"; and

(d) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 22 April 2019, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of six Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S5M-16734 and S5M-16735, on deadlines for lodging questions, motion S5M-16736, on the designation of a lead committee, and motions S5M-16737 to S5M-16739, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the period for Members to—

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 7 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 7 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 15 May and Thursday 16 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 7 May;

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Thursday 9 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 7 May.

That the Parliament agrees that the period for Members to—

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 28 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 28 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 5 June and Thursday 6 June should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 28 May;

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Thursday 30 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 28 May.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government and Communities Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (Designation of Persons as Scottish Public Authorities) Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Motor Sport on Public Roads (Scotland) Regulations 2019 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We turn to decision time. The first question is, that amendment S5M-16702.3, in the name of Jeane Freeman, which seeks to amend motion S5M-16702, in the name of Miles Briggs, on looking after those who look after us, 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)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 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)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)

Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 58, Against 52, Abstentions 6.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-16702.1, in the name of Monica Lennon, which seeks to amend motion S5M-16702, in the name of Miles Briggs, on looking after those who look after us, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-16702, in the name of Miles Briggs, as amended, be agreed. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
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)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 87, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament pays tribute to all those who work in the NHS and social care services for the care and treatment that they help to deliver for patients and families across Scotland; believes that this support for staff should include support in their initial training, and welcomes that in Scotland free tuition has been retained for nursing and midwifery students, and that their bursaries are increasing by £10,000 in 2020; notes the observations of the BMA that Brexit will have a 'potentially devastating impact' on the health and social care workforce, and agrees with the BMA that, for staff from the EU, 'It is simply wrong that they should feel they no longer belong here or should be planning to leave as a result of Brexit'; understands the pressures that NHS and social care staff face and believes that there is a need to improve the holistic care and support provided to them in their workplaces; calls on ministers to review NHS and social care staff workplace support services in order to improve and promote wellbeing and look after those who look after people in Scotland, and considers that such a review must address the underlying issues that contribute to burnout, stress, long-term sickness and to staff leaving health and social care, such as staff shortages, workplace culture, bullying and harassment and poor work-life balance.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-16710.2, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S5M-16710, in the name of Brian Whittle, on health education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: Although someone suggested that they might vote no, they did not. The vote was unanimous. The result of the division is: For 115, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-16710.1, in the name of David Stewart, which seeks to amend motion S5M-16710, in the name of Brian Whittle, on health education, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 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)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 31, Against 85, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-16710, in the name of Brian Whittle, on health education, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament recognises the importance of nutrition as part of an active healthy lifestyle; further recognises that nutrition plays a crucial role in tackling the rising cost of the preventable health agenda such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, many types for cancer, cardiovascular disease, many muscular skeletal conditions, chest, heart and stroke issues, poor mental health, poor oral hygiene and many more; considers that a key battleground will be in ensuring access to the highest quality local produce in early years settings, specifically in pre-school and primary and secondary schools, and that this is a significant way to tackle the stubborn attainment gap; believes that part of this approach should include teaching and learning about active health lifestyles, including the opportunity to apply that learning; considers that this connected approach will give much-needed support to the rural economy; shares the aim to halve childhood obesity rates by 2030, including through action to transform the food environment to support healthier choices and reduce the excessive consumption of food and drink high in fat, sugar or salt, and notes the valuable contribution that schools make to educate children and young people about all of these vital issues.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on six Parliamentary Bureau motions. Any member who does not agree to a single question being put should shout "Object" now.

There being no objections, the next question is, that motions S5M-16734 to S5M-16739, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the period for Members to—

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 7 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 7 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 15 May and Thursday 16 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 7 May;

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Thursday 9 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 7 May.

That the Parliament agrees that the period for Members to—

lodge a Topical Question for answer on Tuesday 28 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 28 May;

submit their names for Portfolio and General Questions on Wednesday 5 June and Thursday 6 June should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 28 May;

lodge a First Minister's Question for answer on Thursday 30 May should end at 9.30am on Tuesday 28 May.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government and Communities Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (Designation of Persons as Scottish Public Authorities) Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) Order 2019 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Motor Sport on Public Roads (Scotland) Regulations 2019 [draft] be approved.

Recall of Parliament

17:07

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Before we move on to the members' business debate, I want to let members know about Parliament's plans to meet over the recess. In the past few days, the Parliamentary Bureau has been considering that matter and Parliament's response in the event of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union on Friday 12 April without a negotiated deal. I can confirm that my intention is to recall Parliament next week to meet at 1 pm on Thursday 11 April in the circumstance that the UK is due to leave the EU without a deal on the following day. Last week, I indicated that I would try to give members at least two days' notice of the decision on whether to recall. It is clear that there is an on-going and developing situation, so I may not be in a position to confirm a recall to members until after decisions are taken at the EU summit on Wednesday 10 April.

The decision to recall or not to recall will be communicated to you through the Parliament's alert system and, of course, your business managers will keep you updated. The parliamentary business team is also happy to advise members throughout the week.

State Pension Changes (Compensation for Women)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-15784, in the name of Sandra White, on the women against state pension inequality campaign. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

A lot of members want to speak in the debate, so I need to be quite tight with time, because there are several receptions after the debate and I do not want to hold them up. At some point, we will need to extend the debate, but I will let members know when we do so. I ask for a crisp four minutes from all members, other than the opening and closing speakers. I am sure that you can all manage that.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament regrets what it sees as the UK Government's inaction to end the injustice experienced by women affected by the changes to state pension laws; welcomes the campaign by the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) group to achieve fair transitional state pension arrangements for all women born in the 1950s affected by changes to state pension laws, including those in Glasgow Kelvin, and notes calls on the Scottish Government to urge the UK Government to provide a bridging pension that supplies an income until state pension age, which is not means tested, as well as compensation for the absence of a bridging pension to those who have already reached their state pension age, compensation to all those who have not started to receive a bridging pension by an appropriate date, which would be sufficient to recover lost monetary interest, and compensation to the beneficiaries of the estates of those who are deceased and failed to receive a bridging pension.

17:10

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank the MSPs who have signed the motion and enabled the debate to take place, and I thank Jackie Baillie, my co-convener of the WASPI cross-party group, for her support throughout the meetings that we have had.

I thank the WASPI campaigners for their dogged determination in highlighting the serious injustice that women who were born in the 1950s face. I was going to say that some of them are in the gallery, but I can see that the gallery is full of WASPI women. I thank them so much for turning up. That shows the importance of the debate and the subject to all women in Scotland and beyond. As the Presiding Officer said, there will be a reception later, and I look forward to meeting all the campaigners after the debate.

This is not the first time that I have had the opportunity to bring this important issue to the

chamber. In 2017, I held a members' business debate, yet here we are in 2019 and the WASPI women's situation has not changed at all. In fact, the situation for the women has got worse, thanks to further Tory austerity and cuts to benefits for those who need them most. The issue affects hundreds of thousands of women. It is estimated that no fewer than 250,000 women will be affected in Scotland alone, yet the situation has remained the same. There has been no justice so far.

No one disagrees that there should be state pension equalisation, but we disagree with the way in which the changes have been implemented, which has been so damaging. The timetable for the changes to women's state pensions, as set out in the Pensions Act 2011, has been accelerated over a short space of time and, in many cases, women have not received letters or any notification of changes at all. Not only is that unjust, it is causing severe financial and emotional hardship for women who are caught up with the changes. They simply have not been given the opportunity to put in place adequate financial measures to compensate for the shortfall.

As I am sure many members across the chamber have done, I have heard stories that illustrate the appalling situation that such women and their families are facing. The Tory Government is adding further hardship by penalising the women and their families through its draconian reforms to our welfare system, which have cut pension credit.

I am certain that the following stories will be familiar to many members. I have left out the people's names at their request. I have said that they are stories, but these things happened. One woman said:

"My own story is that I was born in mid-October 1954 and I have worked since I was 15. Then 6 months before I was 60 I contracted Viral Meningitis. I decided not to be a burden to my employer and take my retirement. It was only after the paperwork was signed that my sister who volunteers for CAB informed me that I would not get my state pension until I was 66. I have paid 43 years National Insurance"—

that is the important point; she paid that money—

"and I feel this is a total injustice that have to wait not 18 months, but an extra 6 years to get my state pension."

Another person told us:

"Due to life circumstances I was unable to join the superannuation scheme until 2004. In 2005 I received a letter stating that I wouldn't be eligible to my pension until I reached the age of 66! I have worked for the NHS from 1986 and paid my national insurance since I was sixteen."

Again, she has paid her national insurance. She went on:

"In 2014 I developed pancreatic cancer. I have since undergone surgery and chemotherapy and have no doubt that it will return. Therefore I had to leave my post with the

NHS and retire early due to my ill health and I fear by the time I reach the age of 66 it will sadly be too late for me to even receive my pension that I paid into for 40 years."

Those are shocking lived-experience testaments from women across the country. I am almost certain that other members will know of examples of the impact that the changes are having on their constituents, such as women who are unable to work as they care for elderly or ill parents or are suffering from ill health themselves. There are women who are forced to take jobs that are inappropriate for the state of their health, in order to qualify for limited jobseekers allowance, and then endure humiliating tests or face sanctions. Women are being forced to take jobs that place them in a worse financial situation, particularly jobs with zero-hours contracts. Single, divorced or widowed women often have no other sources of income; we know that that is the case because those women turn up at our cross-party group meetings. There are women who have planned and saved for their retirement and are living on dwindling limited savings until they reach the new state pension age, when the only income that they will have will be their state pension.

United Kingdom Government ministers are quick to defend their position by citing statistics that show that life expectancy is on the increase. As I am sure they know—and it is not news to us—the latest research shows that Glasgow has the lowest life expectancy, with women on average living to 78. So, tell them the statistics.

Pensioners are being hit under Tory austerity cuts. The UK has the lowest state pension in the developed world, and the UK Government is robbing the lowest earners of vital funds in their retirement. I say this all the time to WASPI women and to others: the state pension is not a privilege or a benefit, it is a contract that is entered into by hard-working women with the UK Government, and the UK Government has reneged on that contract. We must constantly say that it is not a benefit.

That is why I whole-heartedly support the WASPI campaign and its call to the UK Government to

"provide a bridging pension that supplies an income until state pension age, which is not means tested, as well as compensation for the absence of a bridging pension to those who have already reached their state pension age, compensation to all those who have not started to receive a bridging pension by an appropriate date, which would be sufficient to recover lost monetary interest, and compensation to the beneficiaries of the estates of those who are deceased"

—such as the lady I talked about—

"and failed to receive a bridging pension."

That is justice and fairness, which is what WASPI women want and are entitled to.

17:17

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I start my contribution to the debate by acknowledging that all the women who are affected by the pension changes have every right to feel disappointed, angry and aggrieved at the impact on their lives. I understand and empathise with their arguments, particularly as they faced significant barriers to work and workplace rights during their working lives. I believe that there was a failure in communication when the changes were accelerated. However, as I only have four minutes, I will focus on the position that we are in, as I understand it.

It is important to reflect that we are discussing a course of action that has its roots in the European Court of Justice, as part of a drive to ensure equal pay for men and women—a sensible, necessary move, as I am sure many members in the chamber would agree. Life expectancy was changing—positive changes meant people were living longer—and the pensions system was experiencing increasing demands. The Pensions Act 2011 was passed in the heat of the financial crisis with very real concerns in mind.

All of us would no doubt agree that a pensions system is only effective if it is sustainable, and if it is not sustainable, it will do little good. With spending on the state pension set to increase by £26 billion, action had to be taken in the face of the risk that future generations would receive nothing at all.

The motion calls on the UK Government to provide a “bridging pension” and I have asked about the options. It is my understanding that the UK Government has fully explored the options that are available to mitigate the pension change, which shows that it realises that, although change was necessary, as was the acceleration of the timetable, there may not have been adequate communication with some women, which the Work and Pensions Committee has confirmed.

However, as the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions said the other month, the Department for Work and Pensions—

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Michelle Ballantyne: I do not have time; I have only four minutes.

The secretary of state said that the DWP has found that there are

“substantial practical, financial and legal problems to all alternative options that have been suggested.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 17 December 2018; Vol 651, c 6P.]

Perhaps the greatest barrier to mitigation is that reversing the 2011 state pension age changes would cost more than £30 billion up to the end of 2025-26, while returning to a female state pension age of 60 would cost more than £77 billion by 2020-21.

There are also legal issues to be considered here. There is a high risk that, if the UK Government was to acquiesce to calls for a bridging pension, it would find itself in contravention of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which insists on parity between men and women when it comes to pay—and, after all, that was the initial purpose of the change. Such a move might also bring the UK into conflict with European Union law, and particularly the ECJ decision that sparked the process of pension equalising across Europe. [*Interruption.*] You support European law

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please. I want to hear the member.

Michelle Ballantyne: Interestingly, if the Scottish Government was at last to ratify CEDAW—it is disappointing that it has not done so—it could find itself bound by the same legal constraints and be unable to reverse or mitigate the changes for the risk of falling foul of equalities discrimination. I note that there have been conversations about that and, in the meeting that I went to, the cabinet secretary at the time was quick to say that Scotland could not afford to support the changes and would fall foul of the law if it did so.

Personally, I think that it is important that we wait for the result of the case that has been brought to the High Court. The Department for Work and Pensions has temporarily suspended action on state pension age matters until the judicial review is complete, and I think that the results of that legal action will provide us with a useful litmus test on which options the Government should pursue. Bearing that in mind, I think that it is clear that the UK Government will not make a decision until that review has gone through the courts, and that should be considered in any calls to action. Although I recognise the issue, I think that, if we are going to act on behalf of the women effectively, we need to wait until the court case has gone through and then look at the issue in the light of what is said.

17:21

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I am pleased to have been called to speak in this important members’ business debate on the ongoing plight of women who were born in the 1950s and are affected by changes to UK state pension provision. I congratulate my colleague Sandra

White MSP on securing this timely debate and on her tireless work over the years to secure justice for those women. I take the opportunity to mention my Westminster colleague Mhairi Black MP, who is also a real heroine of the campaign. I also commend the work of the west Fife women against state pension injustice group, which has also campaigned tirelessly to see that justice is done and has helped to ensure that the issue remains at the forefront of debate. I, too, welcome all our guests—all these fabulous women campaigners—to the gallery tonight.

As we have heard, the problem stems from the fact that the UK Government accelerated the increase of the state pension age for women who were born in the 1950s. Although it is true that there was a lead-in time for the changes, nobody knew about them. The first letters were not sent out until 2009, some 14 years after the Pensions Act 1995, which introduced them. In the intervening years, the DWP sent out letters about the state pension to the women without even bothering to mention that they would now not be getting their pensions at the age of 60. The accelerations under the 2011 act simply exacerbated the problems.

Regrettably, it has to be said that the UK Government has had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to even recognise that the problem exists. Whither, then, the social contract with the state that state pensions represent? It is a social contract that involves paying into the system over many years through national insurance contributions, and it means that there is, therefore, an entitlement and a legitimate expectation that, upon reaching a certain age, the state pension will be paid. Planning is done and family commitments and aspirations are dealt with on that basis, and for the UK Government to pretend otherwise just shows how out of touch it is.

How were the women supposed to build up the necessary resources to replace the state pension that they will now not receive? In that regard, we know that many of the women simply do not have private pensions to fall back on. Tens of thousands of women across Scotland and hundreds of thousands of women across the UK are losing tens of thousands of pounds. The UK Government has paunched their money, and it is not on. This is the UK Government's mess and it is therefore incumbent on the UK Government to sort it out.

In that respect, when suggestions are made that seek to transfer the responsibility to the Scottish Parliament, which has no power over the matter, we have to recall that the unionist parties—Tory, Labour and Lib Dem alike—have used their best endeavours to ensure that the Westminster Parliament keeps exclusive control over pensions.

I presume that that is not on the ground that Westminster is doing a good job, given that the UK state pension is among the lowest in Europe, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The women are fed up with the UK Government's stalling, procrastination, misinformation and outright rejection. The situation is all the more galling given that the UK Government is sitting on a surplus of some £30 billion in the national insurance fund, which is far in excess of what would be required to sort the problem—£8 billion is the current accurate estimate.

I entirely support the calls for the UK Government to provide the women with a bridging pension so that they will have an income until they reach their state pension age. I also support the calls for appropriate compensation for the women who would not otherwise benefit from that bridging option. It is time for the UK Government to pay out and honour the financial debt that it owes. Why will the UK Government not just do the right thing?

17:26

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Sandra White for her determination to take this important issue forward. Few issues have unified women across the country more than the scandal of the women who have been robbed of their pension at 60—a pension that they had paid for. The gallery is a sight to behold.

In her Westminster hall debate, Patricia Gibson MP pointed out that the issue is not about people living longer, as some would have us believe, but about women who had their pension age changed with no notice and, further, who faced an accelerated timetable in 2011 that brought the change forward by nine years. It is the biggest scandal of the decade, and it is a shame that the Tories cannot see that.

The goalposts were moved not just once but twice—it was a double whammy. The age of equalisation was 65, and then the pension age moved up to 67—those women have had a double whammy. Westminster robbed them and Westminster should pay. It was right that we had the equalisation of men and women, as Sandra White said, but that should not have resulted in women being robbed in their later years in life. The vast majority of those women started work at the age of 15 or 16 and have not had the educational opportunities that younger women may have had. They were carers and they were mothers, and they worked part time and probably on the lowest levels of pay. They have been rewarded with a baseball bat across their entitlement.

When George Osborne was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he told a global investment conference in 2013 that raising women's pension age was

"one of the less controversial things we have done"

and

"it has probably saved more money than anything else."

Today, women around the country are making it clear that that will never be forgotten.

Baroness Altmann said that the former pensions secretary, Iain Duncan Smith refused to engage with her, saying that she was not to speak to the women, because they would go away.

Stella Taylor, who was born in 1955, said that she worked all of her life. She became unwell at the age of 58 and discovered, quite accidentally, that her state pension age—she had expected to receive her pension at 60—had been moved to 66. Sandra White recalled the same type of story—they are not uncommon.

We need to be clear that it is the lack of notice that is the biggest scandal of all. Women were not able to prepare for their retirement years. Steve Webb, who is another former pensions minister, acknowledged that when his department wrote to women for the first time to let them know of the changes—that they were to work an additional year—it was probably "the first time" that many of them realised that they were to work an extra six years.

As Annabelle Ewing said, until the 1990s, women were not allowed to join company pension schemes. Women faced returning to work at difficult times, and a lack of age-friendly policies will be a factor in that regard. Some divorce settlements have been calculated using the projected incomes that women might have received at a pension age of 60—the clock cannot be reversed on that one. The Government can find the money to bail out the bankers, so it is time that the Government found the money to pay these women their pensions.

We should not lose sight of the fact that pensions are a wider issue in society. The retirement age has gone up, and we have not had much of a say in that. We need to educate people about how important their pension is to them. It is their deferred pay—it is money that they have paid to the state or into their pension scheme, and they need to have a say in the state retirement age. Pay the WASPI women what they are due. Back the WASPI women.

17:30

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): First, I declare an interest, in that my wife is a WASPI. Secondly, I pay tribute to Sandra White, not only

for securing the debate but for so persistently campaigning, along with others, on the issue. It is a great pity that decisions on the issue do not lie with this Parliament, because I am absolutely sure that, if they did, the problem would never have happened. Had we inherited the problem, we would have sorted it long before now.

Michelle Ballantyne used the term "failure in communication" about the failure of the UK Government to tell the WASPI women that they would have to wait much longer than they thought to get the pension to which they were entitled. I do not call that a failure in communication; I call it the deliberate deception of those women and an attempt to undermine their right to the pension that they have paid for.

I say gently to Michelle Ballantyne that I have been in this chamber for 20 years and I have never heard so much rubbish in one speech as I heard in hers. On the argument that the issue is down to financial hardship, I remember Cameron and Osborne telling us that we were all in it together. Well, we were not all in it together. Cameron is already worth an estimated £10 million and is reputedly about to make another £3 million or £4 million from his memoirs, while Osborne has about 100 different jobs, totalling millions of pounds a year. Nobody is delaying the payment of their pensions; nobody is punishing them for the damage that they have done to these women—and, indeed, to pensioners more widely, because, as Pauline McNeill said, there is a wider debate.

We are told that the money is not there. That is not true. Pension tax relief is worth £45 billion a year, 80 per cent of which goes to something like 10 per cent of the wealthiest people in the country. If they can get the same tax relief as the rest of us, the money is there to pay the WASPI women many times over. It is not accurate to argue that the money is not there. The money is there if the will is there, but the policy was introduced by people who want to keep the wealthy wealthy and to deprive people who have been working all their lives of the pension to which they are entitled.

As Annabelle Ewing pointed out, there is a £30 billion surplus in the national insurance fund, so £8 billion over the years that we are talking about is perfectly affordable. We can take from richer people to give to the WASPI women and use some of the surplus to pay out compensation.

This is not just about politics or economics; it is about morality in public life. These women are being denied their money—it is not someone else's money. The whole point of the contributory system is that we pay in during our working lives and we get our pension from the age that we have been told that we will get it from. That was the deal, and the deal has been broken in respect of the WASPI women.

Relative to average wages, our pensioners are the poorest paid in the whole of Europe. Although this is primarily about the WASPI women, the fact is that our pensioners, in the fifth largest economy in the world, are living in poverty compared with our European brothers and sisters. It is high time that all our pensioners, especially the WASPI women, get the justice that they are entitled to.

17:35

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): Alex Neil is absolutely right: if anyone was under the impression that the Conservative Government was working hard on behalf of pensioners, that myth has been well and truly busted.

I thank Sandra White for giving us another opportunity to highlight the injustices that the WASPI women face. I also thank the WASPI women for making the issue live and bringing it here. They must not go away.

I was glad to debate the issue last year, and it is important that we continue to debate it until the wrongs are righted. Millions of women around the UK are retiring much later than they had planned because, over a long period, the Department for Work and Pensions and its predecessor departments repeatedly failed to ensure that women who would be affected by changes in the pension age were aware of the changes. Those women were not made aware sufficiently in advance to allow them to prepare accordingly.

Even worse, the UK Government had opportunities to correct that situation, but it did not. For instance, in 2004, a DWP survey found that although 73 per cent of female respondents who were set to be affected by equalisation were aware of it, only 43 per cent were aware of their new state pension age. It also found that awareness of the state pension age was lower in certain groups, including women who carry out unpaid work and those who carry out poorly paid manual work, which are the very groups that are least able to cope financially with having to work many more years at short notice. The survey found that just 2 per cent of those who knew about the changes were made aware through DWP or pension service communications, so the UK Government knew fine well that its message was not getting out.

The DWP concluded:

“This low figure provides cause for concern and shows that information about the increase in state pension age is not reaching the group of individuals who arguably have the greatest need to be informed.”

Why, then, was that not acted on? Why did the UK Government wait until 2009 to send out personalised letters to the women who were affected to inform them of their changed retirement

age? If the DWP knew, as has been admitted, that letters are only read by one in three recipients and that many people were not getting them because they had changed address, why was more effort not made to contact the women concerned?

A House of Commons select committee report concluded that

“governments could have done a lot better in communicating the changes. Well into this decade far too many affected women were unaware of the equalisation of state pension age at 65 legislated for in 1995”.

That was more than 15 years later. Even now, despite the fantastic work that is being done by the WASPI campaign, too many people around the UK are still unaware of their state pension age, and it is certainly not up to the WASPI women to make people aware.

There was clearly a major failure to properly inform the 1950s women of changes to their retirement age, which is why the motion is absolutely right to support the WASPI request for bridging pensions and other forms of compensation.

We must also look at pension credit, with regard to which there is another injustice that will mean that some WASPI women are hit again. From May, mixed-age couples in which one partner is below the pension age will no longer be able to receive pension credit and both will have to claim universal credit—that great success story. Couples who claim after 15 May could be as much as £140 a week, or £7,000 a year, worse off. That will make it even harder for WASPI women to get by.

As Age Scotland argues, it is particularly disappointing that, rather than making sure that everyone is aware of that big change—it had been on the statute book since 2012, but not implemented—the announcement was made quietly through a ministerial statement on a busy day in the UK Parliament. Clearly, lessons have not been learned.

The Scottish Greens congratulate the WASPI campaign on the incredible work that it has done so far in raising awareness of this injustice, and fully back its calls for bridging pensions and compensation to right this wrong. Philip Alston, the United Nations rapporteur on poverty, concluded that some UK welfare reforms could have been written by a roomful of misogynists. This is another such example.

17:39

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I congratulate my friend and colleague Sandra White for securing this important debate. It is appalling that, in 2019, the debate, fight and

campaign are still taking place. I thank the WASPI women who are in the Parliament today and those who have campaigned so tirelessly on the issue over the past number of years.

Michelle Ballantyne clearly has a different political view of the issue, which is understandable when we bear in mind her political party. In her speech, she spoke about the Pensions Act 2011 and stated that it was passed in the heat of the financial situation in 2011. However, most people recognise that the situation is different now, so why has the 2011 act not been revisited to fix the problem for all the WASPI women who are in the Scottish Parliament today?

Politicians from the pro-union side of the constitutional debate have argued that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament have the powers to do something about the WASPI situation. There have even been suggestions that we should top up the pensions, but those suggestions are disingenuous.

First, if the system is wrong and pensions need to be topped up, there will be a shortfall, which will need to be fixed. Secondly, women are being targeted by the Tory UK Government to make up for its own mistakes. Thirdly, the Scottish Parliament does not have the powers to fix the situation, so any suggestion by politicians that it does is misleading and does the WASPI campaigners yet another injustice, on top of the one that has already been inflicted.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Does Stuart McMillan agree that slipping the policy under the wire was not a mistake, but a strategy to ensure that women did not take to the streets ahead of the decision and did not realise that supporting the Tory party was a mistake?

Stuart McMillan: I absolutely agree with Gillian Martin.

My fourth point is that in 2014, the people of Scotland were told that a vote to remain in the UK would protect and guarantee pensions. Clearly, among other things that they were told, such as that voting no would safeguard Scotland's membership of the European Union, that was not the case. It was another false claim by the pro-union side.

Some MSPs suggest that the Scottish Government should top up the pensions. However, section 26 of the Scotland Act 2016 says that the power to do that is limited to

"a short-term need that requires to be met to avoid a risk to the well-being of an individual."

That indicates that, to get that done, each person would need to be assessed.

Exception 10 in section 28 of the 2016 act is about the power to create new benefits. It states that the power cannot be used to provide pensions to people

"who qualify by reason of old age."

Exception 5 in section 24 of the Scotland Act 2016 relates to the "top-up of reserved benefits" and the wide-ranging power to make discretionary payments. However, in order for it to apply, people must already be receiving a reserved benefit that could be topped up. In the case of the WASPI women, they have been denied that which is rightfully theirs and they are not getting that pension. How can they get a top-up of something that they are not getting?

Some politicians will claim that it is not a constitutional issue, and neither should it be. However, when a system is broken and we are being asked to pick up the pieces by applying an imaginary top-up that we are not allowed to apply, it could be claimed that WASPI women will not get what is rightfully theirs until some MSPs and pro-union parties admit that the answer to the problem lies at Westminster. I agree with Pauline McNeill's comments on that issue.

I am sure that every MSP will want to support Scotland's WASPI women and ensure that they get what is rightfully theirs, because they have put into that pot.

17:44

Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): I reassure my good friend Alex Neil that David Cameron will never make £3 million from his memoirs, because not even the Tory members will buy them.

More seriously, I thank Sandra White for her powerful advocacy on behalf of WASPI women and Jackie Baillie for her work on the cross-party group that is supported by so many colleagues across the Parliament.

When the state chooses to change the pension age, the people affected by the change have a right to understand why it is happening and to be fully consulted on the change. Why, then, is it that WASPI women are so understandably aggrieved by the changes that now directly affect them? Why is a landmark judicial ruling, expected this year, so eagerly awaited? Why does the redoubtable Janet Ainsworth lead a public demonstration at the South Lochside roundabout in Lerwick every Saturday at noon no matter the weather? Janet and women like her have formed the Shetland pension justice group and have a Facebook page to prove it, so that people—not just from across Shetland but from the widespread campaigns across the nations of the UK—can keep in touch.

Why have more women attended meetings hosted by Alistair Carmichael in recent weeks in both Orkney and Shetland than meetings on any other major issue?

It is because that generation of women speak about being robbed: robbed of the money from their hard work and service; and robbed of their rights. Shetland women talk about losing sight of and touch with their loved ones in retirement; of not being able to be a granny; of having to make a choice between giving up work, often to care for loved ones, and taking a drop in the hours that they work, with the financial shortfall that that means for the household. Why was there no direct consultation with the women affected by the pension changes? Would that have been so difficult? For those and many other reasons, the issue needs to be addressed. It cannot be right that a legal case is the only potential solution that 3,000 women in Shetland and Orkney alone will see to right this wrong.

Annabelle Ewing mentioned that the pension changes make women tens of thousands of pounds worse off. That money could be spent on many household things, not least on heating the home, as elderly people are particularly affected by fuel poverty. Shetland spends more per household on heating and keeping warm than most of Scotland, and that is even more true for people in elderly households. The cost of living for the 1950s generation of women is 20 to 60 per cent higher in the islands than the UK average, and state pensions do not include such geographic variations. The Shetland population is ageing faster than the rest of Scotland, with 19 per cent of it over 65, which is 4 per cent more than a decade ago.

Women in their 60s care for their elderly spouses and parents. Many look after the next generation, especially those with disabilities. They have been described as the sandwich generation—in Shetland that might be better termed the bannock generation. No matter the title, Janet Ainsworth, the Shetland pension justice group and the 1950s generation of women deserve better. It is time that that happened.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I still have six members who wish to speak, so I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Sandra White to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

17:47

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): It is good that so many members have stayed to contribute to the debate, which is of enormous importance not only to women, but to their families and their families' wellbeing. When I was in my late teens, my mother and father continually lectured me on the need to provide myself with, first, adequate life insurance and, secondly, a pension. Although they were by no means well off themselves, that was always a priority for them and they encouraged me to follow suit.

Of course, when we are young, those things seem a long way off and of little relevance—they are certainly not the first of our priorities. However, I am glad that I listened to my parents, although that was more to keep them happy than because I thought it was the right thing to do. It was not until my late 20s that I fully understood why it was and appreciated the security that it provided, not just for me but for the family that I then had, being married with a child.

Thinking back, if the truth be known, I think that the fact that week by week, month by month and year by year I was contributing to the national insurance scheme and knew that there would be a time when the Government of the day would make good its promise of a state pension, so it was something secure that I had in the bank, worked against the notion of being bothered to make any additional provision for retirement. For everyone, the date of retirement was definite and certain and, since the Government was the public provider, it was considered to be rock solid.

Bringing that forward to today, we find ourselves in a situation in which what women have planned for and taken for granted all their lives, what they have worked for and what they were promised—and, indeed, entitled to—has been taken away from them, not by a callous private provider, but by their own Government, which has broken the contract without any redress of any kind. Just think what would have happened if a rogue private provider had said, at the end of the contract, "We have ripped up the agreement; we are ignoring the deal. We took your payments but we are unilaterally extending the date when we will pay out." The roof would have fallen in on them.

The fact that it is the UK Government that has acted unilaterally in that way and which has stolen pension rights from the WASPI women does not make it acceptable. The fact that the UK Government brought in legislation to make that theft legal does not make it just. The fact that the UK Government has the power to act in that reprehensible way does not make it honest. The impact of this measure on women's wellbeing is, and will continue to be, profound. It is time for the

UK Government to recognise the damage that has been done and to reverse this mean-hearted measure and restore trust in the pension system. It is time to restore the pension rights of all the affected women.

I urge members to support the WASPI women.

17:51

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I, too, thank Sandra White for bringing the debate to the chamber. I know that the fight for state pension equality is one that we both care a great deal about, as co-conveners of the cross-party group on the issue.

I welcome the WASPI campaigners from my constituency and across Scotland who are in the gallery, and I encourage colleagues to meet them after the debate to learn more about the impact on them and what each of us can do to help with the campaign.

More than 2.5 million women who were born in the 1950s have had their state pension age changed without fair notification—in fact, it is probably true to say that many of them have had it changed without any notification at all. Those women deserve recognition for the injustice that they have suffered, an apology for the way in which their complaints have been handled and compensation for their loss.

As I am sure that the WASPI campaigners would point out, there is an argument to be had about the Pensions Act 1995 and the equalising of the retirement age at 65, but it is the completely unreasonable way in which those changes were implemented that has meant that millions of women across the country are being discriminated against purely on the basis of the year in which they were born. They rightly feel robbed—of their entitlement, because they paid into their pensions all their working lives. The almost complete lack of notice that was given to the women, more than 250,000 of whom live in Scotland, has resulted in many of them experiencing significant financial hardship. They have had no time at all to plan for their retirement, despite the Turner commission saying that a notice period of at least 10 to 15 years was required.

To add insult to injury, through a recent freedom of information request, it was found that just three people at the DWP have been given the job of dealing with the thousands of complaints from women who have unfairly missed out on their pensions. That is downright offensive to the millions of women who have spent their working lives contributing to our country, and it shows that the UK Tory Government has a complete lack of understanding of the issue at hand.

Women up and down the country are being forced to wait for significant periods of time just to get an answer to a complaint that they should never have had to make in the first place. The Independent Case Examiner was set up to deal with WASPI complaints. I welcome the fact that it has assessed around 400 cases for examination and has investigated more than 40 cases, but between October 2017 when ICE was created and February 2018, fewer than 44 investigation reports into complaints were issued, and the number of published reports is stagnating because of the size of the complaints backlog. Then, more than 2,000 cases still had not seen the light of day, and I understand that there have been many more since then. At the time of the freedom of information request, it was calculated that, if the DWP kept up its average reply time of 9.75 weeks per case, it would be over 20 years before all 2,000-odd cases were examined. Frankly, that is a disgrace.

This fight could have been avoided. The Government failed to give the women due respect. The amount of time, energy and money that WASPI women have given to the campaign has been recognised in this Parliament and in the UK Parliament. Just three weeks ago, the WASPI campaign won the Sheila McKechnie Foundation grass-roots action support award for specialist lobbying, on which I congratulate the campaign. I had the pleasure of organising a meeting for WASPI women in Dumbarton to which hundreds upon hundreds of women came. I congratulate my local WASPI groups in Argyll and Bute and West Dunbartonshire. I stand side by side with them to address the injustice that they have experienced, and I encourage everyone in the Parliament to join the fight. WASPI women deserve justice.

17:55

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I, too, am grateful to Sandra White for securing this important debate on behalf of WASPI women throughout Scotland. As others have done, I acknowledge her fight and determination on the issue. I also thank the WASPI women who are in the gallery. They are but a small fraction of the women across Scotland who are affected. I thank those who are involved in the campaign for all that they do for women across Scotland and the UK, including many women in my family who are affected.

I do not know whether to feel sorry for Michelle Ballantyne. Here she is, having been sent out by the Conservative Party to put on the face and defend the UK Government, flanked on either side by the landowning gentry, who are unlikely—

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): That is seriously disrespectful, Presiding Officer.

Fulton MacGregor: They are unlikely to be affected by the changes. I have to say that Michelle Ballantyne's speech was a disgrace. She should have turned around and faced the gallery.

The subject is yet another example of how Westminster simply does not work for Scotland. The vast majority of MSPs and Scottish MPs oppose the strategy that the UK Government has adopted and the devastating impact that it is having on women up and down the UK. Like other members, I have been contacted by countless women in my constituency who have told me how big the impact of the decision has been on them and their families. Long-made plans for retirement have been thrown into the air by the heartless Tory party.

I believe that there is a consensus in support of equalising the retirement age for men and women. We have heard that from almost every member in the debate. However, it has to be done in a sensible and fair way. Simply to dictate to women a couple of years before they retire that they will need to work on for several years more is just not good enough. That is why I support the calls for a bridging pension and compensation.

Last year, I was privileged to speak at the Lanarkshire WASPI event in Coatbridge alongside the local MP—Labour's Hugh Gaffney. On issues of such importance that span the country, party allegiances should be put to one side. All of us should stand four square behind the women who are affected by the changes. Some of the stories that we heard that day were absolutely heartbreaking. I was going to give specific examples, but many have been adequately covered by other members. Women have had to put their plans on hold: holidays, dreams of a lifetime and plans for children and grandchildren have been put on hold, there has been financial hardship and much more. It is absolutely heartbreaking.

Another issue that came out at the event was the importance of men also fighting the injustice, which was something that I had not thought about prior to the meeting. We have rightly talked about the women in the gallery: I note that there are a couple of men there, too. Women at the event said that the policy is an injustice for everybody, so we all need to fight it. That is why I am glad that there is cross-party support and that lots of male MSPs have spoken.

The situation is a national scandal involving blatant discrimination and injustice. The policy is misogynistic and includes gender and age discrimination. The Tories thought that they could get away with it, but they have had a bit of a shock, have they not? The WASPI campaign is to be commended for how it has conducted itself.

The women should be paid what they are due. Support the WASPI campaign.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call the next member, I say that members should be civil to other members in the chamber. The members to whom Mr MacGregor referred are not taking part in the debate; they are here supporting a member of their party. I think that members would understand that. The remark that was made was rather unfortunate, so I caution members about how they address one another. *[Interruption.]* That is the matter dealt with. I do not want to hear another thing.

17:59

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): The debate is about justice and fairness. I thank Sandra White for giving members the opportunity to put on the record our support for the women who have been treated so badly.

As Sandra White said, the WASPI campaign is not about opposition to the equalisation of the pension age or about the state pension age reverting to 60. It is simply a demand for fair transitional arrangements for the many women who were born in the early 1950s who are affected by the Pensions Act 1995 and the Pensions Act 2011. For the majority of their working lives, those women were told that the state would provide pensions for them at 60, only for the rug to be pulled from under them.

We should remember that the WASPI women entered the workforce in an era in which sex discrimination was rife. Women were often paid less than men for doing the same work. Even the welcome introduction of the Equal Pay Act 1970 did not end that unfairness. Not only did many women earn less than men, but they often worked in industries in which company pensions were inadequate or non-existent. Even when women were covered by workplace pensions, those pensions were badly hit when they took time off to raise their children. They certainly did not enjoy the levels of state childcare support that parents like me now enjoy. We are talking about a generation of women, many of whom did not have highly paid jobs with gold-plated work pensions.

Philip Alston, who is a United Nations independent expert, found that WASPI women had been particularly impacted by a

“poorly phased in change in the state pension age”,

and that the number of pensioners living in poverty in the UK had risen by 300,000. As Jackie Baillie said, the Turner pensions commission recommended that 15 years' notice of the change be given, and Saga recommended 10 years. The reality is that many women were not personally

notified in 1995 that a huge change was in the pipeline.

One of those women was my constituent Anne Ferguson, from Kilbarchan. In 2012, she was told by the DWP that her state pension age had not changed, then it changed to 63.5 years, then it changed to 65 years and three months. She was given no notice to prepare. Anne was lucky, in that she found a job to tide her over. Many others have not been as fortunate.

Where is the justice for the women who received letters 14 years after the 1995 act was passed? A large percentage received a letter advising them of significant increases to their pension age only when they were approaching their pension age, which gave them hardly any time to make alternative arrangements. As members said, some women report not having received a letter at all.

As Pauline McNeill said, in 2013, George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said that raising women's pension age was

"one of the less controversial things we have done, and yet probably has saved more money than anything else we have done".

The comment shows that there was a cold and callous calculation that there were huge savings to be made without provoking a major backlash.

What we have here is a scandal of major proportions. It is a sexist scandal, because it hits women more than it hits men, and it hits lower-income women disproportionately hard. It is a scandal that could be fixed, if there were the political will to do so. As a country, we have rightly had to make financial provision for the impact of Brexit. We rightly find the resources to respond to national emergencies. When it comes to war, the money can be found.

Therefore, if we are so minded, across the political spectrum we can make a pact and say that we will do the right thing. We should listen to the women who are in the gallery today and to the many thousands more in my community and across the country. We should honour the contribution that those women have made to society and take the necessary steps to deliver the money that would address the unfairness and injustice.

18:04

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): This issue continues to raise its head for all the wrong reasons.

First and foremost, I thank Sandra White MSP for, once again, bringing this serious issue to the chamber for debate.

There will not be one of the 129 members in the chamber who has not encountered the WASPI campaign and WASPI women within their constituency or region over the past few years. Their arguments have remained constant and consistent and they have been well rehearsed by previous speakers, so I will not go back over them.

Sadly, it is one of a number of unfair and unreasonable policies implemented by a Tory UK Government that is continually out of touch and out of luck, and which is rapidly running out of time.

Not only were the changes ineffectively communicated and, in many instances, not communicated at all, but they are reliant on the women affected remembering whether they were informed about them over 25 years ago, although I acknowledge that even that may not have happened.

That is not just ludicrous. It is completely unreasonable for the UK Government to just assume that it is all fine. The sheer ineptitude of this Tory UK Government is quite astonishing. Mind you, it is wholly unsurprising that they have taken a carry-on-regardless approach, just as we have seen them do with other issues that are coming home to roost.

Sandra White's motion urges the UK Government to provide bridging pensions and compensation to those most affected by the changes, and I believe that that is the very least that the UK Government should be doing. A recognition that its approach to the issue is entirely counterproductive and personal apologies to all those who have been affected would go some way towards rebuilding those burned-down bridges.

While those who are living have to bear the brunt of the severe incompetence and intransigence of the UK Government, our thoughts should turn to those who have died waiting on it to get its act together. It is nothing short of a scandal that women across the countries of the UK who have been fighting against state pension inequality have since died waiting for the UK Government to clean up its mess; it should be utterly ashamed of that harrowing and abhorrent fact.

Make no mistake, the hundreds of WASPI women in my Falkirk East constituency, and those across the wider Falkirk district, have allies on the benches here to call on the Tory UK Government to face up to its own inadequacies and admit that it has failed those women. It needs to act on its failures and find a solution to the matter—a point that we in the SNP have been making for years now through our Westminster colleagues. I have little faith that the UK Government will make that happen, however, and I fully believe that if it does not make it happen, then it should give those

powers to the Scottish Government to ensure that it does happen.

We often hear cries from the Tory benches about welfare powers, and I remind them that the benefits that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament still have to fit within the confines of a narrow UK system that is failing our citizens across these countries. The only way forward for Scotland to be able to treat our citizens with dignity, fairness and respect is to take the decisions that affect us most, ourselves.

We can see that this is a mess created by the UK Government that habitually turns its backs on its own citizens. Governments are supposed to be there to protect and provide for the people. However, in our experience, Tory Governments are interested only in protecting and providing for their own interests. I add to the calls from this Parliament for the UK Government to get its act together and ensure that WASPI women, who have lost out to date, get the apology and the money that they rightfully deserve.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Willie Coffey, the last speaker in the open debate.

18:08

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I too thank my colleague Sandra White for securing the debate and representing the case of many thousands of women across Scotland who are being robbed of their pensions by the UK Government. I also welcome to the Parliament the Ayrshire WASPI women and their families who have campaigned long and hard to right this wrong.

Robbery is the appropriate term here, because that is what it is: state-sponsored robbery of some of the poorest people in society. What has the UK Government's response been? Basically it has been to do nothing, claim it is too expensive to fix, blame Europe, as we heard earlier, and tell those women—as the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions did in December—that they should count themselves lucky because they will

“receive more State Pension on average over their lifetime than women ever have before.”—[*Official Report*, House of Commons, 17 December 2018; Vol 651, c 8P.]

Across Ayrshire, about 14,000 women are affected, and it is a pity that they have had no support whatsoever from their Tory MP or MSPs who have given them a deaf ear on the subject. Personal losses for many are anything from in the region of £17,000 all the way up to £45,000 or £50,000. Let us also not forget that those women will continue to be required to pay their national insurance well beyond their previously expected years of service.

There is something fundamentally wrong about all this. The WASPI women upheld their end of the pensions contract when working and paying into their state pension all their lives. Surely it is unacceptable for any Government to break that contract for something as crucial as a pension, particularly so close to the point of retirement. Despite what the UK Government claims, those women did not receive any notification regarding changes to the state pension age, so most were shocked to find that they would not receive their state pension until they turned 66.

As a consequence of what has happened, many women have had to sell their homes or use up their life savings now, rather than keep what they had for their well-earned retirement. Many gave up work in anticipation of their retirement, and now have to try to get back into work. Disgracefully, many who gave up work in order to provide care for elderly parents or even their grandchildren are having to give those roles up, with the obvious consequences of that being clear to most of us in here.

There is no doubt that the pension-age changes are having a knock-on effect on the numbers of women over 60 who now have to claim jobseekers allowance or employment support allowance. Surely the Government assessed that before it decided its policy? There are many other consequential effects that the Government has either chosen to ignore, at best, or, at worst, simply does not care about. Think about the loss of the support for families and children that is very much a part of the caring role that retired grandparents offer. Think about the young people who will not be able to find work or get promotion because there are fewer opportunities as a result of older people being forced to stay in work longer. Further, think about the thousands of charities that rely on the voluntary work of older people who now cannot volunteer because they are being forced to work much later in life. All of those outcomes have a cost associated with them, both financial and social. The policy that we are discussing must represent one of the most deliberately callous policy decisions that has ever been taken by any Government.

As Stuart McMillan said earlier, even if the policy was justifiable, which it is not, it is not good enough to claim, as some have, that the Scottish Government should make up the shortfall. We cannot introduce a top-up benefit to mitigate this policy, which represents one of the worst Tory policies, because it would have to be an age-related top-up, which we cannot implement, because section 28 of the Scotland Act 2016 makes it clear that we cannot provide assistance by way of pensions to individuals who qualify by reason of age.

I once again thank Sandra White for bringing this important matter to the attention of the Parliament. Even taking Brexit into account, this pensions robbery must be the one of the most scandalous decisions ever meted out by a Government on its citizens, and it should be sorted.

The WASPI women have already paid their money in. It is their money, not the UK Government's and the UK Government should not steal it now.

18:13

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I thank Sandra White for bringing this important motion to Parliament, and I pay tribute to the WASPI women who are here today, including those from my constituency of Dunfermline and from west Fife, and the many across the country who have been mentioned by Tavish Scott and others and who have campaigned tirelessly on the issue for years.

The UK Government's mishandling of the issue is a grave injustice, and one that is sadly emblematic of the way that the UK Government has chosen to reduce public expenditure by laying the burden of austerity squarely on the shoulders of women. We pay our national insurance contributions in the expectation that we will receive a state pension at a certain age. As Sandra White and Annabelle Ewing said, the state pension is not a benefit; it is a social contract with the people. However, for more than 2 million women, that is not the case. The UK Government moved the goal posts just as those women were nearing retirement age and then, to make matters worse, did not even have the decency to tell them about it. The changes have shattered retirement plans. There is a deep financial cost, with many struggling to make ends meet while preparing for a longer road to their state pension. Further, many of those women will now miss out on valuable years of retirement with their families. They have been badly let down.

In principle, the Scottish Government is supportive of having an equal state pension for men and women. However, we do not agree with the unfair manner in which the UK Government has implemented the change.

When the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Alston, concluded his visit to the UK last year, he said:

"The impact of the changes to pensionable age is such as to severely penalise those who happen to be on the cusp of retirement and who had well-founded expectations of entering the next phase of their lives, rather than being plunged back into a workforce for which many of them were

ill-prepared and to which they could not reasonably have been expected to adjust with no notice."

The UK Government fundamentally altered the life plans and life chances of hundreds of thousands of women and then neglected to properly inform them about it. Many of those women have faced staunch inequality throughout their lives. As Sandra White and Alison Johnstone pointed out, from next month, many of those women will be doubly disadvantaged due to the UK Government's new rules around pension credit eligibility. Couples where one person is above the state pension age and the other is below it will now have to make a claim for universal credit rather than pension credit. Universal credit is, of course, significantly less generous than pension credit and comes with a host of other problems that we simply do not have time to go into today. However, that is yet another example of WASPI women being let down simply to save money.

Pauline McNeill and Neil Bibby rightly pointed out that many of the WASPI women grew up at a time when having a career and raising a family was even harder than it is now; the burden of domestic labour fell squarely on women's shoulders, childcare was scarce and many worked part time—and still do. Of course, as is still the case for some, whether they were in full-time or part-time work, the vast majority of those women were not paid equally to their male colleagues.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary recognise that, at the time, women were given the option of paying the full stamp or the lower stamp, and that a lot of them opted for the lower stamp because they were on lower wages?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Maureen Watt brings up another very important point about the catalogue of decisions that the women have made during their lives with the best of knowledge and intentions. That is why the UK Government needs to fulfil its part of the social contract that I spoke about at the start of my speech.

The equalisation of the state pension age was supposed to be about equality. However, it has been implemented in a way that has done nothing but compound the injustice that those women have faced all their lives.

I turn to the UK Government's misrepresentation of the powers that are available to the Scottish Parliament through the Scotland Act 2016. The UK Government has, on numerous occasions, suggested that the Scottish Government has the ability to support WASPI women by providing the support that the UK Government has taken away. While that may be a convenient way for the UK Government to disengage from the mess that it created, it is simply not the case, and constantly

repeating that misinformation does a disservice to those who have been affected.

Gil Paterson: Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is a bit like a judge saying that the Tories are guilty of theft and then charging the Scottish National Party, which has to pick up the tab?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That is certainly a fine way of putting it. I agree with the basis of Gil Paterson's intervention. This is the UK Government's mess, and it is the UK Government's responsibility to tidy it up.

I move on to why the Scottish Government cannot intervene on the issue. Section 24 of the Scotland Act 2016 allows the Scottish Government to top up a reserved benefit. However, while some of the women affected may be receiving some form of benefit, depending on their individual circumstances, they will not, as a whole, be receiving a reserved benefit that could be topped up.

Section 26 of the 2016 act is limited to providing help for

“a short-term need that requires to be met to avoid a risk”

to a person's wellbeing. It would require that every person be assessed individually, but would not allow for assistance for the majority of those who are in the WASPI group.

Finally, section 28 of the 2016 act gives the Scottish Government the power to create new benefits. However, it clearly states that we cannot provide

“assistance by way of pensions to or in respect of individuals who qualify by reason of old age.”

Yet the UK Government is suggesting that we can provide mitigation for those who are affected specifically because of their age and a lack of state pension.

I hope that the UK Government does not continue to try to deflect the issue on to the Scottish Government. The UK Government seems to want to ignore the issue and to simply shrug its shoulders, throw up its hands and hope that the women will get tired and the issue will go away. However, it will not go away, and it is not too late for the UK Government to take responsibility for the heartbreak and misery that it is causing and find ways and means to provide transitional protection for those women.

In her speech, Michelle Ballantyne talked about how much the alternatives may cost. Many members have quite rightly pointed out examples of when the UK Government found money when it was a priority for it to do so. However, the key point is that the money is not the UK Government's money; it is the women's money. They have paid for it over decades. That is why

the Scottish Government will continue to fully support the WASPI campaign.

I congratulate all members who have supported Sandra White's motion.

Meeting closed at 18:20.

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