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Scottish Parliament

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[The Deputy Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 13:15]

Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The first item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-18355, in the name of Alexander Stewart, on the 100th anniversary of the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund (RAFBF) on reaching its 100th anniversary in 2019; understands that the organisation was formed by Lord Trenchard one year after the formation of the Royal Air Force with King George VI as Patron; acknowledges that it was previously known as the Royal Air Force Welfare Fund due to one of its objectives being the raising of a memorial to airmen who died in the First World War; notes that it is the Royal Air Force's leading welfare charity, providing financial, emotional and practical support to serving and former members of the RAF, regardless of their rank, in addition to their partners and dependants; acknowledges that, under its current Patron, the Queen, the RAFBF was awarded a Royal Charter in 1999, which was updated in 2008 by the addition of a new charitable object permitting the organisation's work towards supporting the wellbeing and morale of serving RAF personnel; understands that, in its first year, welfare expenditure was £919, with the first welfare assistance being a shilling for a night's lodging to give the recipient a chance to seek work; considers that today the charity provides a far broader range of support to more than 55,000 members of the "RAF Family", with a reported expenditure in 2017 of £18.8 million; acknowledges that the RAFBF also engages with many civilian companies, councils and local authorities across the Mid Scotland and Fife region, Scotland and the UK as a whole, and commends the charity and its staff and volunteers for their tireless work for the welfare and wellbeing of others.

13:15

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to have, and am grateful for, the privilege of opening this poignant members' business debate. I pay tribute to those from the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund who have chosen to attend the debate and support us from the public gallery.

Almost exactly a year after King George V authorised the creation of the Royal Air Force, Lord Trenchard, with King George VI as patron, formed the organisation previously known as the Royal Air Force Memorial Fund. One of the RAF Memorial Fund's objectives was the raising of a memorial to airmen who died in the first world war.

This magnificent monument, which was completed in 1923, can be seen today on Victoria Embankment in London.

In the new welfare fund's first year, expenditure was £919, which was a considerable sum of money at the time. The fund's first welfare assistance was a shilling a night for lodgings to give the recipients a chance to seek work. Other examples of early assistance included money to provide a beneficiary with the tools of their trade, and the repairs to a pair of working boots.

Nowadays, the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund is the RAF's leading welfare charity. It provides financial, emotional and practical support to serving and former members of the RAF, regardless of their rank, as well as to their partners and dependants. Her Majesty the Queen is the current patron of the fund, which was awarded a royal charter in 1999. That was updated in 2008 with the addition of a new charitable objective permitting the organisation's work supporting the wellbeing and morale of serving RAF personnel. In Scotland, for example, the fund spent more than £1 million directly supporting 290 people.

The fund provides support ranging from housing to care home top-up fees, as well as mobility adaptations in the home, so that individuals can live more independently. It has also supported thousands of veterans, with grants provided to other organisations such as the Scottish Veterans Residences, the National Gulf Veterans and Families Association, the RAF Widows Association and Reading Force.

For serving personnel in Scotland, last year the RAF Benevolent Fund spent £148,000 supporting families at RAF Lossiemouth through individual grants and station grants. It has supported the station's family day, the refurbishment of the Circle community centre, a new play park, and the station's cinema club. Personnel at Lossiemouth have also benefited from a whole range of the fund's services, which are available across all stations in the United Kingdom.

The high level of assistance given to our Scottish veterans and serving RAF personnel is a small snapshot of the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund's worldwide capability and capacity. Last year, the RAF Benevolent Fund spent more than £20.9 million supporting an astonishing 53,000 members of the RAF family right across the world. The fund also engages with many civilian companies and organisations, including the Church of Scotland, as well as councils and local authorities across my region of Mid Scotland and Fife, all over Scotland and throughout the UK.

Even with this high level of multifaceted work, a great many people could still benefit from the fund if they knew that it was available, and it is

important to identify those people. It is for that reason that the RAF Benevolent Fund has launched a major new campaign in its centenary year. It is urging the country to help it to repay the debt that we owe to the RAF veterans, and their families, who have served and who now require help and assistance. They put on the uniform for our country when we needed them, so it is only right and proper that they know that, in their hour of need, they will be supported and looked after by the fund.

The campaign, which was launched at the end of June this year, is entitled "Join the Search. Change a Life." It calls on us all to reach out to the men and women who served as regulars or reservists, or who did their national service in the RAF. We all know that many people from that generation feel too proud to ask for support, but it is vital that we identify those people and give them the support that they might require. It may be that people simply do not know that the RAF Benevolent Fund is there to support them, so it is imperative that we identify people before it is too late.

Since the start of the campaign, more than 5,700 people have been in touch, of whom 4,300 have asked about specific welfare needs. It is vital that people get welfare support. They might need housing adaptations to help them in their bathroom or kitchen, or to get in and out of the house, and it is important that they get the opportunity to live independently and to develop.

The top three identified needs are financial assistance, or help to understand the support to which they are entitled for their welfare and their opportunity to develop; help to live independently, which is important; and help in the prevention of social isolation and loneliness. Many people are affected by those issues, and we have identified the problems many times in debates in the chamber across many Scottish Government portfolios. Requests for help have come from as far away as Canada and South Africa. Research has shown that at least one in three of us knows someone who has served in the RAF and who might want to seek support.

Much of the truly phenomenal work that the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund is involved in goes unseen. However, I take this opportunity to whole-heartedly congratulate and commend not only the RAF Benevolent Fund as an organisation, but its staff and volunteers. They are the ones who go the extra mile to provide support and who make a difference on the ground in communities and constituencies. That work will ensure that the welfare and wellbeing of the entire RAF family is looked after for the future.

13:22

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in the debate, and I congratulate the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund on reaching its 100th anniversary. I also congratulate Alexander Stewart on securing the debate.

Given the previous work that I have done with veterans, I am very aware of, and greatly appreciate, the work that is done by the RAF Benevolent Fund. It has been instrumental in providing excellent emotional, financial and practical support for serving members and veterans, and for their families. The debate gives us the opportunity to reflect on the past 100 years, on the role that the RAF has played in situations of war and conflict and, more recently, on the RAF's deployment to deal with natural disasters and emergencies.

We should reflect on the bravery, strength and determination that every member of the RAF has shown, and continues to show, in deeply difficult and demanding circumstances. I recall, back in 1982, waiting in San Carlos Bay in the Falklands for the next air raid warning red and for the latest foray from some very brave Argentinian pilots, and I remember the relief that was shown when the RAF came to our defence in very difficult circumstances.

As today's motion notes, one of the first actions of the RAF Benevolent Fund was to do the thing that is so important: provide support to people in difficult circumstances. Support is given not only when people have left the armed forces, but when people are considering whether they want a career in the armed forces. It is right that the fund does that, and that we as a society continue to recognise the personal sacrifices that servicemen and servicewomen continue to make every day.

Perhaps one of the most daring examples of the RAF's courage during the cold war and the Soviet blockade of Berlin was when its planes were part of heroic efforts to provide western-controlled Berlin with supplies. The RAF transferred more than 400,000 tonnes of cargo into the city, flew more than 30 million miles and spent more than 200,000 hours in the sky.

I am very proud that the Scottish Government's commitment to the armed forces and veterans' community is a matter of public record. The appointment of a Scottish veterans commissioner was the first of its kind anywhere in the UK, and Scotland's mental health and related provision for veterans is acknowledged as some of the best in the UK by the charity, Forces in Mind Trust. In addition, the Scottish veterans fund has provided over £1.4 million in grants to more than 150 projects, helping veterans transition to civilian life.

We know that some service members' sense of duty extends well past their time in the forces. As Alexander Stewart rightly said, they often feel that they are undeserving of the benefits and entitlements to which they are due, which means that the benefit uptake is often not at the level that we would want to see. Therefore, the role of the RAF Benevolent Fund in providing quality advice to serving members and veterans about welfare benefits has been crucial in ensuring that they get the support that they are entitled to and deserve.

The benevolent fund's support for and funding of the armed services advice project is of particular note. The project is very strong in Stirling, where it has worked tirelessly with a number of other organisations to improve veterans' access to entitlements.

I, too, enjoyed celebrating the RAF's remarkable success in a debate in this chamber in 2014. I am particularly encouraged to note the benevolent fund's centenary campaign, called "Join the Search. Change a Life." It aims to reach up to 100,000 veterans and families that it estimates currently miss out on support. Such inspiring campaigns can truly make life-changing differences to individuals, and are illustrative of how the fund has positively impacted the lives of so many, for so long.

Alexander Stewart mentioned that one in three of us knows somebody who has served in the RAF. I encourage everyone to make sure that any RAF veterans that they know are aware of the campaign. They will be aware of the RAF Benevolent Fund, because it is such an integral part of the RAF and its significant contribution to the lives of many veterans.

Veterans should also be aware that, as a society, we have a duty to provide for and empower those who have given so much, and the RAF Benevolent Fund's enduring commitment to meeting that over the past 100 years marks it out as a very important organisation for veterans. It is right that we celebrate that.

I extend my personal congratulations to the RAF Benevolent Fund on 100 years of commendable work. I wish it all the best for the next 100 years and I hope that it will continue to help veterans across Scotland and the UK.

13:27

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank my colleague Alexander Stewart for lodging his motion. It is a great privilege to celebrate the upcoming 100th anniversary of the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund in the chamber today, especially as I am a veteran.

The RAF, as the oldest independent air force, has long been a staple of Britain's security and strength. Its servicemen and women, as with other armed forces personnel, show extraordinary bravery and commitment to our country on our behalf. I am sure that all of us today are immensely grateful for their efforts.

It is no surprise that with their duties come pressures and burdens. With frequent moves, long working hours and separation through deployment, the RAF family as a whole—veterans, along with their loved ones—often needs help and support. Indeed, the RAF Benevolent Fund has estimated that as many as 100,000 RAF veterans, alongside their families, are in urgent need of possibly life-changing support. That support—whether emotional, practical or financial—is what the benevolent fund has provided and will continue to provide.

At its heart, the fund's central vision is that no member of the RAF family will ever face adversity alone. Earlier this week, I was delighted to visit RAF Lossiemouth, where I met Typhoon squadron crews, who are our front-line team working 24/7. They were very impressive, and the families who support them do an incredible job.

The RAF Benevolent Fund offers a truly impressive breadth of welfare, which spans generations and covers the old and the young. That includes contributions towards housing and adaptations, youth facilities, care services and respite breaks.

The benevolent fund takes great care to offer, among its many services, a special strand of support to RAF couples. Those couples can face additional challenges to their relationship, which are often tested through long distance. Through the benevolent fund's partnership with the charity Relate, its online course, called building stronger families, offers welcome guidance. It is designed to help couples navigate through common issues before they become detrimental to their relationship. So far, more than 5,600 servicemen and women, along with their families, have used that relationship support service.

In addition, this month sees the beginning of wellbeing and employment workshops for partners of RAF personnel. The workshops, which are organised by mentors who can share insight into RAF life, encourage partners to recognise their skills and strengths and the mental barriers that they feel hold them back.

Children are at the centre of RAF families. It is important to point out that they often face a unique set of difficulties. Life on an RAF base, such as the one that I saw yesterday, can understandably feel isolated, especially for those of a young age. It is certainly not easy for children to be separated

from a parent for the long term while continually starting new friendships. To lessen those challenges, the RAF Benevolent Fund has channelled funds into airplay, which is a youth support programme that is geared for RAF children and is run in connection with the charity Action for Children. The programme encompasses childcare centres, play parks and activities that are based on or around RAF stations, complete with trained youth workers. That work allows for childcare that favours affordability, opening the way for stability and support.

The RAF Benevolent Fund is perhaps seen at its most compassionate in the case of injury to or death of a loved one. In the whirlwind of a situation that people may not have planned for, the RAF Benevolent Fund comes alongside and offers much-needed support, whether it be financial help with funeral costs or purchasing an accessible house, or assisting with further education. The RAF Benevolent Fund has shown its sincerity and commitment to the RAF family. At such times of difficulty, the charity gives valuable time for loved ones to rebuild their lives.

The work of the RAF Benevolent Fund is incredibly far reaching. The charity prizes safeguarding family relationships, encourages employability and aims to prevent feelings of isolation. It strengthens mental and physical wellbeing and boosts morale. I find it hard to imagine that, without the RAF Benevolent Fund, RAF families would be as cared for as they are. I am sure that I am not alone in the chamber in hoping for another 100 years of this inspiring charity.

13:31

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

I congratulate Alexander Stewart on securing this important debate and on his comprehensive and thoughtful speech.

Like most members who are in the chamber, my interest in the debate is personal. My father did his national service with the RAF at Kinloss as a fresh-faced 18-year-old more than 70 years ago. During my last year of school in the Highlands, I thought seriously about joining the RAF, but instead I chose the less hazardous conflict zone that comes with a career in politics. However, during my time in Westminster, which started in 1997, I relished the opportunity to serve with the RAF for two terms as part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I welcomed the setting up of the scheme in the Scottish Parliament earlier in this session, and I hope that members from across the chamber will volunteer to take part in it.

During my involvement with the Westminster scheme, I had direct experience of RAF Kinloss

and Lossiemouth and a memorable week in Basra in Iraq, which I will say more about later. During that time, I flew in a Tornado fast jet, a Nimrod maritime aircraft and a Sea King search and rescue helicopter. On my last day with the RAF, the Sea King that I was involved with had to attend an emergency in Glen Coe. I vividly remember flying a few hundred feet above Loch Ness on the way there and observing at first hand the bravery, expertise and professionalism of the pilots and the winch crew as they saved the life of a young Swiss mountaineer who had fallen and suffered severe facial injuries. My experience was a brief snapshot, but it gave me tremendous admiration for the armed forces and for veterans.

As others, not least Keith Brown, have said, we should remember that people do not stay in the armed forces forever and that our responsibility to people who have served our country does not stop when they leave the service. The covenant that we make with those in the service community does not stop when they rejoin civilian life. That is why we should celebrate and recognise the centenary of the RAF Benevolent Fund.

As we have heard, the fund's vision is that

"No member of the RAF Family will ever face adversity alone."

The fund has analysed the challenges and stress facing servicemen and women, which include frequent station moves, the separation from family, the distance from close relatives, irregular shifts and of course the stress of active service. I saw that at first hand when I spent a week living in the RAF compound at Basra airport in Iraq, when I experienced day-to-day living conditions in a post-war zone. Living in a tent in the heat of a middle east desert where there were still concerns about mortar attacks put the stresses of civilian life into context for me.

The fund has identified the most common problems that are faced by serving staff: the marriage and relationship difficulties, partners' problems finding suitable work, not knowing about service benefits, and anxiety and depression. The imaginative reaction to its survey results includes financing pilot station engagement workers; increasing the employability and wellbeing of RAF employees' partners; funding respite holiday breaks for families; and addressing mental wellbeing through accessing mindfulness apps.

Winston Churchill, who has a strong claim for originating the RAF, made an impassioned appeal on behalf of the RAF Benevolent Fund in September 1951, just a month before he became Prime Minister for the second time. I think that this is the first time that I have quoted Churchill. He said:

“This fund exists solely to help members of the Royal Air Force; men and women in time of need, and their families or dependents when they are in trouble. The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund is part of the conscience of the British nation. A nation without a conscience is a nation without a soul. A nation without a soul is a nation that cannot live.”

We owe a debt of gratitude and honour to the RAF and the role that it plays in the defence of the nation. The RAF Benevolent Fund is a powerful aid to the RAF family when they are in need. Let us never forget its vision: that no member of that family will ever face adversity alone.

13:36

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): I congratulate Alexander Stewart on bringing forward the motion for debate and his eloquent speech, and I thank members for their contributions.

Debates in this chamber on our armed forces and veterans community have traditionally highlighted a cross-party consensus around wanting the best for those who have served or are currently serving, and I am pleased that that has been the case once again, this afternoon.

There is no doubt that veterans and their families are a great asset to our communities, making a valuable contribution to life here in Scotland. Equally, there is no doubt as to the importance of the work that is done here by our veterans charities in supporting the armed forces and veterans community. I have visited and met many of them since becoming Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans 14 months ago, and I am continually impressed with how, every day, they do everything that they can to make a difference to those who require their support.

Today's debate highlights a particularly good example of an organisation that does just that. As we have heard, this year marks the 100th anniversary of the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, which was founded in 1919, one year after the formation of the RAF. The assistance that it provides to the RAF community is commendable, through the likes of welfare breaks, grants and advice on support that is available for those who have care needs—I know that its efforts are more than appreciated by serving and former RAF personnel, and their families. I welcome the focus of Maurice Corry's speech on the fund's work for the families of serving personnel. As colleagues know, the narrative that I have sought to create encompasses the wider families, not just serving personnel or veterans.

I had the pleasure of meeting the fund's area director, Gavin Davey, at the start of August, when we discussed the charity's work for veterans,

which it is keen to promote among members here in Parliament. As we have heard, RAFBF has launched a three-year centenary project to increase the number of people whom it supports from 53,000 in 2018 to more than 100,000 per annum by 2021. Although the television adverts are quite striking—they are voiced, I think, by James Bolam—I believe that all of us, especially MSPs who have a veterans' locus, have a role to play in awareness raising and helping the fund to achieve its ambitious target. That would achieve a widely shared goal of getting greater help to those who need it, but who may not realise the opportunity that exists through the fund.

Last month's meeting proved insightful in a number of ways, but Gavin revealed a particular fact that really stood out to me: some 20 per cent of all the veterans in Scotland are ex-RAF. That highlights Scotland's close connection with the service, which goes back to the first world war. Alexander Stewart asserted that one in three of us knows someone who served in the RAF. Like David Stewart, I am one such person—my grandfather on my father's side served in the RAF during the second world war, and my dad did his national service in the RAF. I had not thought of the connection until Alexander Stewart made that point.

The RAF's history is apparent across all of Scotland, from the Borders to the furthest tip of Shetland at Saxa Vord. There is evidence of that in my constituency, which was home to RAF Tealing, where the local village hall sports a quite remarkable mural. An interesting fact that connects Scotland and the RAF is that the first German air raid on Britain during world war two, which was repelled by the RAF, took place not far from here, on the Firth of Forth, on 16 October 1939. As we have heard, the RAF's presence is still just as evident today. As has been noted, its station in Lossiemouth has attracted very welcome financial support from the RAF Benevolent Fund.

Given our historical links with the service and the number of veterans in Scotland who proudly say that they are ex-RAF, it is welcome that we have had the opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate an organisation whose valuable work has ensured that RAF personnel and their families have been supported in a way that they deserve.

As I have said previously, I, as the veterans minister, and the Scottish Government are absolutely committed to ensuring that life for those who leave the services is as successful as it can be. The Government's view is completely in line with the values of the RAF Benevolent Fund. Since the Scottish veterans fund was founded in 2008, we have contributed to more than 150 projects that help the veterans community, and I am pleased to say that we have committed to

supporting the fund for a further three years, up to 2023. In addition, I recently met local authority veterans champions to discuss how the Scottish Government can bolster the support that they get in their communities to carry out their role and provide the support that is needed for veterans in those areas.

It would be entirely remiss of me not to acknowledge that, in this role, I am building on the very sound foundations that were established by my predecessor, Keith Brown, whose knowledge of and passion for the subject shone through in his speech.

It is our collective duty to ensure that we provide the best support that we can to those people who are in need. We must work in partnership with those who share the common goal of improving the lives of our armed forces community, and we are extremely fortunate that the armed forces and veterans charities that we have in Scotland are among the most highly effective and well-regarded organisations in the sector. Therefore, I am sure that everyone will join me in thanking the RAF Benevolent Fund for its tireless efforts in supporting our armed forces community and wishing it well for the next 100 years and beyond.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. I suspend the meeting until 2 o'clock.

13:42

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Justice and the Law Officers

Cameron House Fire (Investigation)

1. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when the Crown Office will release its findings from the investigation into the fatal fire at Cameron House in December 2017. (S5O-03499)

The Lord Advocate (Rt Hon James Wolffe QC): It is a live investigation, which is continuing under the direction of a senior advocate depute. Like other incidents of its sort, it involves technical issues that require input from relevant experts. A decision as to whether there should be a prosecution can be made only once final reports have been submitted to the Crown by Police Scotland and other regulatory and investigating agencies. On receipt, those reports will be considered fully and carefully by prosecutors. That stage has not yet been reached. The Crown continues to keep the families of the deceased updated.

Jackie Baillie: I am sure that the Lord Advocate will appreciate that it has been almost two years since the fire at Cameron House, which claimed the lives of Simon Midgley and Richard Dyson. The families have been patient, and of course we want to give the Crown sufficient time to investigate, but can the Lord Advocate give us any indication of when the Crown is likely to arrive at a conclusion?

The Lord Advocate: I appreciate the impact that the passage of time in relation to both criminal investigations and death investigations has on those who are involved, particularly bereaved families. Jackie Baillie will appreciate that it is essential that the criminal investigative process be allowed to take its course. A decision will be made just as soon as it is possible to do so.

Football Grounds (Drug Use)

2. **Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support police in tackling drug use at football grounds. (S5O-03500)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government has invested £800 million since 2008 to tackle the problem of alcohol and drug use. As Margaret Mitchell will be aware, our programme for government that was announced last week commits another £20 million over the next two years to support local services,

provide targeted support and raise awareness of the dangers of drug use.

Police Scotland will continue to work with football clubs to investigate any drug misuse at matches, and it is committed to ensuring that people who are involved in drug dealing and distribution are very effectively targeted for arrest and prosecution.

We want Scotland's football grounds to be welcoming places for everybody, including families and children. The Scottish Government is working with the football authorities, clubs and other partners to address some of the negative issues that we have seen in recent months, including reported drug misuse. We fully support clubs in their efforts to deal with any behaviour that is illegal and that contravenes the grounds' regulations. The use of sniffer dogs by Hibs is just one example of the positive action that clubs can take to deter illegal activity and unacceptable conduct.

Although the allocation and prioritisation of resources is obviously a matter for the chief constable, the Scottish Government's funding for policing in 2019-20 has increased by £42.3 million.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I do not want to interfere too much with the cabinet secretary's position, but if we could have slightly shorter answers, we will make greater progress with the questions. I am very hard on members in that regard.

Margaret Mitchell: The cabinet secretary will be aware from recent reports that there is a growing problem of cocaine use, which has been highlighted at grounds such as Hamilton, Easter Road, Pittodrie, Celtic Park and Ibrox. Given that we know that drug use is an aggravating factor and is likely to increase hooliganism and antisocial behaviour at football games, will the cabinet secretary release more details about the talks that he has had with clubs and the effort that is being made to identify drug use and deter fans from using drugs, because—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, please, that is sufficient.

Margaret Mitchell: The evidence of cocaine use is clearly there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your question has been asked, thank you.

Margaret Mitchell: Will the cabinet secretary also provide details of extra, intense sniffer dog use?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Mitchell, I want to get other members in.

Humza Yousaf: I will be as brief as possible, and I am happy to have a conversation with

Margaret Mitchell. I have met a number of the clubs whose grounds she talked about—Aberdeen, Celtic and Hibs. The issue has been raised with me only by Celtic and Hibs, and I know about some of the proactive measures that the two clubs are taking. I continue to have conversations with the clubs and I am more than happy to speak or write to Margaret Mitchell, if she feels that that is appropriate, about how those conversations are going.

I point to a quotation from John McKenzie, the head of what was known as the focus unit in Police Scotland. He said:

"We do not have any analytical evidence that demonstrates the link between football disorder and the misuse of drugs, but Police Scotland works closely with supporters' groups and clubs to tackle any issues".

As I said, I am more than happy to furnish Margaret Mitchell with further details.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Iain Gray. I beg your pardon—I had indicated that Kenneth Gibson could ask a supplementary question. It has to be brief, Mr Gibson.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary confirm that alcohol remains the drug of greatest concern at football matches? What is the cabinet secretary's view on whether alcohol should be available under certain restrictions at Euro 2020 matches?

Humza Yousaf: I am not convinced by the argument that alcohol should be available at football grounds, as things stand. I have had detailed discussions with a number of stakeholders on the unacceptable conduct that we have seen at football matches, and I am not convinced that introducing alcohol into the mix—beyond what is currently available in grounds—is a good idea, even under restricted circumstances.

People Leaving Prison (Throughcare Service)

3. **Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will ensure the restoration of the throughcare service for people leaving prison. (S5O-03501)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): I thank Iain Gray for that important question. The decision by the Scottish Prison Service to temporarily suspend its throughcare support service is an operational matter and, rightly, a decision for SPS to make. As SPS has made clear, the decision has not been taken lightly. It has been taken very reluctantly and only because experienced throughcare officers are required for duties in prison due to the high prison population that we currently have, unfortunately. It should be said that SPS has indicated that the service has been suspended, not stopped.

In the meantime, the prison service will continue with other work to help individuals prepare for their release, such as the work of personal officers, prison link centres and individual case management activity.

The Government funds other throughcare support. We provide substantial funding to the third sector, investing £3.4 million in the shine and new routes programmes, which have built excellent track records. My officials and I are in discussions with the leaders of those third sector organisations and SPS. We will consider how the third sector might be able to come in to temporarily support SPS with the work that has been left due to it making this decision, for understandable and very difficult reasons. I hope to be able to update Iain Gray and other members in the relatively near future on how that work is progressing.

Iain Gray: It is not really good enough to say that it is an operational decision for SPS. The creation of throughcare services was a policy decision that was driven by ministers in the past. I appreciate that our prisons are currently operating at around 5 per cent overcapacity, which is the reason that SPS has given for bringing throughcare officers back into the prisons. However, given the importance of throughcare in reducing reoffending rates, does the cabinet secretary agree that SPS is cutting off its nose to spite its face, and that he should get SPS to change its mind?

Humza Yousaf: I appreciate the question and I do not disagree with Iain Gray's premise that throughcare support workers do an excellent job and that, through their work, they reduce reoffending. I do not disagree with that sentiment. Where I disagree with Iain Gray is on the point that if I was to overturn an operational decision by SPS, he and other Opposition members would be the first to drag me to the chamber to tell me that I was interfering.

I must be careful to give the chief executive of SPS the right operational space. That is not an excuse. I highlighted in my answer that my officials are working with SPS and third sector leaders to develop a proposal whereby the third sector might be able to fill the gap that has been left and provide throughcare support, for example by expanding the new routes and shine programmes. In the not-too-distant future, I will update—with a positive development, I hope—Iain Gray and other members who have questions on this issue.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): As the cabinet secretary acknowledged, throughcare has been suspended as a result of the rising prison population. Instead of expanding this progressive service, which is key to rehabilitation, the cabinet secretary has presided over its suspension. What are the current projections for the prison

population over the next 12 months? Assuming an increase in that population, what realistic prospect is there of throughcare being reinstated in the near future?

Humza Yousaf: As I said, the suspension is temporary. I hope that the presumption against short sentences, which Liam McArthur and his party supported, will deliver a reduction in the number of prisoners. It might be small but, nonetheless, it will be a reduction.

I hope that we will also see a reduction through some other measures that we will bring forward. For example, as the member knows, there will be a revision to the guidance around the home detention curfew. There has been an understanding with the Justice Committee, of which Liam McArthur is a member, that the pendulum around HDC has swung too far in the other direction.

Those are a couple of measures that will help to reduce the prison population. However, frankly speaking, if we want to make a substantial dent in our prison population, this Parliament will have to support the progressive agenda that we are bringing forward.

I am confident that the suspension of throughcare support will be temporary but, as I said in my answer to Iain Gray, even with a temporary suspension, we are keen to work with the third sector and other partners to see how that gap might be filled.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): We all agree that it is vital that, before leaving prison, offenders are helped to get themselves free of illegal substances. However, the most recent figures show that 26 per cent of those leaving prison test positive for illegal drugs, which is up from 17 per cent in 2009. Is the Scottish Government doing any analysis to find out why attempts to keep drugs out of prisons appear to be failing?

Humza Yousaf: I am happy for Liam Kerr to be put in touch with SPS and those who are dealing with that on the ground. He will be aware of the fact that, in the past three to four years, there has been a huge spike in psychoactive substances—namely, spice—entering prisons. The difficulty around psychoactive substances is that they are difficult to detect. Therefore, various solutions are being tested in the prison estate, such as rapid scan machines. That equipment is being piloted, and I am waiting for an evaluation of it to come back from SPS. If there are, for example, capital funding requirements around that, the Government will have to look at that issue closely. If Liam Kerr wants to follow that up with the prison service, I am happy to facilitate those discussions.

Police Scotland (Contact Assessment Model)

4. Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the contact assessment model pilot. (S5O-03502)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): CAM is the new operating model for police call handling that is being introduced by Police Scotland. Utilising a robust approach to the assessment of risk and vulnerability, it will enable Police Scotland to respond more effectively to vulnerability and demand.

Phase 1 implementation of CAM progressed on 12 June 2019 in Lanarkshire and Dumfries and Galloway. Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority indicate that phase 1 implementation is proceeding positively and is delivering the benefits of improved risk assessment and service delivery.

The SPA and Police Scotland intend to proceed with phase 2 implementation from late autumn this year, when the new model will be rolled out in greater Glasgow. The CAM oversight group, which is chaired by the SPA, oversees the model's implementation.

Jenny Gilruth: During recess, I was grateful to have the opportunity to learn more about the CAM pilot, along with my colleague Rona Mackay, at the contact command and control centre in Govan. Given that the CAM pilot had a 99 per cent compliance rate, can the cabinet secretary provide more detail regarding when he expects the model to be rolled out nationally?

Humza Yousaf: Jenny Gilruth will forgive me, but there are operational decisions around when the model should be rolled out nationally. I am delighted that she came to my constituency and Govan and saw the contact assessment model up close. However, although the timing is a matter for Police Scotland, I can confirm that Police Scotland intends to roll CAM out nationally. The timescale is subject to all phases of implementation being successfully completed, in accordance with the relevant assurance processes, as well as monitoring and evaluation of each phase to ensure that there are no unintended consequences.

Jenny Gilruth can contact Police Scotland directly, and it will be able to give her more detail about the phasing. However, I can confirm that there will be a national roll-out of CAM.

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): Given that adequate police resources are important for the successful implementation of the contact assessment model, is the cabinet secretary concerned about the comments of Deputy Chief Constable Will Kerr, who said that the current budget has a potential shortfall in police numbers of 700? If that is the case, the consequence is

severe for resourcing CAM and for adequate police cover in local communities.

Humza Yousaf: I welcome James Kelly to his first justice portfolio question time.

I always take seriously what the police say to me, particularly an officer of DCC Will Kerr's seniority.

We now have more than 1,000 additional officers in comparison with when the Government came to power in 2007, which is in sharp contrast to the picture in England and Wales. We continue to invest in our police and increase police numbers. The agreement with Police Scotland is that numbers can be reduced only if enhanced operational capability is demonstrated. The agreement is overseen by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland, and if it cannot be achieved, there is a conversation to be had with the Government.

As James Kelly suggested, the SPA will, rightly, request additional funds, as it would from any Government. Otherwise, the deficit reduction plan will need to be revised. We will continue to engage positively with Police Scotland. I will not prejudge the spending review later this year, but the important point is that we have more police officers now than when we inherited power more than 12 years ago.

Programme for Government (Equally Safe Strategy)

5. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the Cabinet Secretary for Justice's priorities in the equally safe strategy will be supported by its programme for government. (S5O-03503)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): This year's programme for government clearly sets out the Scottish Government's ongoing commitment to prevent and eradicate gender-based violence. Each action for the year ahead is aligned with one of the four priorities set out in the equally safe strategy, which include actions to ensure that

"Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls".

The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 came into effect this year and we will continue to support the implementation of that landmark legislation by engaging with those who work in housing, social work, health and schools to ensure that professionals have the resources available to them to support a shared understanding of domestic abuse.

Later this year, we will introduce the forensic medical services (victims of sexual offences) bill to promote early and consistent access to healthcare

for victims of sexual assault, and we will support a pilot to make a video record of rape complainers' statements to police to be used as evidence in a trial, to reduce the need for them to recount their ordeal again in court.

Ruth Maguire: The cabinet secretary mentioned the equally safe strategy's priority 4, which is that

"Men desist from all forms of violence against women and girls, and perpetrators of such violence receive robust and effective response".

Will he outline how the Scottish Government intends to tackle human trafficking?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Ruth Maguire for that exceptionally important question. I should have paid credit to her for the work that she has done to promote the equally safe strategy in Parliament.

Any form of human trafficking and exploitation, including sexual exploitation, is completely unacceptable in 21st century Scotland. I have been hugely impressed by the commitment of officials and the stakeholders involved in the work to eradicate human trafficking. There are still huge problems around human trafficking, not just in the United Kingdom but here in Scotland. That is evidenced by the referrals that come into the national referral mechanism.

We know that people are trafficked for a range of reasons, including labour exploitation of male victims, which has increased in recent years. However, as Ruth Maguire said, we have to recognise that the impact of trafficking for sexual exploitation can be particularly devastating. We have a strategy, we are progressing some elements of the legislation and we will continue to support specialist groups such as the trafficking awareness-raising alliance and Migrant Help. If the member wishes a fuller answer on all the actions that we are progressing, I will be happy to write to her.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (Gold Commanders)

6. **Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government in what circumstances Scottish Fire and Rescue Service gold commanders are deployed. (S5O-03504)

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): Operational decisions, including the deployment of gold commanders, are a matter for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Gold commanders are deployed in a broad range of circumstances, such as all level 5 incidents, spate conditions in a region or regions and large-scale, serious and major incidents.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the minister—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would like to call you first, Mr Macdonald, although I know that you are dead keen and want to save time. I call Lewis Macdonald.

Lewis Macdonald: Does the minister accept that current procedures mean that, in the event of such a serious incident at St Fergus, on royal Deeside or in Aberdeen, the gold commander in charge would be deployed no further north than Dundee? If she acknowledges that fact, does she agree that it is time for the centralisation of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to be brought to an end?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister—briefly please.

Ash Denham: It is imperative that we have the right level of leadership for such major and large-scale incidents in place at the right time. The SFRS is constantly reviewing and planning the resource that is required for the delivery of front-line services, which includes succession planning for senior leadership.

Gold command officers have been mobilised approximately 14 times over the past two years. I assure Lewis Macdonald that there has never been a single occasion on which the SFRS has not responded with the required resources, but I will follow up with him in more detail on the specific point that he raised.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that there we must conclude our first set of portfolio questions. I apologise to Maureen Watt that, despite my best efforts, we failed to reach her. We will move on to the second set of questions in a moment, once members on the front benches have changed places.

Government Business and Constitutional Relations

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that questions 1 and 3 will be grouped together. Any member who wishes to ask a supplementary on either of those questions should press their request-to-speak button in the usual way. I will take such supplementaries after I have taken questions and supplementaries from the members whose questions have been grouped.

As usual, all members should try to make their questions short. I beg ministers to do the same with answers. I know that that is difficult, and I understand why, but members should try, please, to let everyone get their questions in. Ministers should be helpful, too.

Citizens Assembly (Recommendations)

1. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will ensure that it

considers and takes action on recommendations made by the citizens assembly of Scotland when it concludes its deliberations in April 2020. (S5O-03507)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): All recommendations made by the citizens assembly of Scotland will be debated in Parliament. Where Parliament agrees with such recommendations, the Scottish Government will set out a plan for implementing the Parliament's decisions, which will be published by the Government within three months of the assembly's recommendations having been received.

David Torrance: Does the cabinet secretary share my observation, that a stark contrast now exists in the United Kingdom between the Scottish Government, which is actively listening to and acting upon the views of its citizens, and the UK Government, which is, in shutting down the UK Parliament, denying the people a voice and preventing those who elected it from exercising their right to hold that Government to account?

Michael Russell: That contrast will be provided in this afternoon's debate in which, I hope, we will discuss the citizens assembly in a constructive and consensual way.

Meanwhile, the judges in the inner house of the Court of Session have now indicated that the prorogation of the Westminster Parliament is illegal, and that in the circumstances what should happen, in order to parallel our positive step, is that it be recalled immediately and the prorogation cancelled.

Citizens Assembly (Impartiality)

3. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to ensure the impartiality of its planned citizens assembly. (S5O-03509)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): I will address that matter this afternoon, in the debate that will follow. In the meantime, I point out that the assembly is led by two independent conveners, one of whom is a third sector leader and the other of whom was a Scottish Labour Member of the European Parliament for 35 years.

The members of the assembly will be selected in a scientific process that broadly represents the Scottish adult population—by which is meant those who are aged 16-plus—and which takes into account a range of factors including geography, age, gender, ethnic group, educational qualifications, limiting long-term health conditions, disability, attitudes to Scottish independence and the UK's membership of the EU, and Scottish

Parliament voting preferences. The contract for the recruitment of members on those bases was awarded following a competitive procurement process.

Liz Smith: When the cabinet secretary introduced the idea of the citizens assembly he said that it would be “transparent”, “inclusive” and “independent”, but his colleague Joanna Cherry MP has said that it would be

“‘the perfect way’ to move Scotland ... towards independence”.

Those two things do not sit together. Which is correct?

Michael Russell: In the Scottish Government, I am responsible for the establishment of the citizens assembly. I have indicated to Liz Smith what the Government's position is on the matter. I know that Ms Smith is addressing me as a member of the Scottish Government, so I hope that she will accept my assurance, as a person who is involved in it, that I am determined to ensure that the assembly is an independent body and that I have taken many steps to do so, more of which I shall outline this afternoon. It will be a totally and fully independent body that will set its own terms, choose how it operates and report in a fully independent way. Liz Smith and I have known each other for many years, so I hope that she will accept my assurances on the matter.

Scottish Government (Freedom of Information Practice and Performance)

2. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made on fully implementing the recommendations in the Scottish Information Commissioner's intervention report on its FOI practice and performance. (S5O-03508)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): The commissioner published on 29 July his annual progress report on the Scottish Government's implementation of the action plan. In it, he outlines the significant progress that has been made across each recommendation, and confirms that he anticipates that the Scottish Government will complete implementation by the end of the current calendar year.

Edward Mountain: For confirmation, is the minister comfortable that the Government will complete the action plan by the end of this year?

Graeme Dey: A great deal of time and effort has gone in not only to improving performance but to embedding change, so the answer is—in short—yes, I am.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I like clear and short answers.

Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill (Timescale)

4. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its anticipated timescale is for the progress of the Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill. (S5O-03510)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): The Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill was introduced to Parliament on 2 September 2019. Its timetable thereafter is a matter for the Parliamentary Bureau.

Alexander Burnett: This Parliament's Finance and Constitution Committee, of which I am a member, is currently dealing with the Referendums (Scotland) Bill and will, likely, have to deal with the franchise and electoral reform bills as well. Has the Scottish Government seriously considered how all three of those bills will be passed at least six months before the next scheduled Scottish Parliament election, thereby taking into account the Gould principle?

Graeme Dey: With the greatest respect to Alexander Burnett, I say that I think that he presumes something in that question. It is for the Parliamentary Bureau to allocate a bill to whatever committee is relevant.

However, I assure him that among the considerations that I, as Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans, always have in introducing legislation are the workload of committees and the need to ensure that they have sufficient time to interrogate bills that are introduced. Sitting next to the member is Edward Mountain. He would, I am sure, concur that when a committee—his, for example—has requested additional time to allow it to carry out its work, I have been receptive to that.

House of Commons (Constitutional Developments)

5. Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the impact on Scotland of constitutional developments in the House of Commons. (S5O-03511)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): No one should underestimate the significance of events at Westminster. With prorogation, the Prime Minister used prerogative power to remove from members of Parliament a decision on how many days the Commons would sit on before 31 October. The prorogation of more than 30 days is significantly longer than any other prorogation in modern times, and the court's decision in Scotland today reflects on that. The Prime Minister took the step pre-emptively, before the Commons had returned from recess, thereby presenting MPs with a fait accompli.

All those factors—the use of executive powers to deny MPs a voice, the discarding of recent commonly accepted practice and the denial of any opportunity to challenge or scrutinise Government action—should give us all grave cause for concern. It is no surprise that those actions of the Prime Minister have galvanised opposition parties in the Commons to come together to prevent a no-deal Brexit—an action with which the Scottish Government completely agrees.

Dr Allan: In a week of astonishing constitutional events, none can top the Court of Session's ruling this morning that the Prime Minister acted unlawfully in proroguing the United Kingdom Parliament. The court said that proroguing

“was motivated by the improper purpose of stymying Parliament”.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that Downing Street sources would now be advised to spend more time preparing for recall of Parliament and less time making outrageous remarks about Scotland's judges and judicial system?

Michael Russell: Yes. I have to say—I do so speculatively, but I think that he is agreeing with me—that Adam Tomkins, for example, has indicated his disagreement with what was said.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): It is outrageous.

Michael Russell: Mr Tomkins uses the word “outrageous”. I—for once—completely agree with him. Sources at number 10 Downing Street suggested that

“The legal activists choose the Scottish courts for a reason”.

That is an outrageous thing to say.

Gavin Barwell—I think, now Lord Barwell—who was Theresa May's chief of staff, said that

“This is a ... unwise road for a party that believes in ... the Union and ... the rule of law to go down”.

Robert Buckland, the UK Secretary of State for Justice, eventually tweeted:

“Our judges are renowned around the world for their excellence and impartiality and I have total confidence in their independence in every case.”

Alasdair Allan is right. The right reaction is to recall Parliament. If I may use a song title from the estimable band Peat & Diesel from his constituency, this may be the way the Tories do it, but it is not the way we do it in Scotland, let alone in the Western Isles.

Intergovernmental Relations

6. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last spoke to the United Kingdom Government

regarding intergovernmental relations. (S50-03512)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): This morning I met Oliver Dowden, HM Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office. The most recent ministerial meeting to take place was the finance ministers' quadrilateral on 29 August. My colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work discussed the governance and terms of reference for that forum with UK and Welsh Government ministers.

The most recent ministerial discussion at which the quadrilateral review of intergovernmental relations was on the agenda was the joint ministerial committee (European Union negotiations) on 28 June. There is a meeting of the JMC(EN) tomorrow, and the new Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union will co-chair that meeting.

Stuart McMillan: Does the cabinet secretary agree that intergovernmental relations with the UK Government are broken, and that the attempts to formalise a respect agenda are continually rebuked by a disrespected UK Government? Clearly the best way to have a respect agenda would be for Scotland to become an independent nation and to formalise relations as equals.

Michael Russell: I cannot disagree with a single word of that. Even in its present confused state, it is important for the UK Government to recognise that procedures and relationships are not simply in its gift. I had occasion to say to the Paymaster General this morning that, although the UK Government might wish to change the way in which the intergovernmental review is discussed by, for example, doing it trilaterally rather than through the JMC(EN), that is a matter for all participants, not just for one of them. He took the point, but it is an important point and it has been emphasised by Mark Drakeford. The JMC process does not belong to the UK Government, and the more it behaves as though it does, the harder it will be to make any progress.

UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill

7. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what advice it has received on the effect that the legal date of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union will have on its continuity bill. (S50-03513)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): As members are aware, the Scottish ministerial code states that ministers must

not ordinarily divulge either the source or the content of legal advice. Legal advice is confidential and it is a long-established convention that legal advice that is provided to the Scottish Government is not published, and that the Government does not disclose the source of advice.

The Scottish Government is determined to respect to the maximum extent possible the choices that Parliament made when passing the continuity bill. The new bill will therefore bring back provisions to ensure that Scots law continues to keep pace with EU law, as we believe that the extent to which devolved law aligns itself with the law of the EU should be a decision for this Parliament to take, not the UK Government. The bill is also intended to maintain the role of environmental principles and effective and proportionate environmental governance after EU exit.

Jeremy Balfour: The Supreme Court ruled that the Scottish National Party's previous bill was largely incompetent. The independent judiciary, which all in the chamber support, decided that the SNP had refused to accept that. When the new bill is introduced, will it meet the criteria set out by the courts?

Michael Russell: I advise the member to read the judgment, as I do not understand where his interpretation comes from. The Supreme Court judgment was very clear that, with one very small exception, the continuity bill was competent for Parliament to pass. Of course, the UK Tory Government, which the member supports, chose to change the law after the Scottish Parliament had voted for the bill in order to stymie this Parliament's intention.

That might have given us a hint of what was to come with prorogation, because Tories of all shapes do not seem to be willing to consider democracy above all. I do not think that the member would want to support that, so perhaps he should read the judgment again and then he might like to correct the record of what he has actually said this afternoon.

European Nationals Resident in Scotland (Status)

8. **Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the status of European Union nationals who are resident in Scotland. (S50-03514)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): Ending free movement will significantly reduce the rights that EU citizens in Scotland currently enjoy. The Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development met former immigration minister Caroline Nokes

multiple times this year to discuss the rights of EU citizens in Scotland and to express concerns about the UK Government's EU settlement scheme. He has also raised concerns in writing with new Home Office ministers, and requested a meeting, and he will continue to press the UK Government to safeguard the rights of EU citizens in Scotland.

Linda Fabiani: I presume that the Scottish Government has noted the number of EU nationals who are being refused settled status. The UK Government has tried to justify its actions by suggesting that granting pre-settled status is not, in fact, a refusal, but that has created great uncertainty and gives people no security. At the next meeting with the UK Government, will the minister raise the issue and denounce this nonsense in the strongest terms? It is causing huge stress to many EU nationals, both in my East Kilbride constituency and across the country. These people have lived here for decades and, up until now, have considered Scotland their home.

Graeme Dey: I associate myself with much of what Linda Fabiani has said. She is right to air the issue. As a constituency MSP, I recognise the matters that she has described.

The stress and emotional toll that have been inflicted on our friends and neighbours who have chosen Scotland as their home does not end when they are fortunate enough to be granted settled status. There have been examples of our friends and neighbours applying for settled status, getting an acknowledgement and then being left in limbo for months.

Some of my constituents have been granted settled status, but the news has been conveyed to them by email—that is it. They are now worried that, if they leave Scotland to go on holiday before 31 October, they might encounter difficulty in gaining re-entry to the country. My constituents are genuinely concerned. They are talking about printing off the email and carrying it with them, and they are asking where they should carry it. The matter is very serious. We should all be alive to the stress that is being created for our friends and neighbours.

I will ensure that Mr Macpherson is aware of Linda Fabiani's point about raising the issue in the strongest possible terms.

Royal Hospital for Children and Young People

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a statement by Jeane Freeman on the Royal hospital for children and young people. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:37

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I am grateful for the opportunity to update Parliament on the Royal hospital for children and young people and the department of clinical neurosciences.

Before I do, I put on record my sincere thanks to all the staff for their forbearance in difficult circumstances. I am genuinely sorry that, despite the considerable work that they put into planning the move to the new hospital, that move cannot yet be realised. I am acutely aware that, for many, the halt created significant personal challenges to important domestic arrangements. This morning, I met the chair and the employee director of NHS Lothian, and I have again written to all staff who are involved, to update them on the current situation, which I am setting out to the chamber.

Let me also record my thanks to the patients and their families for their forbearance and patience. The safest possible care for the children is my overriding priority, and I am sorry for any impact that the current situation has had on them.

Today, I will write to the Auditor General for Scotland, whom I have kept fully informed to date. I assure Parliament that we will, of course, fully cooperate with any further scrutiny that Audit Scotland or the committees of this Parliament might choose to undertake.

Following my decision to halt the opening of the new facilities in July, I commissioned two reports: one from KPMG and the other from NHS National Services Scotland. KPMG was asked to consider issues of governance and to establish the facts that led to the decision to delay the move. NSS was asked to examine the whole site and to advise me on relevant compliance issues. I am publishing both reports today.

The NSS report provides a detailed assessment of key buildings and identifies issues that require to be resolved to ensure safety prior to occupation. Although the report is technical, I will highlight several areas. In addition to the issue that was previously identified in critical care, remedial action is required on the quality of ventilation work in a number of areas, with specific issues

identified in haematology and oncology. Independent testing identified no widespread contamination of the water systems, but NSS has recommended remedial and precautionary actions as well as system-wide disinfection prior to occupation. It has also recommended monitoring of the drainage system and has concluded that elements of plumbing require monitoring and routine disinfection, although that is considered to be low risk.

NHS Lothian has accepted all the recommendations, and its action plan has been published today. Phase 2 of NSS's review is to assess fire, medical gases and electrical safety. Although that work is still in progress, there is no indication that findings in those areas will create a further delay beyond that which I will set out. It is clear that significant work is to be undertaken to ensure that the site is fully compliant. The work that has been done over the past weeks to identify and plan the remediation of all the outstanding issues allows me now to give a clearer indication of a realistic timeline for moving into the new hospital.

The additional work that NSS recommends can be undertaken in parallel to the work to resolve the ventilation issue in critical care. The key consideration in determining when the move to the new facilities can take place is the time that is needed to rectify the critical care ventilation system. That work includes designing, procuring and installing the solution for that system and then rigorously testing and validating it. That work will, I regret to say, take time. In the interests of patient safety, I will not authorise a move to the new site until that work has been completed, tested and found to be fully compliant.

The work will be carried out as quickly as possible, but, to ensure that it is done properly and to give maximum certainty to staff and patients, I have concluded that children's services will remain on their current site until next autumn. The department of clinical neurosciences is unaffected by the issue in critical care. However, the additional work that is required to rectify the other issues at the children's hospital may impact on the DCN clinical pathway. I am, though, mindful of the challenges that are faced in the current DCN location, and I have asked that the work on the children's hospital be phased to allow the DCN to migrate earlier. My current expectation is that the DCN will be able to move next spring.

The KPMG report on governance sets out a clear picture of human error and confusion over interpretation of standards and guidance, as well as missed opportunities to spot and rectify that error, despite clear references to the requirement to adhere to relevant technical guidance. Members can read the report in full. In short, the main

problem stems from a key document—the environmental matrix. The document, which was first produced by NHS Lothian in late 2012, was inconsistent with the guidance but was referred to throughout the project.

I want to make it clear that I hold the principle of accountability in and of our health boards to be vital. This publicly funded project of strategic importance has not been delivered by NHS Lothian in compliance with the standards and guidance. That is unacceptable. There are clear issues about accountability in the board to be considered now, which must be done carefully and with due process. I will advise Parliament of the outcome of that work in due course.

NHS Lothian is at level 3 of our performance escalation framework. However, given the issues with the new hospital and the number and level of issues that need to be rectified, the Scottish Government health and social care management board has escalated NHS Lothian to stage 4 for the project.

That means that, in relation to the project, we have assessed that there are significant risks to delivery, quality, financial performance and safety, as well as that senior-level external support is required. A senior programme director will be appointed, who will report directly to the Scottish Government.

All of this—the delay, the additional work that is needed at the new hospital and the additional work that is needed to ensure that the existing sites can continue to operate well—comes at an additional cost. Given that NHS Lothian had taken possession of the site, the unitary payment of £1.35 million per month must be made even though the facilities are not yet open. However, those payments were already budgeted for and so, strictly speaking, that is not an additional cost. The additional costs arise from the work that is needed to replace the critical care ventilation system, the other remedial work that NSS has identified and work in respect of the continued operation and improvement of the current sites. The costs will continue to be refined and I will keep Parliament updated, but I can advise members that the current estimate of additional costs for the works is £16 million.

As I said, this is a publicly funded project of strategic importance that has not been delivered in compliance with the standards and guidance that are in place for the safety of patients and staff. The delay that we now face will be borne by NHS staff in Lothian and by patients and their families, and the additional cost will be borne by the health portfolio.

NHS boards in Scotland have delivered many major infrastructure projects on time, on budget

and in compliance. However, we cannot have a repetition of the problems that we see today. That would not be right for the public purse and it would not be good enough for patients or staff. Therefore, in line with the programme for government, we will move swiftly to establish a new national body for reducing and effectively managing risks in the healthcare built environment. The new body will have oversight of the design, planning, construction and maintenance of major NHS infrastructure developments, not least in order to ensure effective infection prevention and control and compliance with standards and guidance.

The NSS and KPMG reports are detailed, and I appreciate that members will not have had time to read them fully before this statement. I have therefore arranged to meet Opposition party spokespeople tomorrow, to answer any questions that they have. I have also written to the convener of the Health and Sport Committee, and I am, of course, happy to provide his committee with additional information or to attend the committee to answer questions.

As I have set out, my overriding priority is patient safety, and I know that that priority is shared by members across the chamber. The children and families who depend on these hospital services should receive them in the safest way possible. No one would choose the current situation, but we will resolve it and deliver the safe migration of service to the new Royal hospital for children and young people and department of clinical neurosciences.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in the statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for the questions, after which we must move on to the next item of business. I repeat the usual mantra and ask members to try, once we have had the questions from front-bench members, to keep their questions short.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing an advance copy of her statement.

It takes a pretty cynical Government to try to bury bad news by sneaking out two major reports at the very time that Parliament is asked to hold ministers to account. Today's statement raises more questions than it answers. The cabinet secretary expects us to believe that human error and confusion and the failure of an environmental matrix mean that no Scottish National Party ministers are responsible for the seven years of delay on the project. Reading between the lines of the statement, it looks as though the cabinet secretary intends to hang NHS management out to dry for the problem. The cabinet secretary has been in her job for a year now, and her

predecessor held the position for four years, while all the delays and problems were happening. What responsibility will SNP ministers take for the findings of the reports?

Jeane Freeman: I find all of that deeply disappointing. Let me be clear: I am sneaking nothing out. On 4 July, when I halted the move to the new hospital site, I said that patient safety was my priority. It was my priority then and it remains so now. I also said at that point and subsequently that I would publish the reports as soon as they were available, and I have done that. *[Interruption.]* Please do not to mutter at me from the sidelines, Mr Briggs.

I have offered a meeting with party spokespeople tomorrow precisely because I appreciate that the reports are technical and that members are seeing them only today and will need time to review them. We will meet tomorrow, when I am sure that there will be plenty of opportunities for members to ask further questions.

I do not expect Mr Briggs to believe anything. The KPMG report is clear in what it says, as is the NSS report. I am acting on those reports, and Mr Briggs will know—because he will have made great effort to understand his brief—that responsibility for infrastructure build currently rests with boards, so boards are responsible for the build and compliance. I have said clearly—and the programme for government said this last week—that we now need to move to a situation in which we hold more closely expertise in and responsibility for compliance. We are addressing those issues.

If Mr Briggs would care to listen to what I have said, I think that he would agree that the approach that I took on 4 July and that I have taken ever since—I will, absolutely, take it from now on—is exactly right for patient safety, our NHS staff and the public purse.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement.

This project is a disaster. The statement throws up more questions than answers, so we now need a debate that should be timetabled in Government time. The KPMG report on governance highlights human error, confusion over the application of standards and guidance, and missed opportunities to rectify mistakes, but we still do not have a clear picture of where responsibility lies. Are we to believe that no one is responsible? I think not. Does the cabinet secretary fully agree with the reports? Does she believe that the investigations are adequate? We know from the reports that there was regular and extensive dialogue between NHS Lothian and the Scottish Government. Who

from the Government sat on the project board and where are they now? The role of NHS Lothian has been referenced many times in the statement but, ultimately, the buck stops with the health secretary and this Government. On the principle of accountability, we need a full-blown public inquiry. Does the cabinet secretary agree? Yes or no?

Jeane Freeman: My straightforward answer is the one that I have given before: no, I do not agree. I do not see what difference a public inquiry would make to the work that we have already undertaken. The focus should be on remedying the situation and moving patients and staff safely to the new site. I do not see why we would distract them from all that into a public inquiry, when we have the reports and when I am here to be accountable for what boards are doing.

I said in my statement that there is more work to do with the board, because I firmly believe in the accountability of NHS boards, both in boards and to Government and the wider public. There is more work to do and I will update Parliament on that. Ms Lennon says that she has many questions. I look forward to hearing some of them tomorrow at the meeting—I am sure that she will be there—when we can begin to answer her questions once she has had the opportunity to read the report in full.

The focus must be on two things: how to ensure that that new site, a major facility of strategic importance, is safe and that patients and staff can move there safely. I am absolutely focused on that. In relation to how do we understand why this happened—not just what happened, but why—I have taken account of that in my statement and I have updated Parliament on what we will do in terms of infrastructure projects across the wider NHS, some of which have been delivered recently on time, on budget and in compliance.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members who want to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button.

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): Our children and young people clearly deserve more than the senior managers of NHS Lothian have been delivering. The cabinet secretary announced today the escalation to level 4. Does she agree that the board's senior management should reflect on the current situation, work constructively with any programme manager who is put in place by the Government to deliver the new hospital and get their finger out and get performance back on track?

Jeane Freeman: It is important to be clear that the escalation to level 4 is for this project. The board is already at level 3 in relation to other matters around performance. Of course, Ms Constance is right to say that the board should be

focused on its performance across a range of issues. With the additional support that we have given it, the board is focused on that and is already making progress in those areas.

The point about the escalation to level 4 is that it represents recognition of the importance of this area of work and of the need to provide an external project director, with whom I am confident that the board and senior management will work closely to deliver what we need done.

Ms Constance mentioned the need for reflection. I know from speaking to the chair of the board this morning and from other conversations that the members of the senior team in NHS Lothian are reflecting on how we have got to the present situation. We will continue to have those discussions with them and, as I said in my statement, I will update Parliament on the outcome of that.

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): When I asked you on 27 June whether you felt that it would be safe to open the new sick kids hospital, you responded by saying that you had had all the reassurances that you had tasked NHS Lothian to give you.

My question is simple. What scrutiny did you put in place? What lessons had you learned from the failure of the Queen Elizabeth hospital? What reassurances did you receive that those lessons had been learned? What has happened seems to stem from the tender process.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members must not use the second person. The term “you” is the second person, Ms Ballantyne. I have let it go by, but I want people to remember to say “the member” or whatever instead of using “you”.

Jeane Freeman: I gave the answer that I gave on 27 June precisely because I had had assurances from NHS Lothian that all the compliance issues had been met and that the lessons that at that point had come from the Queen Elizabeth university hospital had been learned. I was advised on 2 July that the ventilation system in critical care was not compliant with national standards and guidance, and I acted on 4 July in that regard. The answer that I gave Ms Ballantyne was based on the information that I had been given by NHS Lothian at that time.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Patient safety was and remains paramount. What steps does NHS Lothian plan to take for the existing sites to ensure that they are as effective and safe as possible for all patients?

Jeane Freeman: We asked NHS Lothian to produce an additional plan on mitigation for the existing site at Sciennes and the department of

clinical neurosciences site at the Western general, and to give us an estimate of the costs. That is contained within the overall estimate. It includes additional expenditure to do with an increase in the maintenance levels.

With regard to the DCN, active work is under way to look at a modular unit. There might be other alternatives that might be more suitable from a clinical point of view, one of which was raised with me this morning. The DCN site is the most critical area. I am very keen that, with the involvement of the clinicians concerned, we identify what can be done to manage the safety of that site until we can move to the new site at the Royal hospital.

As far as Sciennes is concerned, the other area that is being actively considered is the location of out-patients, with a view to increasing the footprint of accident and emergency on the existing Sciennes site.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Further to that point, the Sciennes site is in my constituency. In her statement, the cabinet secretary mentioned the cost of remedial action on the new site, but what is the total cost of keeping the old site open, which was not programmed? Equipment that was due to be replaced will have to be provided, maintenance will have to be carried out on a building that is well past its sell-by date and contracts that were cancelled have had to be renewed. What is the cost of keeping the old site open?

Jeane Freeman: The total estimated cost of maintaining the existing sites, which includes an element of dual running, is between £6 million and £7 million. That includes some of the factors that I have mentioned, such as the interim modular solution, and equipment including neuroradiology equipment, as well as additional investment in the current Sciennes site and in the DCN. As the plan is developed, I am happy to provide the member with the details so that he can be assured that all the issues that he believes need to be taken into account are being taken into account.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary expand on the role of the new national body that is being set up to ensure that all future NHS building projects are protected against problems with water, ventilation and drainage systems?

Jeane Freeman: As I mentioned, we will move swiftly to establish that national body. Its objective is to better manage and reduce the risk in terms of the healthcare built environment. Its final function will, of course, be informed by the independent review of the Queen Elizabeth hospital that is being undertaken. The body will have oversight of the design, planning, construction and

maintenance of major NHS Scotland infrastructure developments. It will hold expertise in those areas, including in microbiology, and, critically, it will have a clear understanding of the interrelationship between the built environment and effective prevention and control. It will also have a compliance function. Work is under way at this point to bring that body together. Again, I will ensure that Parliament is updated as we make progress in that regard.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The cabinet secretary states that the additional cost of this shocking case will be borne by the health portfolio—so, ultimately, by the people of Scotland. Those who support private finance initiatives claim that the risk is always borne by the private sector, and this is yet another case that reveals that to be false. Does the cabinet secretary agree that her Government's non-profit-distributing model, just like the private finance initiative before it, means that it is the public who pick up the cost when things go wrong?

Jeane Freeman: There is nothing in either of the reports that I commissioned to suggest that the funding model holds any responsibility for the situation that we are facing and the need to halt the migration to the new site in the interests of patient safety. What I am keen to do—this is why I said that the additional cost would be paid by the health portfolio overall—is to ensure that front-line patient-facing services are not asked to bear any of that additional cost. Within the overall health portfolio, we will manage that additional cost without an impact on patient services.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I restate my call for a full public inquiry into this matter.

The KPMG report tells us that this disastrous outcome was baked into the hospital build from day 1 because of a flawed reference to an environmental matrix in the tender document. What oversight did the Government have of that tender?

If the most optimistic expectation is that the staff and patients will have to wait another year for the new sick kids hospital to open, what is the worst-case scenario for how long the delay will be?

Jeane Freeman: I will deal with the question about the timeline first. I have consciously ensured that the timeline that I have given Parliament today—autumn for the full children's services and spring for the DCN—can be relied on. If it is possible for the necessary work to be undertaken more quickly, services will move sooner than that. However, that is the timeline that it is right and proper for me to confidently give this Parliament.

Mr Cole-Hamilton is right to say that the KPMG report identifies a flaw in the 2012 environmental

matrix document, which meant that it gave the wrong specification for critical care ventilation. However, the report also points out that subsequent guidance and documents gave the right specification and that mistakes were made and opportunities were missed to spot those and correct matters.

Mr Cole-Hamilton asks about Government oversight. In terms of the current relationship between NHS boards and infrastructure projects, Government oversight is primarily around finance and timelines; it is not in the area of these specifications. That is one of the reasons why we will establish that new national body. In my view, that gap and deficiency needs to be rectified and Government needs to have greater oversight in terms of design and compliance and the interrelationship between the build and effective prevention and control.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the publication of the reports. Will the cabinet secretary join me in acknowledging the contribution of all the staff who, in very difficult circumstances, have continued to provide high-quality clinical services at both the children's hospital and the department of clinical neuroscience?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Ms Harper for that question—I absolutely will acknowledge that contribution. In July, along with the chief medical officer and the chief executive of NHS Scotland, I visited both the Sciennes site and the DCN in the Western general. I had the opportunity to speak to different groups of staff and explain my decision to halt the move, as well as to hear what they believed needed to be done, part of which has informed the work that will go into additional investment into those sites to see them through the coming period.

Despite the undoubted disappointment of the staff in the circumstances—they were ready to move to a site to which they had anticipated moving for some time and they had made their own arrangements to accommodate that—I was struck and impressed by how quickly they were moving to be able to continue to deliver high-quality care professionally. I wrote to them then and I have written to them again today. I also intend to visit those sites again this month to talk through with staff what I have laid out in Parliament and what the reports say, and to answer any questions. I have also offered to meet the partnership forum of NHS Lothian, which—as members know—is made up of the unions and representatives of staff from across the health board.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Three more members wish to ask questions. I want to get you all in, but you must make your questions short.

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): The cabinet secretary confirmed in her statement that the payment of £1.35 million per month will continue and that a further £16 million of additional costs will be incurred. Will she clarify the detail of those additional costs and whether any of them will be recovered for the public purse?

Jeane Freeman: As I said, the additional costs cover the costs of maintaining existing sites—which I outlined for Mr Johnson—project team costs and the costs of the work that needs to be done to remedy the new site; that is, the costs of upgrading the ventilation system in critical care and fixing the ventilation and other matters, which the NSS report identifies, elsewhere on that site. I am happy to provide Gordon Lindhurst with the detail of that if he would find that helpful.

On whether any of it is recoverable, the KPMG report did not express an opinion on the accountability of individuals or organisations. Given that the board holds the various contracts, it will wish to consider that with its legal advisers. We will continue to have discussions with it on that.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary confirm how many procedures and operations have been cancelled as a result of the most recent delays? Will she also release the programme of meetings that she and her officials had with NHS Lothian, the project team and Integrated Health Solutions Lothian—the project and the delays have gone on for years—so that parents and NHS staff can see for themselves the failings in governance that have plagued this vital and much-needed set of hospital facilities?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was not really a short question; however, never mind.

Jeane Freeman: Before I answer that question, it is important to note that the KPMG report confirmed that NHS Lothian's governance processes were exactly as they should have been. I am happy to issue the list that Ms Boyack requested if she sends me a note—I did not write everything down—saying what specifically she wants to look at.

From memory, I think that just under 4,000 patients had to be notified of a change in location for their appointment and procedures. NHS Lothian staff worked remarkably well to ensure that that happened, both by telephone and follow-ups in writing.

My understanding is that no appointments were cancelled, although some might have had to be rearranged. In addition, we put in place a helpline, which remains in place. This month, the number of calls has declined significantly—there were seven in the most recent week—but that helpline will

remain in place until we are sure that it is no longer needed.

Initially, staff were located at the new site in order to ensure that anyone who turned up there would be assisted to get to Sciennes or the DCN quickly for their appointment in those places.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): At the close of her statement, the cabinet secretary was clear about something that it is worth repeating. Will she confirm that, although no one would choose the situation, the Government will resolve it and deliver the safe migration of services, and the children's hospital will open?

Jeane Freeman: I absolutely confirm that. Patient safety first and last is my priority.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank members. We got through all the questions.

Citizens Assembly of Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-18778, in the name of Michael Russell, on the citizens assembly of Scotland.

15:11

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): I am sure that every member of the Scottish Parliament will always listen attentively to what Scotland has to say. All of us as MSPs listen to and act on what we hear in our constituencies and regions, in our surgeries, and at local events. We meet and learn from individuals who bring us their worries, concerns, ideas and even their enthusiasms. All of us as legislators and members, and some of us as ministers, also hear and pay heed to national and international voices from the third sector, unions, business, those who lobby in one way or another for or against change and reform, representative groups, wider civil society, faith groups, our universities and many more organisations. We also hear the voice of Scotland every time a member contributes in a committee or a plenary session in the chamber, carrying his or her concerns, which are informed by listening and thinking. This is Scotland's Parliament, where the representatives of the people of Scotland, elected by a fair system of proportional representation, speak on behalf of their parties and—more important—their electors.

The past few years of Brexit division show that listening is important, but they also show that we must do better. If we are to row back from the current impasse and find a way forward as a nation, we must listen to new voices and in new ways. We must turn down the volume on what divides us and turn up the volume on ways of moving forward together. To do so, we must not just listen; we must pay attention, focus and understand, and then act.

That is what the citizens assembly of Scotland is about. It is a radical act of listening. It is an intervention in a political culture that can seem more concerned with making its own point, no matter the cost, than with listening to others' points of view.

Nobody could deny that I am a robust politician. I was schooled in a robust age of debate, and sometimes it shows. I am as guilty as anyone in the chamber of misusing language. However, the times that we are in call for other voices to be heard and for people to speak out in other ways. Formal politics is not the only way to find solutions; sometimes it may not even be the best way.

The assembly is about doing things in a different way, with a different tone, and developing a different democratic language. International experience shows that such approaches can bring new perspectives and new solutions. However, by definition, such initiatives are not about politicians. This debate marks the moment at which Scotland's citizens assembly becomes an independent entity reaching out to make a new contribution to our country.

The citizens assembly of Scotland now has its remit, and Parliament is being invited to endorse it. It is our first national citizens assembly sponsored by Government but wholly separate from it, and its remit goes to the heart of the question that faces our country. The remit asks the assembly to consider three things:

"what kind of country we are seeking to build, how best we can overcome the challenges Scotland and the world face in the 21st century, including those arising from Brexit, and what further work should be carried out to give us the information we need to make informed choices"

about our future.

Those are broad questions, but deliberately so. The assembly will listen, deliberate and come to conclusions. It is entirely free to define what it thinks are the challenges that are faced by Scotland and the world. Within the framework that is set out in the remit and terms of reference, it will set its own agenda, put in place its own work plan and draw its own conclusions. Could that agenda take it to places that are uncomfortable for the Government? Of course. If I am prepared to accept and acknowledge that, I have to constructively ask those who still stand against the initiative: what are you worried about?

If I am open to the views of the assembly—

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Russell: I will in a moment. If I am open to the views of the assembly, surely they should be, too. Surely they are not afraid to listen.

Mike Rumbles: I am glad that the cabinet secretary took my intervention and that he is not afraid to listen.

One of the problems is that there is a great lack of trust about the Government's motivation for the initiative.

Michael Russell: It is the lack of trust that I am seeking to address today. I will say more about the independence of the citizens assembly now. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that all members, including Graham Simpson, who find this entertaining might trust me a little to find out how it is going to move forward.

We should all want to be challenged by the assembly, as it will say and do things that make each and every one of us think anew and reflect anew.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): On the subjects of trust and thinking anew, does the cabinet secretary agree with the remarks that are attributed to David Martin, one of the co-conveners of the assembly, that it was "a mistake" to introduce into Scotland the idea of a citizens assembly as part of a package of measures seeking independence for the country?

Michael Russell: I have heard David Martin's view on the matter. In retrospect, I can understand why people think that. I have to say, there was no intention—

Mike Rumbles: No intention!

Michael Russell: I am trying to make a point that can be believed or not believed. There was no intention to say that the citizens assembly would be driving forward any agenda other than the one that I have put forward. I understand and respect David Martin's point of view, and if we had our time again, perhaps we would have done it in a different way. That is a fair reflection of where I stand on the matter.

The first important step in achieving a fully independent citizens assembly was the appointment of two entirely independent conveners, whose role is to steward, lead and represent the assembly. David Martin and his distinguished track record as a Labour MEP, speaking for Scotland in Europe, will be familiar to everyone here, and his integrity and expertise when it comes to many of the most pressing issues of the day is unimpeachable. Kate Wimpless has established and led arts organisations in Scotland and Northern Ireland for nearly 30 years. She brings to her new role considerable experience of engaging and inspiring communities and insight into how best to listen to and amplify the voices of the less heard. It is over to them now.

This week, we have published a memorandum of understanding between the Scottish Government and the conveners. The memorandum will, I hope, make real the promises that we have made about the assembly's independence. It provides for a secretariat that is accountable to, and takes its direction from, the conveners. It also provides for a budget and for the assembly's ability to receive, directly and independently, the advice, support and services that it requires.

It is essential that the assembly is run to the highest standards of public administration, that it demonstrates the potential for deliberative democracy, and that it fulfils the ambition of

everyone who is involved to develop something inclusive, accessible, and open minded.

I understand the need for reassurance, and I am happy to meet with any representative of any party who wants to discuss the issue further. I encourage them to meet the conveners and discuss such matters.

Recruitment of the members of the assembly has already begun. People are out there, knocking on doors, working to find a broadly representative cross-section of Scottish society to take part in something very special. For six weekends, between this October and April next year, they will debate, share views and decide on recommendations that could shape the future of their country. The first meeting will be held over the weekend of 26 and 27 October. That is only days before the current date of prospective European Union exit. Things will undoubtedly change before then, and change again before the assembly finally reports in May next year. Almost certainly, there will be a general election in the United Kingdom.

The Government will continue to press for a referendum that would allow the United Kingdom to stay in the EU. We will request the section 30 order that will put this Parliament's ability to hold a referendum on the constitutional future of our country—which it has voted for—beyond challenge.

That uncertain background does not imperil the citizens assembly; rather, it makes it even more essential. With public attention focused on the latest indignity to emerge from Westminster, the assembly will have a calmer, longer-term perspective.

Adam Tomkins: Will Michael Russell take an intervention?

Michael Russell: I really must make progress—I am sorry. I think that I will not be given much extra time by the Presiding Officer.

During a period when the claims of competing camps are likely to increase in their vehemence, the evidence-based and balanced approach of the assembly will help to provide us with facts, considered opinions and a framework for thinking. Wherever we end up in spring next year and whatever we are debating, none of us will, I hope, wish to turn away an informed, representative and balanced contribution to our national debate.

I began by saying that I wanted to know and listen to what Scotland thinks. I will go further: we need to know what Scotland thinks, what kind of country the people of Scotland want to build, what people think are our greatest challenges and what information the people of Scotland want to have if

they and we are to face up to the responsibility of overcoming those challenges.

The Brexit debate has demonstrated the discord that can arise when big constitutional questions are posed in a way that does not include a whole country, that distorts rather than informs and that allows nobody—whatever side of the debate they are on—to have confidence in the terms or implications of the outcome. It has shown what happens when there is only heat in a debate, with no light to shine into our different thoughts, fears and hopes. All parties in this chamber have spoken of the need to improve dialogue, to step back and to consider all points of view more carefully. This assembly provides us with the opportunity to relearn how to do that.

The assembly will report as it sees fit to this Parliament, the Scottish Government and the people of Scotland. Its remit and terms of reference require its report to be laid before Parliament. It expects this Parliament to consider and scrutinise the report, and it requires the Scottish Government to set out, within three months, what it intends to do in respect of the assembly's recommendations. The assembly's report will not replace this Parliament's democratic function of deliberating and deciding. It is one part of Scotland's story, but I hope that it will be a big and significant part.

This Parliament was the beginning of a new sang, to follow on from Seafield's famous remark about 1707 being the

"end of an auld sang."

However, a song can have many voices, and the more that those voices sing in harmony, the better they sound.

This will be Scotland's first national citizens assembly, but not its last. The Green Party is proposing a future assembly on climate change, and this Government will be happy to endorse that and help to make it happen in this session of Parliament. Adding citizens assemblies to our civic and democratic structures is a natural step for this open and inclusive Parliament, and I am sure that the lessons of this first one will help that happen.

When Henry McLeish presented the report of the cross-party steering group in 1998, he set out the key principles to guide the design of this place. They included an ambition that the Parliament should

"embody and reflect the sharing of power between the people of Scotland".

We have done a lot to live up to that ideal, but we can do more.

Twenty years ago, this Parliament met for the first time. Twenty years on, let us resolve to

continue to innovate in the service of those who put us here and to ensure that they are more and more at the heart of what we do.

I move,

That the Parliament supports the use of deliberative democracy in Scotland; welcomes the establishment of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland and the appointment of its independent conveners, Kate Wimpess and David Martin; notes the principles, remit and terms of reference for the Assembly; further notes that the Assembly's report will be laid before the Parliament; commits to the Scottish Government considering the recommendations in that report and to holding a debate to allow the Parliament to respond to those recommendations, and agrees that, within three months of receiving the report, the Scottish Government should publish a plan setting out how those recommendations that have been agreed by the Parliament will be implemented, and should lay that plan before the Parliament.

15:23

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I seem to have upset Mike Russell. He is so upset that he frequently takes to social media to plead with me to talk to him. I know that it is difficult to believe that I could upset such a self-effacing, modest, self-deprecating gentleman and member of this chamber, but I say to Mike Russell that the Liberal Democrats will be happy to talk to him anytime on most issues.

Indeed, we have talked a lot about many issues over many months. We worked together on the EU withdrawal bill and the continuity bill—we did not just work together; we agreed with each other on those. We agreed that the Conservative Government was taking powers that should rightly have been placed here from the very beginning. We talked about the people's vote and, eventually, we persuaded Mike Russell to back the people's vote. We will work together when we agree.

We also support the citizens assembly as a method and means to reach agreement on the way ahead on challenging issues. For example, to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions, people will need to be prepared to make radical changes in their day-to-day lives. However, such changes must have a democratic foundation. A citizens assembly on the climate would help to provide that. We must understand people's different perspectives and the different ways in which that process will affect their lives so that the transition to a carbon-neutral economy can be accomplished as quickly, fairly and legitimately as possible, and that can be done through a citizens assembly. That is the kind of measure that the assembly would be ideally suited for.

That is why we deeply regret that the first opportunity to utilise the tool was when the First Minister announced it earlier this year as part of a statement on the next steps to achieve

independence. That is what Mike Russell is upset about; he complains that we will not take part. We do not support independence, so how could we take part in that kind of initiative?

When we listen to David Martin, can Mike Russell blame us? As Adam Tomkins pointed out, David Martin said that it was "a mistake" to wrap the two things together. He was right; it was deeply flawed and, as a result, the process is flawed.

I am an avid reader of *The National*—that journal that is a record of all things Scottish. Moving on from its campaign earlier this summer of harassment of Scottish strawberry producers who dared to put the union flag on their strawberry punnets, it turned its attention to the citizens assembly. I thought that it was good to give space to the issue. It gave space to Joanna Cherry, who is famous—she was filmed outside the court today—and who speaks for the party on home affairs in the House of Commons. She wrote:

"I have been inundated with queries about how a Citizens Assembly might work and how it could help to achieve independence".

She went on:

"I was delighted when the First Minister embraced my plan as part of the package of measures paving the way for indyref2. The Citizens' Assembly process will lay the foundation for the referendum".

Joanna Cherry went further at the Scottish National Party conference. With some degree of excitement, she told delegates that

"A citizens assembly ... is a concrete way to achieve our goal which is to create a consensus across Scotland and a bigger majority for Yes".

Adam Tomkins: Does Mr Rennie know that, earlier this afternoon, at portfolio question time, Conservative members invited the cabinet secretary, Michael Russell, to distance himself from the remarks of Joanna Cherry, but he declined to take up that invitation?

Willie Rennie: I find that astonishing and difficult to believe.

Michael Russell: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It is important that the words that I used, which will be recorded in the *Official Report*, are quoted. On no occasion did I refuse to distance myself. I made my position clear. As the minister responsible for the matter, I think that what I said should have been quoted properly and not improperly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Both points have been made. The *Official Report* can be checked later today and any member who wishes to do so can take appropriate steps.

Willie Rennie: Joanna Cherry seems to have created a degree of excitement, not just in the courts today, but in this chamber. I am grateful to her for giving us such clarity and honesty that her exposé of the real purpose of the assembly makes it impossible for us to take part in it. We now know that it is a ruse, a scheme and a mechanism to help the SNP members' campaign for independence. *[Interruption.]*

Graeme Dey says that this is about our obsession with independence, but it was the SNP's idea to have the citizens assembly, it was the SNP's idea to wrap it up with independence and it was an SNP member of Parliament who put independence at the heart of it. Do not say that we are obsessed with independence; it is the SNP that is obsessed with independence.

I favour abolishing the House of Lords, changing the unfair first-past-the-post voting system and having a written constitution. If we had had that written constitution, that would have helped us today. I favour having powerful regional and national Assemblies and Parliaments—a federal structure. However, with this half-Machiavellian, half-clever approach, it is impossible to discuss all that in the citizens assembly. It is an SNP approach—a Joanna Cherry-inspired citizens assembly—and that is why we can have nothing to do with it, and no one who wants to keep the United Kingdom together should have anything to do with it. Once we have stopped Brexit, we need to change the UK, but at this moment of national crisis we do not need yet another discussion about independence. For goodness' sake, let us move on. Let us stop Brexit, let us get this country on track and let us reform this country, but the citizens assembly has nothing to do with that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Rennie, will you move your amendment?

Willie Rennie: In all the excitement, I forgot to do that.

I move amendment S5M-18778.1, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“regrets that the first opportunity taken by the Scottish Government is a citizens' assembly announced as a part of a package of measures to achieve Scottish independence, which was welcomed by SNP MPs as part of the route to independence, and notes that Scottish ministers have not agreed to abide by the recommendations of the assembly if it rejects Scottish independence.”

15:30

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): I turn my attention first to the Liberal Democrat amendment, which has just been so movingly moved by Mr Rennie. We on the Conservative benches strongly agree with every word of it—not quite with every word of Mr Rennie's speech, but certainly with the

sentiment behind it. It is a matter of deep regret that the idea of a citizens assembly for Scotland was introduced to the Parliament and to Scottish politics as part of a package of measures that were designed by the First Minister to achieve independence for Scotland. I think that everybody, even Mike Russell, can understand why that has made us all so deeply suspicious of it, just as we have our suspicions about the Referendums (Scotland) Bill, which is another part of the same package. For all those reasons, we will be voting for the Liberal Democrat amendment tonight.

I now turn my attention to the Government motion. The first thing that it says is

“That the Parliament supports the use of deliberative democracy in Scotland”.

I support deliberative democracy in Scotland and I will explain why briefly. I support it because I do not think that party politics gets everything right. I do not think that the Parliament has shown that it is able to get to the bottom of every social or economic problem that faces Scotland today. For all its merits and virtues, the Parliament does not have all the answers, even when we all come together to agree that an issue is of pressing national importance. Climate change might be a good example. If we had started with a citizens assembly on climate change and then moved to other matters, that would have been infinitely preferable to starting with the constitution and the SNP's obsession with independence.

Another example, which I have given before, is that we all agree that Scotland faces a crisis when it comes to drugs deaths. There is cross-party agreement that the issue blights our nation and it shames us all that we have not been able to come together as a Parliament to agree a way forward. It is not just unfortunate but appalling that the issue has become constitutionalised and has become about where reserved powers lie with regard to safe consumption facilities. That is exactly the kind of issue that party politics is failing to address in Scotland and which a citizens assembly could and should be established to address.

If we had started with climate change or drugs deaths, perhaps there would have been much less suspicion about the idea of citizens assemblies and we could have had genuine all-party support for it.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I accept much of what Adam Tomkins has said about drug deaths. I was first involved in difficulties in that area in the early 1960s. Would it be helpful if all those from across the UK who might be able to influence policy and practice on drug deaths were able to sit in one room together, or does it need a citizens assembly to summon such people and bypass the political

system? I am not quite clear about what Adam Tomkins is saying.

Adam Tomkins: The answer to the first part of that question is, yes, it would be helpful. It should happen, in my view, and I know what the consequences of that are.

The next part of the Government motion notes various matters that we are happy to note: the appointment of the conveners, the principles and remit of the citizens assembly and its terms of reference. We note, likewise, that

“the Assembly’s report will be laid before ... Parliament”.

We have no objection to any of those elements of the motion.

The final part of the motion says that the Government will consider the recommendations that emerge from the citizens assembly and that the Parliament will decide on them. Again, that is fine—it broadly gets right the balance between the role of the citizens assembly, the role of the Government in considering its recommendations and the role of the Parliament in deciding on them.

Scottish Conservatives will listen to what the SNP—not just its front-bench members but its back benchers—has to say about the motion before we decide how to vote on its motion this evening. If—as we suspect that it is and will be—the citizens assembly becomes a proxy for independence, full fiscal autonomy, devo max or any other constitutional scheme that is designed to undermine the integrity of the United Kingdom, we will vote against the motion.

There is one very significant omission from the Government’s motion, which is the question of cost. What will it cost to establish, administer and run the citizens assembly? What will we pay members, conveners and the civil servants who will help to service it? In the press, it has been reported that the cost will be half a million pounds.

Michael Russell rose—

Adam Tomkins: I am not sure whether the cabinet secretary can shed any light on that. I will be happy to give way to him if he can.

Michael Russell: Transparency will be a key issue for the citizens assembly. It will be committed to publishing its costs in full. It will do so at the appropriate moment, which will be up to the assembly. I do not think that there will be any doubt about that; the information will be there for everyone to see.

Adam Tomkins: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for that response, although he did not shed any light on the question of cost and simply said that it will be made transparent at some point in the future.

We have already heard what David Martin has said about the coupling of the citizens assembly in Scotland with the idea of independence, and it has been quoted by other members. However, it is not just David Martin who is of that view. Neil Mackay, the former editor of the *Sunday Herald* and a journalist who supports independence, has said:

“The idea was a simple, elegant addition to our democracy—but the SNP has now stomped all over it, politicised it, and, made it look falsely like a propaganda unit. The party’s behaviour is completely counter-productive”.

I quote that not in anger but in sadness. The citizens assembly had the potential to be a really good idea and a useful addition to our parliamentary democracy here in Scotland. However, the SNP has ruined it because it has coupled it with independence, which has made us all very suspicious of what its true motivations are.

15:37

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): In opening the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour, I state our support for the principles of the citizens assembly for Scotland. I also welcome the appointments of both David Martin and Kate Wimpres and have faith that they will be both independent and hard-working co-conveners.

Too often these days, I find myself having to advocate for democracy and reiterating that, although it is flawed, it is still a good thing. More democracy is certainly no bad thing, and the principles of deliberative democracy and their use in Scotland should be welcomed. The use of citizens assemblies is a proven and respected method when it is done properly. They can help services to work together and allow us, as a country, to develop our culture of citizenship. One of their key benefits is that they can allow complex issues to be explored in depth by the people who are directly affected by them. All that is surely a good thing.

I understand the point and the concerns that Willie Rennie has raised in his amendment. I also recognise that the purpose of the assembly has been muddied by at least one SNP MP, who has asserted that its purpose is to move us towards independence. Therefore, I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary would clarify the point again in his closing remarks. I know that he feels that he has done so already, but I ask him to do so again. As I understand it, the Government is committed to introducing the assembly in good faith. If that is indeed the case, Scottish Labour will participate in good faith in return.

Mike Rumbles: This is about motivations. The First Minister has said that we are facing a climate emergency. Liberal Democrats made the point that the citizens assembly would have been the ideal

vehicle for tackling such an emergency. However, independence is not an emergency, however we look at it.

Alex Rowley: I will certainly come on to that point.

I have some experience in deliberative democracy. While I was leader of Fife Council, we held one of the first citizens juries in the country back in March 1997. Our citizens jury was established to examine what public agencies and local communities could do to create employment opportunities in Levenmouth. It was an incredibly positive experience, and at the end the jury made more than 50 recommendations, most of which, I am pleased to say, were implemented.

When we speak to people who have taken part in such juries or assemblies, one of the key messages that comes across is how positive the experience was. Here are some of the views that were given by participants in the recent Irish citizens assembly:

“It ... helped me ... to listen, understand and develop empathy”,

“It got balanced and truthful information out among the people of Ireland”,

and

“It took the debate out of the realm of fearful self-interested calculation”.

We could surely use all of that in our politics in Scotland at present.

I am told that one of the key messages to be learned that came out of the Irish assembly was about how to engage with the press and get it on board at an early stage. It can be too easy for the press to see citizens assemblies in a negative or sceptical light, so I believe that it is key to the success of the Scottish citizens assembly for the press to be fully engaged in the process at all stages. That also brings about much greater transparency.

I am pleased that it has been stated that the citizens assembly for Scotland

“will be independent, transparent and inclusive.”

Those objectives are good and I am sure that they will get widespread support throughout the country.

We are willing to go into this with an open mind, and I hope that the Government is willing to do the same. The questions that are proposed to frame the citizens assembly are:

“What kind of country are we seeking to build? How can we overcome the challenges Scotland faces, including Brexit? How can people be given the detail they need to make informed choices about Scotland’s future?”

Those are surely welcome questions, and Scottish Labour is willing to engage in the discussions.

Our country is undergoing a massive political upheaval, and we need to work together where we can to ensure that a level of stability is returned to the whole of the United Kingdom. The questions that frame the assembly are questions that I would like to be answered, and I believe that, through collaborative working and engaged discussions with the public, we can set out the kind of Scotland that we want to see flourish into the future.

We are not a party that stands for the status quo, so we will engage in the discussions on what kind of country we want to live in and what best meets the needs and aspirations of the Scottish people. I am clear that part of that will involve constitutional, social and economic reform across the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom is far too centralised as a state—indeed, Scotland has become that way as well—and we would like to see reform of how our state operates at an economic, political and constitutional level. We hope that the discussions will take us in that direction.

I finish by saying to the Tories and the Liberals that we cannot stand still and we cannot go backwards. We should support this initiative and let Scotland move forward.

15:43

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I welcome the motion that has been brought to the chamber for debate today. The Greens have long expressed support for deliberative democracy in a range of forms. We have seen at a local level—with participatory budgeting, for example—that it can be done well or done badly, and we need to learn from that experience as we explore the greater use of deliberative democracy. I do not think that that learning is going to be well served by the kind of debate that we have had so far this afternoon.

Deliberative democracy—Adam Tomkins is right about this—does not in any way need to be seen as being in conflict with parliamentary democracy or as undermining the role of elected Governments or Parliaments. It can and should be complementary and enriching in a way that was so chronically missing in the run-up to 2016.

Adam Tomkins and I are on the Finance and Constitution Committee, which has been hearing evidence on the Referendums (Scotland) Bill. Although I am sure that we will not agree on everything about that bill, one of the common themes that we can all recognise from the evidence that we have heard so far is the distinction between a referendum that is held in the full light of a well worked-up and detailed

proposition—either published legislation or something detailed, such as the Scottish Government’s white paper—and what we saw in 2016, which was a referendum that was based on a narrow proposition and something as simplistic as the slogan “take back control”.

We should learn from the Irish experience of using citizens assemblies to inform and enrich the debate about constitutional change in their country. It is a far greater expression of genuinely deep democracy than what we saw in 2016. If the question on EU membership, for example, had been subjected to that kind of detailed deliberation in advance, we would have ended up with a much richer debate and far greater clarity about what should happen as a result.

Further constitutional change is coming. Whether Brexit is implemented—and I hope that it can still be stopped—or is killed off in its tracks and we simply reflect on what has happened to us in the past three years and the level of contempt that has been shown to Scotland’s democracy by the UK Government, further constitutional change is coming. Let us make sure that, when it comes, it is as informed as it can be by that deliberative process.

I understand that some people want to see this as an opportunity to have a proxy debate about independence. Adam Tomkins does not need to be suspicious that the SNP might privately, secretly or covertly support independence. We all know that the SNP supports independence, he knows that I support independence and I know that he does not. I have no fear of a citizens assembly that wants to consider whatever proposals Adam Tomkins makes, even they are to support every dot and comma in the UK Government’s proposals for what should happen after Brexit. I would have no hesitation in seeing a citizens assembly consider those options, and I would not feel threatened by that.

Adam Tomkins: I do not feel threatened, but there is a difference. In Ireland, citizens assemblies had all-party buy-in because they started on issues that all parties agreed needed to be addressed by a citizens assembly. That is not the case in Scotland, and that is what I regret.

Patrick Harvie: Indeed, and I regret that Mr Tomkins’s party is not buying in. He is perfectly capable of buying into the process and seeing that the citizens assembly considers any issues that he thinks it should consider.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie: I will in just a moment.

Similarly, I say to the Liberal Democrats that I do not think that the citizens assembly should rule, for example, that federalism is to be rejected. I do

not think that the Liberal Democrats should be unwilling to see a citizens assembly come forward and to offer it their proposals.

Mike Rumbles: Does Patrick Harvie agree that we can all agree, and have agreed, that we face a climate emergency? I would have thought that, of all people, he would have wanted to see the climate emergency being the first subject to be addressed by the citizens assembly, but we have heard nothing about that from him.

Patrick Harvie: I am sure that Mr Rumbles knows that that was the basis of our amendment—I will come on to that in a moment.

Unlike Mr Rumbles, I think that the current constitutional crisis also constitutes an emergency. From the contempt that has been shown for devolution to what was today deemed to be an illegal proroguing of Parliament, the constitutional crisis should be considered an emergency.

I regret that the only amendment that we will be able to vote on today is the Liberal Democrat one. The Green Party amendment learned from the experience in Ireland, where broad-brush ideas were identified, such as the role of taxation in the transition to a low-carbon economy. It was not about answering the detailed questions but about addressing the broad-brush idea.

The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill gives us the opportunity to use the same deliberative democracy approach in relation to climate change. I am glad that the cabinet secretary said that he supports that and I hope that he will say on the record that he will back an amendment to the bill to mandate that process. Although I am not able to move that amendment today, I propose it and ask that all parties in the chamber back an amendment to the bill, in order to ensure that we move forward in an open, participative and deliberative process in relation to the climate, just as we should—and must—in relation to the constitution.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I ask for speeches of six minutes, please. We are quite tight for time, so any interventions will need to be included within the six minutes.

15:50

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): Today’s motion asks Parliament to endorse the idea that deliberation should be at the heart of our decision making. Now, more than ever, we need our politics to be the product of fair and rationale debate. I am not for one minute suggesting that we strip passion from our politics—we always need to show that we care. However, in these troubled times, we need very much to bring back

into vogue clear and calm heads and good old-fashioned common sense. Citizens assemblies have a contribution to make in that regard, by helping to change aspects of our political culture and discourse.

I am a big fan of the author Zadie Smith, who counsels us that, for progress to survive, it needs to be looked after and “reimagined”. The events of the past few weeks show that we cannot take our democracy for granted. Although, as a life-long nationalist, I have never wanted to be ruled from Westminster—I have always felt somewhat disengaged from it—as a citizen, I have every right to be absolutely outraged by the so-called mother of Parliaments being prorogued for the longest-ever period in recent history, and at ministers of Her Majesty’s Government speculating on television about how they might find ways around legislation. I am sure that, across the political divide, I am not alone in thinking that.

The reality is that there is a big national crisis across the UK. At the end of the day, no one knows what will happen next, although we all like to speculate.

It is important that, in Scotland, we meet in our Parliament to discuss how we can strengthen our democracy. Although we should not view citizens assemblies in isolation—they are not a magic bullet; when you get to my age, you realise that nothing ever is—they could be one part of a broader system of civic participation that underpins a well-developed and functioning democracy. At home and abroad, we see other factors that might challenge or change our democracy as we know it: globalisation, the rise of populism, the increase of corporate power, technological changes, social media as a news outlet and campaign tool, the climate emergency, and poverty and inequality. That range of emergencies cannot necessarily be tackled in isolation from one another, but they can all lead to disengagement and distrust.

In order to protect our democracy, we need to constantly seek better ways to reach out and engage. That is important, because Parliaments are rarely truly representative of the people whom they seek to serve. The prominence of Etonians at Westminster means that it looks and sounds to me increasingly like a period drama from the 1950s. However, we in this Parliament are also not truly representative of the diversity of Scotland—folk from many of our various communities are simply missing. Of course, that needs to be addressed—preferably within the 21st century—but it underlines the point that we need other forums, outwith the parliamentary bubble, to inform our work and decision making.

The question that will be posed to the citizens assembly is entirely open. What kind of country

are we seeking to build? How do we overcome the challenges that we face? We all need to be committed to really listening, thinking and then responding. In that regard, the Government has outlined its respect for this Parliament in its motion.

It is important not to miss the spirit—or the potential—of a citizens assembly, because we can neither prejudice the outcome nor rewrite our response to it. If we set up an independent assembly, we cannot control it. David Martin has certainly demonstrated his independence.

In a democracy, people are entitled to change their minds, but they are also entitled to stick to their guns. The reality is that the question of Scotland’s constitutional future has not evaporated. We can, of course, debate why that is and what we should or should not do about it. There will be a range of views, but whatever a person’s position on Scotland’s constitutional future is, and whatever happens, surely we can all agree that we need to find a path to travel on together on a range of issues.

I end with one of Zadie Smith’s clarion calls. She said:

“Stop worrying about your identity and concern yourself with the people you care about, ideas that matter to you, beliefs you can stand by, tickets you can run on.”

We should all heed those words.

We all have to be wary of making predictions. However, in the times that lie ahead, I think that we will all have to step outside our boxes and our comfort zones.

15:56

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Forgive my scepticism, but this citizens assembly is nothing short of a Trojan horse. At first glance, it is a benign chance to let the public have a say, but it is mired in a hidden agenda.

What we again have is another chance—this time in the form of a citizens assembly—for the SNP to push its independence plan. We have heard today that it is already doomed to fail to represent the people of Scotland, so the SNP has fallen at the first hurdle in terms of transparency and fairness.

I see Mike Russell sitting there with his head in his hands because he is obviously in despair about what his SNP colleagues have said about the citizens assembly. [*Interruption.*] Thank you very kindly.

There are a number of reasons why the citizens assembly is tainted by the SNP’s agenda. Nicola Sturgeon announced the assembly alongside

cross-party constitutional discussions and indyref 2 legislation back in April, as part of her agenda to push independence. Former MEP David Martin has lambasted that as a “mistake”, and has criticised the FM’s decision to include the citizens assembly in developing independence referendum legislation.

SNP MSPs and MPs really let the cat out the bag before the assembly got off the ground. We have heard Joanna Cherry MP calling the newly announced citizens assembly the “perfect way” to independence. That commentary from the SNP has destroyed what could have been simply a democratic and transparent process.

Mike Russell has said that

“Scotland has a fundamental choice to make about its future”

when it comes to citizens assemblies. We have made that choice—we voted no in 2014, and the SNP Government lost its majority in 2016.

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

Rachael Hamilton: I will make a little bit of progress, first.

Moreover, Dr Oliver Escobar—a prominent academic who is involved in the assembly—has expressed his anger at Joanna Cherry. It seems that there is a trend here. In response to Cherry’s claims about the assembly, Dr Escobar, who is involved in organising the assembly, said that he was “kind of fuming” at the statement, believing that it makes the assembly’s work “ten times harder”. Maybe Ms Cherry wishes that she had stayed quiet.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP) rose—

Tom Arthur rose—

Rachael Hamilton: On top of those bloopers, funding the assembly will cost the taxpayer half a million pounds. Many people will rightly be furious about that spending—especially given the direction of travel that has been put on the assembly following SNP politicians’ comments.

Bruce Crawford: Will Rachael Hamilton tell us what role Joanna Cherry has in the Scottish Government?

Rachael Hamilton: I am not sure whether Bruce Crawford’s knows this, but Joanna Cherry is a member of the SNP. She has a role to play—

Michael Russell: Boris Johnson is a member of the Tories.

Rachael Hamilton: Joanna Cherry’s comments have made the public sceptical; she has also caused an issue with transparency and fairness.

We are not against the concept of citizens assemblies, but the questions that are up for debate are not set by the assembly, but by the SNP Government. As we have heard from Mike Russell, the First Minister set out three broad questions. Forgive me for my suspicion, but those questions have nothing to do with fixing the Government’s domestic record and everything to do with the constitution. For example, there is nothing about reducing the deficit in Scotland, about tackling declining national health service performance or about the fact that there are fewer teachers in our schools. I, and many of my colleagues, would like a citizens assembly to discuss how we can better reach a zero-carbon economy and tackle climate change. The list goes on.

I will draw together my points. It might be argued that the real citizens assembly is here in the Scottish Parliament. Across the chamber, there are many people of all political persuasions, from all walks of life, from different backgrounds and professions and with different life experiences. We are elected to represent our constituents and we stand up for them in the chamber every day. However, we should remain open minded about the concept of citizens assemblies.

People are highly suspicious of the SNP’s motives. The SNP wants a citizens assembly because it has been, and always will be, about independence. Simply put, it will be a talking shop for independence and very little else. How can that opinion be turned round? Will the assembly seek people’s views on how the SNP has dismantled local front-line policing, thereby leading to an increase in crime?

Tom Arthur: Will the member take an intervention?

Rachael Hamilton: No, thank you.

Will the assembly seek people’s views on how to reverse the SNP’s failure on school standards? Will it seek people’s views on how rural areas are becoming increasingly isolated in a technologically advancing world?

It is a matter of deep regret that a potentially good idea has been tainted. Citizens assemblies have been effective in other countries. However, it seems that the SNP’s incurable narrowness and its constitutional agenda have destroyed what could have been a new way forward to reflect public opinion.

16:01

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): We have heard interesting contributions from Conservative members. Adam Tomkins said that we in Parliament do not have all

the answers, and I agree with him. However, Rachael Hamilton said that Parliament is the citizens assembly. Those are fundamentally different points of view, so there are obviously differences among views in the Tory party. We in the SNP have robust debates and ways of dealing with different points of view.

I want to start with the character and experience of one of the conveners of the assembly. I know one of them, but not the other. When David Martin was first elected as an MEP in the 1980s, he came to the Bank of Scotland to meet senior executives. I remember sitting round the lunch table—we were hospitable to him—to hear his questions and his responses, and the issues that he was raising with the bank. That was more than 30 years ago. The first thing that David Martin brings to the table is objectivity. The second is experience and the third is honesty in his political opinions—which are not my political opinions, but come from a different tradition.

If we attack the citizens assembly, we attack David Martin and his substantial record of public service, his preparedness to serve the public good and his preparedness to tackle the democratic deficit, or emergency, that undoubtedly exists in these islands. Today's court judgment is just one part of the continuing failure of the UK's democratic systems to solve major problems.

I absolutely support the Green Party proposal, which has been supported by Conservative members, to involve citizens more on the issue of climate change. I progressed the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill in 2009, for which we had unanimous support: I hope that we will get such support again. In an era of post-truth politics, in which climate change is an issue and globalisation is a matter of debate, our citizens must be part of deciding the future.

Who is taking a risk by establishing the citizens assembly? In Parliament, we have a majority in favour of independence. Those who support that objective—which is part of a wider agenda and does not stand on its own—are taking the risk that the citizens assembly, which is independent of Government and is chaired by a lifelong opponent of the political philosophy that I espouse, could come up with a conclusion that will make us desperately uncomfortable.

I believe that we will have convincing evidence and arguments that will lead the assembly to a different place. However, those of us who support Scotland's independence are taking the risk. The fact that the Tories and the Liberal Democrats will not take such risks is very revealing.

We have an opportunity to recalibrate how our democracy works. What is before the assembly lays out the way in which to address issues, but

the assembly is the master of its own destiny. The Liberal Democrat amendment does not disagree with the assembly's remit, so I invite Liberal Democrats to endorse the motion in their concluding remarks. The word "independence" appears nowhere in it.

The UK's general relationship with the devolved nations is changing; in England, there are huge tensions across geography and people's different experiences in different parts. Citizens assemblies can be important in allowing countries to consider how they take themselves forward.

In Ireland, the removal of the eighth amendment to the constitution was a suitable subject for a citizens assembly to contribute to the subsequent referendum debate—and it was very successful. The referendum followed closely the recommendations of the assembly but—more to the point—participants said that it made them consider the impact of a proposal in ways that they never would have done before. It is important to rely on the deep reflections of fellow citizens who come without the baggage that every party politician here inevitably has. That brings honesty and openness to the deliberative process, so I congratulate our friends in Ireland for showing us the way to re-ignite thoughtful dialogue.

It is worth considering Brexit. If, three years ago, we had taken forward the post-2016 referendum deliberations via a citizens assembly, we would not have got ourselves tied up in the cul-de-sac that was created by the Prime Minister in January 2017, which has contributed to the failure of the political system to come to a meaningful conclusion.

This is not really a debate about the proposals from the Government for an assembly; it is about the credibility of David Martin—a man with whom I have often disagreed but whom I continue to respect.

16:07

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

This afternoon's debate gives members an opportunity to consider the citizens assembly in more detail. Although the remit was published in August and the memorandum of understanding was published earlier this week, opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny of the proposal has been limited. This afternoon, we can explore the issues that are involved in establishing a citizens assembly.

When the First Minister announced plans for a citizens assembly, Scottish Labour gave a cautious welcome to the news. It is regrettable that the Scottish Government did not bring the proposal to Parliament at an earlier stage. In Ireland, cross-party consensus was achieved

through parliamentary scrutiny and the ability to consider and amend the remit.

I have previously highlighted concerns regarding the nature of the announcement as part of wider plans to pursue a second independence referendum, which puts at risk faith in the process. Although the memorandum that was published this week emphasised the independence of the assembly, it remains to be seen whether the Government's ambition for another referendum is the intended purpose of the assembly. I have heard the Government's assurances on that point this afternoon, but the inclusion in the remit of a specific role regarding the "options for constitutional reform" does little to dispel those concerns, and there is a job of work for the assembly in considering how it will approach that discussion and what direction it will lead it in. We are at the stage of handing over the process to the assembly, and it must be for the assembly to set its agenda.

Deliberative democracy can be a valuable approach to questions that a society faces about its future. It can be used to engage citizens in what are seemingly intractable problems or questions that have the potential to cause division in communities. Involving the public more directly in the democratic process is something that we, as parliamentarians, should all support.

We have seen examples of citizens assemblies in Poland, Canada, Ireland and Australia providing opportunities for participatory democracy and addressing a range of issues from the reduction of fossil fuel use to the reform of abortion law. As well as providing a forum, a structure and time for members of the public to hear evidence, to challenge what is put to them and to question experts, such assemblies can contribute to wider knowledge and understanding if engagement with the broader population is secured. I attended the sessions that involved representatives from Ireland, at which we heard about their experiences, and I thank the cabinet secretary for arranging them. We can learn a lot from those countries that have already been through the process.

In setting up our assembly, we must provide an opportunity for assembly members, as representatives of the wider population, to determine which areas they want to focus on. Although the remit that was published last month is broad, it is for members of the assembly to decide what they wish to focus on.

I will move on to consider the progress of the work. The recent publication of the remit is a welcome step towards the first meeting in late October, but I note that information on the citizens assembly website indicates that decisions are yet to be made in some areas. Among those are

critical decisions on the best ways to involve the wider public in the process and on how the assembly will operate. For example, it will have to be decided whether there will be any live streaming of content beyond deliberative sessions. Decisions also need to be taken on whether access will be provided for observers and the media. Key to all those considerations is the need to balance the public interest and transparency with the legitimate need to protect the privacy of assembly members.

Recruitment of 100-plus members is under way, but it is far from a straightforward task. I understand that, in Ireland, the percentage of people who agreed to take part was quite small and that it was quite an onerous task. There were also issues with retention as the model in Ireland rolled out. Aside from the need to balance the membership in line with the broader population, the people who take part need to be convinced that providing their time and participating over a number of weeks is a worthwhile task for them and one that will enable them to make a contribution to society.

I have a number of other questions that the cabinet secretary might wish to address. What assurances are being provided to members of the public that their privacy will be safeguarded if they take part in the assembly? Has a decision been made about what information about participants will be made public? In Ireland, the names and broad geographical locations of members were published following the creation of the assembly. Will streamed footage include footage of the assembly members? Some assembly members will have social media accounts. Are steps being taken to ensure that they are not contacted or otherwise targeted via those accounts or other routes in an effort to influence their contributions? We also need to think about the potential for harassment or abuse if participants are identified and about the need to support them more generally throughout the period of meetings and beyond. What pastoral care measures will be put in place to support members through the process?

As other members have recognised, we live in a time in which heightened emotions are too often linked to political and social debate. We need to ensure that the assembly is respectful and that we, as a society, respect the role that its members are carrying out. We also need to consider how to ensure that participants are able to speak openly and freely in the assembly, which could include the expression of views that they might not feel comfortable airing in an open forum. For example, will there be an option for them to submit their views anonymously or through a proxy speaker?

The fact that participants will be recompensed for giving up their weekends is welcome and

should, I hope, provide some incentive for those who might not otherwise consider getting involved. There is a desire to include people who are not in employment. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the arrangement whereby people will receive a gift payment for their participation means that those who are currently receiving benefits will not be affected?

As is evidenced by the outcomes of the citizens assemblies that have taken place around the world, there is much that we can gain from the process. I look forward to the work of the citizens assembly of Scotland. We must recognise that it is working to challenging timescales and that a lot is being asked of the people who agree to take part. The principles of transparency and access must be balanced with appropriate support and the protection of the privacy of members of the public who become involved in the assembly. The assembly has the potential to act as a stimulus for wider public engagement and discussion, and I hope that it can help to raise the level of debate in order to address the challenges that we, as a country, will face in the coming years.

16:15

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I will concentrate my remarks on the impartial nature of the citizens assembly and, in particular, on how the structures that underpin it are designed to deliver that impartiality.

First and most important, the assembly is independent of Government and will set its own agenda within its remit. Leadership will set the tone, and I hope that we can all agree that the conveners are impartial and respected people. That is critical for impartiality, because the conveners will also sign off the final membership profile. I am fortunate in having had some contact with both of the conveners in the course of my parliamentary work. Kate Wimpres has addressed the cross-party group on culture, which I convene, in her role as the director of North Edinburgh Arts, which is a successful community-focused project that uses creative people's skill sets to improve and deepen the engagement of local people in shaping the places in which they live. She brings that expertise to her role as the chair of SURF—Scotland's Regeneration Forum—which also promotes innovation and engagement. That strikes me as an excellent background for a convener of a citizens assembly that is designed to do the same thing for political engagement.

I have also been fortunate enough to engage with co-convener David Martin, who has given evidence to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, which I convene. My earliest memory of David Martin, who is Scotland's longest-serving MEP, comes from back in the

1990s, when *The Herald* gave a lot of space to his promotion of a Europe of the regions, which was then an idea that was very much in its infancy. I have to say that those of us who supported the idea of independence in Europe for Scotland at that time were not too enamoured of David Martin's ideas, as we believed that only a seat at the top table was good enough for Scotland. I say that not to drag up the past but to emphasise that David Martin is and has always been his own man and is not someone who could ever be accused of being told what to do by the SNP. As has been said, David Martin was a Scottish Labour member of the European Parliament for 35 years, and he was formerly the European Parliament's longest-serving vice-president. Of course, he is also the professor of public policy at the University of Glasgow.

We are lucky to have David Martin and Kate Wimpres in these roles, and I hope that no one in this Parliament would ever question their impartiality. In addition to those conveners, an impartial and arm's-length secretariat will be appointed to the assembly. Importantly, it will be located outside Government offices and will be made up of civil servants who will adhere to the civil service code and take their direction from and be accountable to the impartial conveners.

The most important element of the assembly is its members. Again, the focus is on ensuring that they are completely independent. An independent contractor will identify participants and will provide the secretariat with a list of members. I note that the memorandum of understanding says that Scottish ministers will have no involvement with that element of the delivery of the contract. The memorandum of understanding also sets out clearly that the members are in the driving seat of the process. The remit of the assembly says that it will

"decide for itself which challenges it wants to consider, examine the current constitutional arrangements for dealing with those challenges and the options for constitutional reform, and set out what further work is required to provide the information that would allow the people of Scotland to make an informed choice about the future of the country."

All of those impartial people—the members, the conveners and the secretariat—will be assisted in their work by expert groups. Mary Laffoy, the chairperson of the Irish citizens assembly, referenced the role of those expert groups in her Michael Littleton memorial lecture last year. Speaking of the expert groups, she said:

"I truly believe that their involvement in the process and in helping myself and the Secretariat navigate through some of the most complex and challenging issues facing Irish society is one of the most noteworthy features of this process, and that this collaboration with academia, professionals and administrators is something which is of benefit"

to the whole work of the assembly.

If the independence of the conveners, members, secretariat, contractor and expert groups still does not satisfy, there is an additional layer of scrutiny to ensure impartiality, which is the politicians panel. That means that the assembly members, if they choose, can summon all the parties of this Parliament—even those that oppose today's motion.

I will end by quoting a politician: the former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, who wrote favourably about citizens assemblies in *The Guardian* earlier this year. He said that they offer

“a fresh opportunity to invite more people into the decision-making process—and in a more structured and constructive way.”

My message to those who oppose the motion is to heed the words of Gordon Brown, abandon their cynicism and place their faith in the impeccable impartiality of the assembly and its conveners.

16:20

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):

Following on from Joan McAlpine's measured contribution, I have to confess that I am a cynic, in general. I am certainly cynical of all Governments, because they all play the same games. When there is an idea like setting up a citizens assembly, we have to think about what they are up to. In this case, we do not have to look very far. We know what they are up to because it is in the remit, which is all about Scotland's constitutional future.

I genuinely came into the debate with an open mind—[*Interruption.*] No, I did, and in listening to it I have heard things that I did not realise. I now tend to the view that citizens assemblies can be a good thing. I was a councillor for 10 years, and I always felt strongly about involving people. I saw from the way that councils operated that that was not always their view—just as Governments often think that they know best, councils thought that they knew best.

It is a good thing to ask people what they think. What is a shame is the way that this has been done. As has been said, it would have been much better if different subjects had been chosen to start it off. There are serious issues that a citizens assembly should be considering, one of which is climate change. There is also, as Adam Tomkins mentioned, the drugs crisis. Those are serious issues for a citizens assembly to consider.

One misconception is that the citizens assembly is a permanent body—it is not. It will sit for only six meetings, and it is to consider only the constitution. I presume that it will report and then be scrapped, and a new body will be set up if we

want another citizens assembly to discuss another issue.

Michael Russell: That will not necessarily be the case, although it is certainly true that different membership could be found. I indicated in my opening speech that the Government has already accepted a proposal in relation to climate change, and other proposals may come forward. For example, there are difficult social issues that may require that type of approach. What Graham Simpson says might not necessarily be the case, but, as I see that his enthusiasm for citizens assemblies is beginning to get going, I would welcome his ideas for one.

Graham Simpson: Mr Russell knows that I am a measured man and that he can come and speak to me any time that he likes.

I am concerned that there appears to be no budget for this particular citizens assembly. We have heard that it could cost up to £500,000. Mr Russell could not confirm that or tell us what the figure is, which is a matter of concern. At some point, that should come through the Parliament and be budgeted for.

The members of the assembly are being chosen at the moment, and we have heard about the co-conveners. I am afraid that I do not know either of them, so I have no views on either of them. However, I am sure that they will do their very best. In a breezy blog that was signed off “Kate and David”, they said:

“we have been busy getting to know each other”

and

“getting up to speed with the range of work required to deliver the Assembly ... There can be few roles more worthwhile than helping our citizens seek common ground.”

I could not disagree with that.

However, the remit of this particular assembly is set by the Government. Mr Russell touched on the three questions that the assembly will consider: Brexit is mentioned, but education, health and drugs are not mentioned. The remit says that the assembly will

“examine the current constitutional arrangements for dealing with ... challenges and the options for constitutional reform”

and that, within that remit, the assembly will decide its own agenda. However, the remit is set by the Government and the assembly can do nothing outside that. At the moment, the assembly appears to be a bit of a stunt for independence. Although I am not against the idea of a citizens assembly, I regret the way that the citizens assembly of Scotland has been set up.

Willie Rennie asked previously what would happen if the assembly came out against

independence. What would Mike Russell and the Government do? What would their response be to that? We have not had an answer to that question.

Michael Russell: I would be delighted to answer that question. That was covered in my opening speech. All the assembly's recommendations will come to the Parliament, and the Parliament will vote on them. If the Parliament accepts those recommendations, the Government will bring forward its own recommendations—it is bound to do so. It would do that no matter what the recommendations were. That is entirely clear.

Bruce Crawford: Has Graham Simpson changed his mind now?

Graham Simpson: No, I have not, because I am not quite sure that I buy that. If the citizens assembly came out against independence, its opinion would be roundly rejected and we might not have another one.

My time is up, so I will leave it at that.

16:26

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): This week, a Tory Government has shut down the UK Parliament at a critical time, and today its actions have been declared illegal. Even before it shut down Parliament, we were at the height of the greatest constitutional crisis faced by the United Kingdom since Irish independence 100 years ago. The move was both reckless and sinister. The shutdown of democracy was sought by a Prime Minister who is the leader of a party that does not command a majority in the House of Commons and who was installed as Prime Minister without any democratic mandate.

Meanwhile, in Scotland, we are busy finding ways of improving our democracy, and we welcome the first meeting of the new citizens assembly of Scotland, which will be held next month. The key features of the assembly are independence from Government, transparency, inclusion, access, balance, cumulative learning and open-mindedness. All those principles are admirable, but I would like to dwell first on open-mindedness.

The assembly

“will be a forum for open-minded deliberation between participants, ensuring the public see it as a genuine process of enquiry, and to help ensure that it receives an open-minded response from the parliament and government.”

That statement is taken from the assembly's own mission statement. It emphasises the assembly's separate identity and its independence from Parliament and Government.

The concept of a citizens assembly is not a new one. Citizens assemblies have been set up in many other countries—in Ireland, which is close to home, and in Canada's British Columbia, which is on the other side of the world, to name but two. That means that we are looking for best practice in other parts of the world and importing and adapting it to use in our own political system. We are outward looking.

Transparency is another key feature of the assembly. What will that mean in practice? Will it apply to all levels of the assembly? It has been applied to the selection of the assembly's members. A hundred members from across Scotland have been randomly selected to be representative of the adult population in terms of age, gender, educational qualifications, ethnic group, geography and political attitudes. Transparency will apply to the assembly's proceedings, and they will be live streamed so that we can all observe them for ourselves if we wish.

Adam Tomkins: Will the member take an intervention?

David Torrance: No, thank you.

Transparency will be an important element in demonstrating the assembly's independence from the Parliament and the Scottish Government. It is vital to the assembly's credibility that its independence is clear for all to see.

I strongly believe that the critics and cynics will be excited at the prospect of finding reasons to dismiss the assembly's workings and outcomes.

Adam Tomkins: Will the member take an intervention?

David Torrance: No, thank you.

Something that is new, progressive, transparent and independent will not be popular in some quarters.

Adam Tomkins: Will the member take an intervention?

David Torrance: No, thank you.

I was delighted that David Martin, who is a former member of the European Parliament, was appointed as one of the assembly's conveners. I hope that his knowledge of political institutions in the UK, at the EU level and in other EU member states will turn out to be a huge asset to the workings of the assembly. The appointment of someone from outside politics—Kate Wimpres—as the other convener will, I hope, create a balance of approach, expertise and experience between the assembly's two conveners.

The assembly's independence is enshrined in its memorandum of understanding with the Scottish Government, so its conveners and

members will be confident of their freedom to follow their own path within the assembly's remit.

Needless to say, our exercise in widening democracy has not been welcomed by everybody in the chamber. That brings me back to recent events in the UK Parliament. One reason why the UK is currently in such a mess is the choice of one particular party to pursue its own party interest over Brexit, when that interest is directly opposed to the national interest. Had that party chosen an inclusive approach to all Brexit issues and put the national interest first, our current political landscape would be totally different.

Inclusion is one of the key features of our new assembly. All the political parties that are represented in the Parliament will have supporters among the members of the assembly. With that in mind, I urge everyone in the chamber to be forward thinking and embrace the opportunities that are offered by our citizens assembly.

16:30

Willie Rennie: Presiding Officer,

"The idea was a simple, elegant addition to our democracy—but the SNP has now stomped all over it, politicised it, and, made it look falsely like a propaganda unit."

Those are not my words; they are the words of Neil Mackay, who is an independence supporter, and they are the exact words that Adam Tomkins quite rightly quoted. Neil Mackay is an avid supporter of citizens assemblies; he sees the greater good that can come from them and he is embarrassed—in fact, ashamed—that the party that he has supported, which has advanced independence, could treat this precious instrument in such a manner. That is the fundamental problem that we have with the SNP Government's approach.

It is unfortunate that the debate has been personalised. Both Mike Russell and Bruce Crawford have sought to undermine Joanna Cherry and her role in the debate. I feel the need to stand up for her. If they will not stand up for her, I think that it is up to us to do so, because she has brought honesty and integrity to the debate by revealing the true purpose of the citizens assembly, which is to advance independence. [*Interruption.*] They are shouting again, but I will stand up for Joanna Cherry. She has done the country a great service and I think that we owe her a debt of gratitude.

It is ridiculous to suggest that those who criticise the way in which the SNP has gone about the citizens assembly are somehow undermining David Martin. That is an atrocious way to approach the debate. In fact, it shows how weak the case that the SNP has developed is that its

members have sought to claim that somehow I am personally attacking David Martin. That is not the case—

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: No, not just now.

Stewart Stevenson was particularly unpleasant in his approach to the debate when he claimed that I was attacking David Martin. In no way whatsoever were any of us seeking to do so. That is the unfortunate part of the debate: SNP members' argument is so weak that they have sought to personalise the debate. We should have nothing to do with that approach.

Alex Rowley agreed that Joanna Cherry has "muddied" the water, as he put it. However, he seems to have ignored the evidence that she provided, which is that the SNP is seeking to use the citizens assembly just to advance the independence debate. I hope that he comes to see that that is the case.

We have heard on numerous occasions—it is a trick that the SNP tries every time—the SNP ask what is wrong with having a debate, another discussion or a national conversation across the country. We have the taxpayer paying for SNP ministers to book halls in every part of the country so that we can have another debate about independence. The SNP's first attempt at engineering the debate happened right back when it gained power in 2007, and we have had endless debates ever since. We had the three-year-long independence debate, which the SNP lost; we had the white paper and the debate about the legislation for the referendum; and subsequently, we had Andrew Wilson's report into the economic impact, the future of Scotland and independence. We were encouraged to participate in all those debates.

It is endless. The SNP could forgive us for being a wee bit bored and for wanting to move on and talk about something else. Perhaps we could talk about the Brexit crisis, for instance—maybe we could deal with that problem.

Stewart Stevenson: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: No.

It is regrettable that the principle—deeply held by many—that a citizens assembly can do great things has been undermined today, because a citizens assembly for Scotland could do great things. Let us look at some of the proposals that have come forward today alone.

There has been talk of having a citizens assembly on drug deaths. That would be a particularly valid debate to have. We could bring

together people from all parts of society to have that discussion.

I proposed an assembly on climate change, so that we could try to get people to understand the need for personal behavioural change to meet our challenges with the climate.

Perhaps there could be an assembly on closing the attainment gap. That might be a useful discussion to have. We could involve parents, pupils and people right across society so that we could close the attainment gap. The SNP Government has failed to do that so far—perhaps it is time for somebody else to come up with some ideas. There are also massive challenges with social care—let us get people involved in that discussion.

Those things should all come way before yet another boring discussion about independence, which is all that the SNP seems to be interested in.

Stewart Stevenson: Will Willie Rennie take an intervention now?

Willie Rennie: No. I am in my final few seconds.

The citizens assembly was announced by the First Minister as part of a package of measures to achieve independence—that is without doubt. The package is the assembly, the cross-party talks and the unstoppable legislation on another referendum. Mike Russell managed to keep a straight face when he said that the assembly would be free from vested interests, even though it exists only as part of the independence package.

The cabinet secretary set up the assembly, recruited the conveners, allowed them to make speeches on the assembly, designed the remit and then said that it was up to the assembly to decide for itself what it wants to do. No, it is not up to the assembly. The First Minister has never said, “Full steam ahead for independence, subject to the conclusions of the citizens assembly.” Those words have never passed her lips, because the truth is that the SNP is using the assembly as another wheeze to try to get independence. However, we will not be fooled.

16:37

Alex Rowley: The debate has been interesting, but in many ways disappointing. It perhaps reflects where we are in Scotland on the issue, because anybody who has lived in Scotland during the past five years cannot deny that the constitution question has overarched all policy areas in Scotland. We need to find a way forward and to ask questions about the best way to do that.

Labour is taking the Government at face value and is engaging with the process. We will engage in discussions on the way forward. This citizens assembly is the first national assembly to be created in the United Kingdom, and the first to be properly resourced and organised in such a way that it can be effective. The eyes of people internationally will be on the assembly, so if it turns out that—as Graham Simpson put it—it is a bit of a stunt for independence, that will be exposed.

However, the principle that has been set out is right. As other members have said, if we get this right, we can use such a mechanism in the future to look at difficult issues in Scotland—not just drug deaths but drug policy, which is outdated and failing. There are other issues to consider, so we need to look at the way in which we move forward and be positive.

On the concerns of Willie Rennie and Adam Tomkins about independence, the greatest threat to the future of the United Kingdom does not lie in the Scottish citizens assembly but in the Conservative and Brexit party and Boris Johnson. That is a fact. Even Boris’s brother, Jo Johnson, resigned from his Government saying that he had to choose between family loyalty and what was best and right for the country. There is no way that a citizens assembly is a greater threat than that. If members are really interested in the future of the United Kingdom, they need to start to stand up to Boris Johnson and tell him that what he is doing is not on and is damaging the United Kingdom.

Mike Rumbles: Alex Rowley seems to have bought the SNP Government’s motivation for that, but he does not accept that that motivation could be independence. If he has bought that, I have a bridge to sell him.

Alex Rowley: Stewart Stevenson made a good point. He talked about having taken the risk and the confidence that he had in his argument. If members want to argue about the future of Scotland, I am confident in the argument that the economic case for independence does not stack up in any shape or form. I am confident that we can take forward the arguments and win them, just as Stewart Stevenson is confident in his arguments.

However, do not confuse that with arguing for the status quo, because every nation and region in the United Kingdom is being let down by Westminster—by the Tory and Brexit party, which has become obsessed with Brexit.

I am confident in my arguments. If Mike Rumbles is confident in his, perhaps he will come to the assembly and work with the other parties to find the best way forward for Scotland. The way forward has to be to remain and reform in Europe and to remain and reform in the United Kingdom.

Stewart Stevenson: Does the member remember that, in 2011, the Liberal Democrats caused us to have a referendum on proportional voting in elections? Out of 440 voting areas, only 10 voted in favour but, in July this year, Vince Cable said that we should have a citizens assembly to discuss it. The issue was not closed by that referendum; why should any other issue be closed?

Alex Rowley: I also remember that, in 2010, Willie Rennie's Liberal Democrats did a deal with the Tories. As a result of that, we got welfare reform that has created widespread poverty across Scotland and the United Kingdom. If we want to know why people voted for Brexit, we must look at the levels of poverty that were created by a Liberal-Tory Government in Westminster. The bedroom tax is a tax that had never been seen before.

Willie Rennie might be trying to appeal to a certain group of people in Scotland, but the Liberal Democrats and the Tories created that situation and the unacceptable levels of poverty.

A number of members have mentioned the co-conveners. I do not know Kate Wimpess, but she has an impressive CV. I know David Martin well. He has offered to meet all parties to have a discussion around those issues. In the spirit of at least trying to find the best way forward for Scotland, I urge members to meet the co-conveners, share their concerns with them and hear what they have to say.

16:43

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

When the cabinet secretary announced the creation of the citizens assembly in June, my colleague Adam Tomkins said that there is a role for citizens assemblies, particularly when it comes to aspects of

"public policy that parliamentary democracy has failed or is struggling to address and resolve".—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2019; c 31.]

The cabinet secretary said that

"democracy does not stand still and we have to keep innovating in order to keep moving".—[*Official Report*, 26 June 2019; c 27.]

I could not agree more with those valid and substantial points.

I concur with many of the sentiments expressed by others from across the chamber. Members have spoken about examples of citizens assemblies elsewhere, most notably in Ireland, which have been drivers of significant social change.

The Scottish Conservatives are by no means against the premise and principle behind the creation of such institutions and the role that they might have in using a unique model of public discourse to drive reform.

We fully support local democracy and devolving power from this Parliament to more local democratic bodies.

I do not personally know the co-conveners, David Martin and Kate Wimpess, but they seem to enjoy respect across the political spectrum, and I am sure that they will work diligently alongside a committed group of representatives from across Scottish society.

It is not the principle that we object to but the process. It has been abundantly clear from the outset that the manner in which the Government has proceeded in establishing the Scottish citizens assembly has been short-sighted, to say the least. Despite warm words from the cabinet secretary, there is a justified suspicion that the assembly has fundamentally been designed to do one thing—further the independence agenda. Given that Joanna Cherry called it the "perfect way" to advance independence, it was always going to be a tough sell to the Scottish public as a fair and balanced forum to lead a conversation about Scotland's future.

Earlier in the year, when he announced the creation of the assembly, the cabinet secretary preached about consensus among political parties when it came to citizens assemblies, but he also mentioned Brexit nine times and independence twice in that statement, as well as being critical of the UK Government. There was a hint of that again today.

The assembly was announced alongside the referendum legislation and the cross-party talks, and therein lies the problem. Even at its birth, it has proved to be a partisan endeavour. David Martin was right when he called it a mistake to throw the three things together; it created "suspicion", to use his word. No one minds the rough and tumble of party politics in this place—of course they do not—but, in our view, it was really unwise to launch the citizens assembly project in such a context. One cannot preach consensus on the one hand, while pushing a deeply divisive policy on the other.

I will move on to discuss the remit of the assembly, which the Government has published. My disappointment centres not on what is included but on what is omitted. There is no mention of how we should improve Scotland's schools, reform our NHS for the long term or invest in infrastructure. Other MSPs raised a number of issues that could have been addressed by the citizens assembly of Scotland. Willie Rennie raised the climate

emergency, but what about economic regeneration? We know, for example, that the UK economy is expected to grow faster than the Scottish economy over the next four years. It would have been intriguing to hear views about that. What about the fact that the total number of teachers in our classrooms is falling?

Serious day-to-day issues are crying out for innovative solutions, which the citizens assembly could have addressed. How much more invigorating would it have been if the Scottish Government had tasked the assembly with focusing on bread-and-butter, everyday issues and not the constitution? Deliberative democracy is suited to those kinds of matters, rather than to polarising constitutional issues. Also, as Graham Simpson pointed out, the fact that the assembly will meet over no more than six weekends begs the question of what it can realistically offer Parliament in terms of a vision for the future.

Tom Arthur: I note that the first aspect of the remit is to establish what kind of country we are seeking to build, which is very broad. Can Donald Cameron suggest how that remit precludes discussion of any of the domestic or bread-and-butter issues to which he referred?

Donald Cameron: I do not accept that the remit is broad; I think that it has a narrow focus. There are many people both inside and, more importantly, outside the chamber who need convincing that it will be more than just a talking shop for constitutional change.

In summing up, I turn to a few of the remarks made by colleagues across the chamber during the debate. Adam Tomkins and Graham Simpson were right to say that we should perhaps have started with different topics. Angela Constance was right, in my view, to say that this Parliament is lacking in diversity and that there are voices in Scotland that we do not hear, which need to be heard. I hope that if the citizens assembly achieves one thing it will be to reach those people and I fully accept what Angela Constance said.

To conclude, it is our view that the citizens assembly can be a worthwhile exercise, but we remain concerned that it has been tainted from the beginning. I hope that I am proved wrong and that the assembly eventually tackles some of the day-to-day issues that I have mentioned. We can all agree that it is time to remove some of the poison and vitriol that infects our politics. A citizens assembly would have been the ideal way to do that, but when a senior SNP figure calls such a body the “perfect way” to advance the independence agenda, how can we approach it consensually and, more importantly, how can it have a transformational impact on public policy?

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I call Michael Russell to conclude the debate.

16:49

Michael Russell: Before I come to the substance of the debate, I want to correct a misapprehension that appears to have arisen. A number of members have referenced the citizens assembly in Ireland. However, that assembly, which dealt with abortion among other issues, was the second deliberative democracy innovation in that country. The first was the constitutional convention, which took a number of years to set up. In the end, it was passed by the Dáil without dissent, but it took a long time to get to that position. Therefore the argument that there was some outpouring of agreement at the very beginning of that process is simply not true.

Nor is it true that the first of those bodies looked solely at social issues. In fact, if members care to look up the remit of the first constitutional convention—that is, the citizens assembly—they will discover that number one was about reducing the presidential term of office, number two was about reducing the voting age, number three was about review of the Dáil’s electoral system and number four was about giving residents outside the state the right to vote. In Ireland, the first steps in such matters were constitutional issues that were not able to be resolved by the Dáil itself. Therefore far from departing from what we are told is the Irish model, we in Scotland are actually being remarkably consistent with it.

That should be borne in mind particularly when we consider future assemblies. I take at face value the views of members who have said that they want to have such assemblies. However, only one party has come up with a proposal for those, to which I will come in a moment. If there are to be future assemblies, we might also learn from the Irish model that we need to move on. The abortion issue was also a constitutional one, because it addressed the constitutional ban on the practice.

I will come to Claire Baker’s point in a moment, but first I say that members who talk about social policy and using the citizens assembly in a certain way need to focus on that model. We brought over from Ireland people with experience of the approach there, so that we could have such a conversation. Some of the members here who have been most critical of the idea did not take part in those discussions. However, they should look at the actual history of the matter and not make it up.

Members might take one of two positions on this afternoon’s debate. One is, frankly, a pessimistic view from which we might come away deeply depressed about how closed some people’s minds

are and how deep are the divisions that are impervious to argument or reason. The other view is more optimistic and says that the debate has proved that, more than ever, we need not just a citizens assembly but this one. We need to find a way to debate major issues without the type of rhetoric and division that we have heard this afternoon.

Let me go back to the issues that are within the assembly's remit, as they are the ones that we are trying to look at. What kind of country are we seeking? How can we best overcome the challenges that Scotland and the world face in the 21st century, including those arising from Brexit? What further work should be done to give us the information that we need to make the informed choices?

It seems to me that if members were perhaps to step back and read the *Official Report* of this debate tomorrow or the next day, they might come to the conclusion that the citizens assembly is precisely the means by which the divided membership of this chamber can be brought together. I am on the side of optimism—

Graham Simpson: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Russell: Of course.

Graham Simpson: The problem with all that is that the citizens assembly's remit and terms of reference document is headed:

"The citizens' assembly of Scotland—Scotland's constitutional future",

so it is not being set up to deal with wider issues such as education, health or anything else; it is about the constitution.

Michael Russell: I have been fair to Mr Simpson and I am happy to do that again. Because I know that he is a man of open mind—he was clearly edging towards support for the assembly—I suggest that he goes and talks to its co-conveners. If he talks to the people who are involved in the assembly, he will see that they will interpret the remit in what I understand to be a very wide way indeed, which they will have the opportunity to do. Indeed, the remit, which has been developed and discussed with the co-conveners—I stress that that is the case—gives exactly that flexibility.

Here we have an opportunity to move forward with something new and innovative. The debate has told us that some members' minds are not entirely closed—such as Mr Simpson's, which is at least partially open to persuasion. We need to be able to persuade them that such an opportunity is here, and I want to do so.

Alex Rowley asked me to address some key issues in making my closing remarks, which I will now do.

The citizens assembly will be independent. I have gone through in great detail why that is so, but I confirm it yet again. It has a published and clear remit that it is perfectly possible—indeed, it is desirable—for those who are running the assembly to interpret. It will be fully transparent—I will come on to some of the issues that Claire Baker raised in a moment—and it will set its own work plan and agenda. There is a commitment for it to report to the people of Scotland, this Parliament and the Government and for the recommendations to be taken forward, and it is established as an act of good faith.

I am grateful for the position that Mr Rowley has taken, because I want him, at the conclusion of this, to be able to say that the good faith that we showed was indeed good faith. Mr Rowley and I have worked opposite each other for many years and I do not think that we have ever deliberately told each other a falsehood. I want to make sure that that is provable and proved by the actions of the assembly, but it is up to the assembly to do so.

If I can prove that to Mr Rowley and his party, I hope that, in time, I might prove it to members on the Conservative benches—some more than others, I have to say, but I heard a willingness from the Conservative benches to be persuaded that a citizens assembly is a good thing, and perhaps that this citizens assembly might surprise them. I think that Mr Cameron made that point towards the end of his speech. He would like to be persuaded. Well, I would like him to be persuaded, and I therefore want to make sure that the fully independent citizens assembly is able to persuade him.

I encourage members to go and speak to the conveners. They are open to that and they want members to do so. In that regard, the range of sensible and important points that Claire Baker raised are important. The issues included whether payments will be taxed or treated as difficult in relation to benefits; social media; and press. It is really important that those issues are discussed by the co-conveners with the member and others, as they are the people who will answer. There are good examples to follow from Ireland. For example, those who were part of the citizens assembly there could not use social media while a topic was under discussion. They were free to do so afterwards, but not while the topic was under discussion. All the deliberative sessions were filmed, but not the private sessions of discussion. However, those who did not wish to be filmed were not put in the position of being filmed.

There is lots of good practice, but it is important that that discussion takes place with the

conveners, and every party has that opportunity. It was mentioned that there will be an invitation, as I understand it, for parties to nominate somebody for a political panel. That panel will be available to the assembly—but at its wish, not at the politicians' wish—for its members to say what their positions are on a range of issues, and it is important that those views are heard. It is important that the views of the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats and others are heard in the politicians panel and are available to the citizens assembly.

Patrick Harvie: The minister said that he would return to the proposal from the Greens. In the last couple of minutes of his speech, will he put on the record whether the Scottish Government agrees that that should be mandated by an amendment to the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, if for no other reason than to establish that it was the decision of the whole Parliament and not just of the Government?

Michael Russell: I was just coming to that point, but I am happy to do so. I fully agree with that. I understand that discussions on that matter have commenced this afternoon and will come to a conclusion. That is a commitment that we have entered into, and we are pleased to do so. There can be discussions about a future citizens assembly, and we are open to those discussions.

Finally, with one minute to go, I want to thank Mr Rennie for his commendation of Joanna Cherry. It was touching, to say the least. I think that, on this day of all days, the entire Parliament should commend her. Looking at the result in the inner house today, we should be glad that she is a person of such integrity and forthrightness. She says what she thinks, but the proposals that come to this chamber are my proposals.

Mike Rumbles: Nothing to do with her.

Michael Russell: I have been very restrained with the Liberal Democrats, and as I have only a minute and 12 seconds left, I want to keep that restraint in hand no matter the encouragement not to do so.

As far as this Parliament is concerned, there is an entirely clear set of proposals and an entirely clear remit. Two independent conveners have been appointed and the process of establishing the membership is under way. I have reiterated all the points about the independence of the citizens assembly in the debate this afternoon.

It is really important that we now allow our votes to follow our voices. If those members who have spoken this afternoon believe that the citizens assembly is important and useful, if they take the Irish examples, which were established in both cases to look at issues within the Irish constitution, and if they believe that we require a different way

of doing politics and a different type of debate, they should certainly support the motion. If, however, they do not believe that, I cannot imagine why they are pretending to support it but failing to support it when we put our money where our mouth is.

I ask members to please support the citizens assembly and let it work independently of us so that it speaks the truth to us, which it will do.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-18797, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 17 September 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Investing in our Credit Unions
followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Impact of the UK Government's Family Migration Policy on Scotland
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 18 September 2019

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

Thursday 19 September 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 Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee Debate: Bill Proposal on Pre-release Access to Statistics
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 24 September 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Finance and Constitution Committee Debate: Common Frameworks
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 September 2019

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Security and Older People; Finance, Economy and Fair Work
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 September 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: Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Scottish National Investment Bank Bill
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 16 September 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 Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-18798, on the designation of a lead committee.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Children (Scotland) Bill.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-18778.1, in the name of Willie Rennie, which seeks to amend motion S5M-18778, in the name of Michael Russell, on the citizens assembly of Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 34, Against 86, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-18778, in the name of Michael Russell, on the citizens assembly of Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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 86, Against 5, Abstentions 29.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament supports the use of deliberative democracy in Scotland; welcomes the establishment of the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland and the appointment of its independent conveners, Kate Wimpless and David Martin; notes the principles, remit and terms of reference for the Assembly; further notes that the Assembly's report will be laid before the Parliament; commits to the Scottish Government considering the recommendations in that report and to holding a debate to allow the Parliament to respond to those recommendations, and agrees that, within three months of receiving the report, the Scottish Government should publish a plan setting out how those recommendations that have been agreed by the Parliament will be implemented, and should lay that plan before the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-18798, in the name of Graeme Dey, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Children (Scotland) Bill.

Scottish Food and Drink Fortnight

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-18571, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on the 10th anniversary of Scottish food and drink fortnight. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament celebrates the 10th anniversary of Scottish Food and Drink Fortnight, which this year runs from 31 August to 15 September 2019; welcomes the aims of the fortnight to encourage more people to buy, eat and promote Scottish food and drink, and have as many people as possible taking part in the nation's biggest food and drink celebration, with events taking place throughout the country; acknowledges the growth in Scotland's food and drink sector and the contribution it makes to the economy, with a record £14.8 billion turnover and £6.3 billion in exports; acknowledges the ambition of the national food and drink strategy, *Ambition 2030*, to double the value of the industry by 2030, and believes that Scotland has some of the most popular protected food name products in Europe, including Stornoway Black Pudding PGI, which make a unique contribution to what it considers its food and drink success story.

17:04

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am delighted to have secured tonight's debate, which celebrates the 10th anniversary of Scottish food and drink fortnight. It is an event that has helped to ensure that Scotland's outstanding food and drink industries start to get the profile that they have long deserved.

I thank the many members who signed my motion and those who are taking part in the debate. I hope that as many members as possible will be able to join us at the reception after the debate, for a chance to meet people from the industry and, I hope, sample some of their wares.

I do not expect to get extra time from the Presiding Officer for having a cold, so I will keep going.

A huge range of exciting developments are happening in Scotland's food and drink sector across the country. As the member who secured tonight's debate, I fully intend to abuse my position and draw on as many examples from my constituency as I feel that I can get away with.

Nationally, Scotland has a fantastic story to tell. Our produce enjoys an enviable reputation at home and abroad. The sector is a key pillar of the Scottish economy, directly employing 45,000 people and producing a record turnover of £14.8 billion last year, with £6.3 billion in exports alone. As members are aware, the importance of the

sector extends far beyond direct employment and far beyond rural constituencies; it is a truly national industry.

Only last month, the enterprise minister, Jamie Hepburn, came to my island constituency to open the new Loomshed brewery on the Isle of Harris. Harris is, of course, already well known for its gin, and the distillery on Harris is now also quietly maturing the first batches of its own malt whisky, which are already exciting considerable interest in the whisky world, even before the angels have had time to claim much of their share. North Uist, too, now has its own gin distillery, while Lewis has Abhainn Dearg whisky. Meanwhile, the Western Isles continue to be famed for the production of everything from salmon and scallops to biscuits, black pudding, prawns, fudge, lamb and lobster.

Across Scotland, food producers are too numerous to mention—I leave the task of naming some of them to their respective local MSPs. We should not underestimate the sheer demand that exists around the world for—to take but three obvious examples—Scotch whisky, Scotch beef and Scottish salmon. That is before we even consider Scotland's production of haggis, marmalade, confectionery, raspberries, tatties and a host of other products.

Farmers, fishermen, crofters, distillers, brewers, dairies, factories and countless other food producers are increasingly aware of the link that their businesses have with tourism—a link that actively and positively contributes towards the overall visitor experience of Scotland. The days when distilleries actively discouraged visitors, in the belief that they might be undercover spies from rival distilleries, are long gone. Whisky tourism now forms a central part of many distilleries' business model, as new markets everywhere from Sweden to China are opened up by people who discover whisky while they are on their holidays.

It would be fair to say that Scotland's tourism industry more generally has come a long way. Tourists now come with high expectations not just of the quality of what they will eat but of its local provenance. Visitors, whether they eat in restaurants or stay in self-catering accommodation, rightly expect to be able to obtain local food, which, in the past, was sometimes easier said than done.

We still have a long way to go in persuading some supermarkets of the benefits of stocking local produce—or even, in some cases, the benefits of marking Scottish produce as Scottish produce—but we are making progress on all fronts. Despite the very occasional much-publicised attempt at cultural appropriation of an iconic Scottish product, the overwhelming number of producers recognise that "Made in Scotland"

represents a very attractive label to put on anything.

The programme for government that was presented to Parliament last week contained a number of welcome points of importance to the food and drink industry. The ambition for Scotland to be a good food nation, where people benefit from, and take pride and pleasure in, the food that we produce, buy, cook, serve and eat every day is, I hope, something that everyone across the chamber can support. Vital and warmly welcome though tourists are, Scotland's food is obviously not just for them, but can contribute to a sense of place that benefits those who live here and those who visit in equal measure.

The commitment to lay a good food nation bill before Parliament to underpin the significant work already being carried out to achieve that ambition has been widely welcomed. It was encouraging that the Government is committed to continuing to promote and encourage more local sourcing of Scottish produce through public sector contracts, meaning that there will be more Scottish produce served in our schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, care homes and prisons. Such major public sector contracts close to home make the world of difference to our food industry and show Scotland's commitment to tackling food miles, wherever that is practicable to do.

Brexit—I have gone and mentioned the word—represents uncertainty for the exporters of all food, not least those exporting live shellfish to France and Spain, who now face the task of getting their produce across international borders. People producing everything from Arbroath smokies to Stornoway black pudding currently benefit from the European Union's protected geographical indications scheme, and they need information about what will come next—and that is even before we speculate about what form common agricultural policy funding or an equivalent might take beyond the next couple of years for our lamb, beef and other farming sectors, or before we touch on the stated concerns of the fish processing and soft berry industries, among many others, about the future supply of labour.

Notwithstanding those uncertainties, the Scottish food and drink sector is confident about the growing interest around the world in the excellent product that it has to sell. James Withers, who is the chief executive of Scotland Food & Drink, recently said:

“By 2030 we want to have doubled the value of Scotland's food and drink industry.”

That aim is set out in “Ambition 2030”, which is the growth strategy that seeks to position Scotland as one of the best places in the world in which to run

a food and drink business and to attract and retain investment.

The goal is to double the turnover in farming, fishing and food and drink to £30 billion by 2030. In order to achieve its vision, the strategy will focus on producing a

“Coherent and joined-up education programme”,

developing

“a new national industry recruitment campaign”,

and creating a

“Nationwide mentoring programme”.

A decade ago, the food and drink sector had a low profile in the Scottish economy, with hardly any growth in the industry. Today, it is one of Scotland's best-performing domestic sectors and fastest-growing export sectors. Scotland's food and drink fortnight can claim at least some credit for that transformation, and I look forward to seeing it grow just as spectacularly over the coming 10 years.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that if they wish to speak, they must press their request-to-speak buttons. There are 10 members wanting to speak, which is great, but it means that you must keep to your time.

17:12

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): I am very grateful to my friend and colleague Dr Alasdair Allan for securing tonight's members' business debate to celebrate everything that is fantastic and great about Scotland's food and drink industry and, of course, to shine a light on all the fabulous local produce in our constituencies.

In West Lothian, the food and drink industry supports 2,500 jobs in 60 companies. I am very pleased to say that, on more than one occasion in the Scottish Parliament canteen, I have seen Dr Allan and other colleagues from across the political divide tuck into haggis made by A J Hornig from West Calder.

Some of the best home-made grub that I have ever tasted was in the Decca, a bed and breakfast in Dr Allan's constituency in Lewis. I think that that makes a point about the connectivity between our food and drink and tourism sectors.

I will share with members something that they are perhaps not aware of about my constituency. We—quite rightly—have a big focus on whisky. Whisky companies Glenmorangie and Glen Turner have large bases in West Lothian. There is also a rum distillery in Bellsquarry near Livingston, where artisan golden and spiced Mattuga rum is produced. The flavours and smells are very much inspired by east Africa. The product can be bought

in Scotland or online. I am very pleased to congratulate Jacine Rutasikwa who, along with her husband, founded Matugga Distillers. She is one of the finalists at next week's Women's Enterprise Scotland awards in the start-up of the year category. I wish her well at the ceremony.

I welcome the commitment to a good food nation bill. We need a joined-up approach to food and food policy to ensure that more of Scotland's larder ends up on our plates and that we do more to support what is a key growth sector of our economy to increase exports and to protect and grow local jobs. The industry makes a contribution to tackling hunger and obesity in Scotland. Given that there is a Young's and Macrae factory in my constituency, I of course associate myself with any encouragement to get folk to eat more fish.

I support the Government's efforts to end multibuy promotions of food that has little or no nutritional value, but I want to ensure that all the proposals in the Government's healthy eating action plan are evidence based and do not disproportionately impact on Scottish small and medium-sized enterprises. Paterson Arran, which is based in my constituency and which was recently bought by Burton's Biscuit Company, produces the number 1 and best-tasting shortbread in the United Kingdom. It is an innovative and ethical company. It relies on promotions in supermarkets and free samples to boost sales of shortbread, particularly at certain times of the year, with hogmanay and Christmas being the most obvious examples.

I do not pretend that shortbread is anything other than a treat, but it is 17 per cent sugar, whereas a KitKat is 52 per cent sugar. My concern is that the large confectionery companies will continue to advertise—given that regulation on that is reserved—and that, with our powers, we may inadvertently affect small Scotland-based companies. I know that Mr Ewing is aware of the issue. He has been generous with his time and has visited Paterson Arran, and the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing has been kind enough to meet me to discuss the matter further.

I support the desire to enshrine the right to food in Scots law, because we must end hunger in 21st century Scotland. I accept that it is comparatively easy to legislate and that the challenge is putting legislation into practice to ensure that weans in Scotland do not go hungry.

17:17

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I thank Alasdair Allan for bringing the debate to the chamber. I am delighted to have the opportunity to celebrate one of Scotland's most important and iconic industries. In my constituency

of Galloway and West Dumfries, the food and drink sector is vital to our rural economy. We have a host of fantastic companies developing new and exciting products.

In line with the Scottish Government's ambition 2030 strategy for the industry, Dumfries and Galloway Council has a programme, which is ably managed by Lorna Young, to ensure that targets are met. The industry is currently worth £1.2 billion to the region and employs more than 9,000 people. The sector now comprises a quarter of private sector activity in the local economy, which is up from a fifth just five years ago. In terms of gross value added, the sector represents £60,000 per head of population, which is well above the local average of £40,000.

It is a pity that I have only four minutes to speak, because there are so many wonderful individuals and businesses doing so much in my constituency. Earlier today, I was alongside the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall as they officially opened the new visitor centre at the Bladnoch distillery, which I am sure you will know well, Presiding Officer. Australian businessman David Prior purchased Bladnoch distillery in 2015 with a vision to restore it to its former glory. Shortly after his significant investment, the distillery resumed production and launched its award-winning range of Bladnoch single malts and Pure Scot blended whiskies. In 2017, Bladnoch celebrated its 200th anniversary, making it the oldest privately owned Scotch distillery. I should not forget the Crafty distillery, which is just along the road and which produces the now famous Hills & Harbour gin.

I am thoroughly looking forward to attending this year's Stranraer oyster festival, at which we will be joined by the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, Mairi Gougeon. The festival is now in its third year and is getting bigger all the time. It is a fantastic event that brings together the community and showcases one of our finest coastal products. If members have time, I certainly recommend popping down. The Kirkcudbright food festival is coming up next month and we had the Wigtown food festival in July. When we add in a Dumfries farmers market at the railway station every month, we really are spoiled for choice when it comes to getting fine local produce.

On the 20th anniversary of Food and Drink Federation Scotland, I was pleased to hear that it is offering 20 opportunities in the industry for youngsters. One is at Sheena Horner's Galloway Chillies, a small, thriving business in my region. The programme has allowed her to take on a youngster for work experience, which is a fantastic opportunity to learn about how to grow chillies in Scotland, assist in building two greenhouses for the 2020 season and share ideas with partners

and participants in the Dumfries and Galloway food and drink forum. As we have heard before in this place, the region faces huge challenges in keeping our young people, so opportunities like that should be explored more as we look for incentives to keep them there.

There is so much untapped potential to grow our food and drink industry. Dumfries and Galloway is home to almost half of Scotland's dairy herd, and we have almost a quarter of the country's cattle. I am almost certain to miss out some of our iconic products, but I must mention the world-famous Castle MacLellan's pâté, Marrburry's smoked salmon, Sulwarth Brewery's award-winning Galloway Gold lager and Galloway Lodge preserves. Today, I met up with the dairy company that makes Cream o' Galloway ice cream and now has award-winning ethical cheeses. New businesses include Five Kingdoms brewery in the stunning Isle of Whithorn and Galloway Mead, which hopes to bring back traditional mead to south-west Scotland. I should also mention Kirkcudbright—famous for its scallop fleet—and high-quality beef from our Galloways, belted and otherwise, which are growing in stature and popularity.

Potential to expand the sector is reckoned to be worth £2.5 billion in Dumfries and Galloway, so this is an exciting time for our businesses. With the south-west 300 driving route, people can take in some of the most beautiful countryside in Scotland, combined with the best food that the country has to offer and washed down by a fine dram. I look forward to seeing more of my fellow members enjoying Galloway hospitality and I will be more than happy to point them in the right direction.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have given us enough places to go to. I call Stewart Stevenson, to be followed by Colin Smyth.

17:22

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I congratulate Alasdair Allan on securing the debate. I add to his litany of constituency interests, as I first had spoots at Northton. They were harvested within a mile of where I was eating them—that is cutting down food miles. My constituency also has unusual and interesting things in it; it is where extra virgin rapeseed oil came to the fore, because of one of the farmers in my area.

I, too, offer congratulations on the 10th anniversary of Scottish food and drink fortnight. Of course, Scotland has wonderful seafood, Scotch whisky and much more. My constituency has multiple fishing ports and farms, and it even has four whisky distilleries: Knockdhu, Inchgower,

Glenglassaugh and Macduff, which provide high-quality products and high-quality jobs.

Scotland has four of the largest fishing ports in the UK, and we account for almost all of the UK's aquaculture production. Nearly 5,000 people work on Scotland-registered fishing vessels and 8,000 work in seafood processing—in both cases, many of those jobs are in rural areas. The Scotch whisky industry employs 10,000 people in Scotland, including 7,000 people in rural areas. Those are big numbers, and continued growth could make them even bigger. The efforts of ambition 2030 stand to be recognised, because the contributions that the food and drink industries make to our economy are heading in a most positive direction. When we eat and drink their products, we are eating and drinking the most healthy food on earth.

Our food exports have increased by 111 per cent since 2007, to £1.5 billion, with salmon and seafood leading the way. Capital investment is also going up. Across Scotland, there are improved distilleries, new distilleries, refitted distilleries and new visitor attractions. Farmed salmon is up by 16 per cent and Scotch whisky has increased in value by £153 million, to more than £4 billion. Its export value has grown by 7.8 per cent, with 40 bottles of whisky exported every second—that will be 9,600 bottles during this speech.

Our food and drink sector deserves to be toasted and celebrated. Scottish food and drink fortnight is an ideal expression of that, and I encourage the public to join in. I listened with interest to what Finlay Carson said. He mentioned the Stranraer oyster festival, which I was going to cite as an example of what is done in the south. The spirit of Speyside festival, in the north, is among the events that take place in my area.

It is important that we continue to support local food and drink. The sector is a massive success story for Scotland. It is diverse and omnipresent, and I am looking forward to tucking into some Scottish products later this evening, to augment the Scotland-sourced tacos that I had at lunch time.

17:25

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Alasdair Allan for lodging his motion, which has allowed this evening's debate to take place. He has provided members with the opportunity not only to celebrate Scotland's world-renowned food and drink sector but to do our annual food and drink fortnight sales pitch for our constituencies and regions. I fully intend to do just that, and I follow Finlay Carson—and, no doubt, precede Emma Harper—in highlighting the thriving food

and drink sector in my home region of Dumfries and Galloway, where our farmers produce more than 40 per cent of Scotland's dairy and which boasts a fantastic range of wonderful artisan products.

As a result of the importance and potential of the sector, the local Labour-led council has committed to the development of a regional food and drink strategy that aims to double the value of the region's industry to £2.5 billion by 2030. That is an ambitious target, but it is one that the region is more than capable of realising. I recall launching, as a local councillor, the Dumfries and Galloway food trail, which invites people to eat and drink their way around the natural larder of the region, whose produce is produced by some of the most passionate people in the business. I am talking about companies such as Cream o' Galloway, which is near the food town of Castle Douglas—David and Wilma Finlay are leading the way in ethical farming by proving that there is an alternative to the export of live calves and producing some of the most amazing ice cream and cheese along the way—and Loch Arthur, to which I, as the chair of Dumfries and Galloway's Fairtrade steering group, had the privilege of awarding Fairtrade flagship employer status, thereby helping to deliver Fairtrade status to the region.

The food trail takes people behind the scenes of producers including Annandale distillery, which, after three years, is bottling its first malt whiskies—the peated Man o' Sword and the unpeated Man o' Words—which are named after Scotland's national bard, Robert Burns. I can personally vouch for the remarkable quality of both, despite their young age. It is fitting that the co-owners of the distillery, David Thomson and his wife, Teresa Church, have now taken ownership of one of Burns's favourite haunts, the 400-year-old Globe Inn, in Dumfries. Recently, our craft whisky distilleries have been joined by Ninefold, near Lockerbie, which does small-batch rum distilling, and wonderful gin distilleries such as Oro, in Dalton, Crafty Distillery, in Newton Stewart, and Solway Spirits, near Annan.

We have exciting new businesses in the soft drinks sector, too. Scotland's youngest chief executive, nine-year-old Molly Rose McLean of Molly Rose Lemonade, in Gretna Green, launched the second flavour in her growing range just a few days ago.

The region also boasts some of the busiest farmers and community markets, from Wigtown and Kirkcudbright, in the west, to Dumfries, Moffat, Lockerbie and Langholm, in the east. We also have some of the best food festivals and celebrations in the country, including the Stranraer oyster festival, which I am proud to plug—I

suspect that I will be one of four members who will do so during the debate. It celebrates not only Loch Ryan's world-class oysters but the area's culture and heritage.

With outstanding restaurants, cafes, guest houses and hotels, Dumfries and Galloway is the place to do business when it comes to food and drink, and it is playing its part in Scotland's food and drink success story. However, we are not without our major challenges. The region's food and drink sector—along with the rest of Scotland—faces the uncertainties of Brexit, which threatens our tariff-free access to markets as well as access to workers. In addition, the threat to geographical indication status looms over products such as Scotch whisky, our nation's biggest food and drink export. That industry is worth £4.7 billion a year. Because the economic importance of our food and drink sector is enormous, so, too, is the potentially damaging impact of Brexit.

The importance of the food and drink sector goes beyond its crucial economic importance. It impacts on our health, our environment, our record on animal welfare and our fight for equality. The lack of adequate access to food for far too many people exposes many inequalities in Scotland today. Sadly, although our food and drink sector has grown, so, too, has the scandal of food poverty. It is absolutely right that we celebrate the success of Scotland's food and drink, but we also need to rethink how we approach access to quality, nutritious food in this country.

We need to recognise that access to food is a fundamental human right. Although I am glad that this year's programme for government committed to introducing a good food nation bill, there is still a lack of clarity about what the bill will contain. We urgently need bold, comprehensive legislation that puts tackling food poverty at its heart and that includes a statutory right to food. I hope that the Government will use this debate to commit to that this evening.

In a nation that provides so much outstanding food and drink, of which we are all proud, it is to our shame that, tonight, there will still be many children in Scotland who will go to bed hungry. That is a scandal that we must end.

17:30

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I am delighted to be taking part in this important debate. As others have done, I congratulate my colleague Alasdair Allan on securing the debate.

Scottish food and drink fortnight gives all MSPs the opportunity to highlight some of the marvellous food and drink companies in our constituencies and regions. Presiding Officer, you have guessed it: I am biased when it comes to Scottish food and

drink, because I am of the view that Stirling produces some of the best in the country.

The Stirling area is home to two remarkable whisky distilleries, in the shape of Deanston and Glengoyne. Furthermore, the emergence of new gin distilleries, including that which makes McQueen gin, which is based near Callander, and that of Stirling Gin Ltd, which is based in Stirling's old town, shows that gin is certainly not lagging behind.

Of course, rural Stirling is home to many farms, and is a major producer of high quality Scotch beef, lamb and milk. In Scotbeef Ltd, which is located in Bridge of Allan, we have one of the UK's largest privately owned fresh meat companies, whose passion is to produce the highest quality innovative meat products for the UK retail market. Also in Bridge of Allan, we have Graham's The Family Dairy Ltd, which this year celebrates its 80th anniversary. Graham's is Scotland's leading food brand, and produces very high quality dairy products. I acknowledge that both those companies are in the constituency of my colleague Keith Brown, but I am always trying to nick stuff off Keith, so there is no change there.

I always consider Scottish food and drink fortnight to be a positive opportunity to celebrate our marvellous produce, which has unbeatable provenance. However, in this year, of all years, I am afraid that it must also come with a serious warning. The elephant in the chamber is a no-deal Brexit, which simply cannot be ignored. If the current Prime Minister succeeds in taking the whole UK out of the European Union with no deal, that will leave the UK having to trade on World Trade Organization terms. In that circumstance, the challenges for our food and drink industry will be stark.

For many producers, the situation will, potentially, be impossible. Without a trade deal being in place between the UK and the EU, the UK will be subject to export tariffs when it trades with other countries—including Ireland—just as any other third country that does not have a trade deal with the EU is. That will include tariffs that could be punitive on products including beef, lamb, butter and cheese. I do not think that I need to emphasise just how serious a situation that would be for Scotland's farmers, food producers, retailers and consumers.

I will finish with a quote from James Withers, who is the chief executive of Scotland Food & Drink. He said:

"If you take our lamb and sheep sector, a quarter goes to the European Union so you face the potential of that market effectively closing, with a huge tariff suddenly payable on lamb. Even if you could increase the consumption in the UK we wouldn't be able to absorb that amount, so the projections we see for lamb on the UK market is a

reduction in the price of around 30 per cent, which would have a disastrous effect. It would have the same kind of impact economically as foot-and-mouth in 2001."

Make no mistake: a no-deal Brexit is a direct and specific threat to the future of Scotland's highly successful food and drink sector. The fact that about two thirds of food exports go to the EU demonstrates just how valuable the EU market is. All the great work that has been done to ensure that food and drink exports from Scotland reached a record high of £6.3 billion last year would be hugely undermined by crashing out of the EU without a deal. That is a future that I dare not contemplate; I hope that colleagues across the chamber share that view.

17:34

Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):

I declare an interest as a partner in a farming business, because we cannot have a debate on the wonderful food and drink that we enjoy in Scotland without mentioning our farmers, who help to produce the raw materials on which a lot of it depends.

I also thank Alasdair Allan for bringing the debate to the chamber, because I relish any opportunity to praise the Scottish food and drink sector. As I have often said in the chamber, the food and drink industry is one of Scotland's biggest success stories, and food and drink fortnight is all about celebrating that.

The Food and Drink Federation Scotland has published some incredible statistics that show the importance of the industry. For example, 25 per cent of the Scottish manufacturing workforce is within the food and drink industry, which employs a staggering 45,000 people every year. It is estimated that by 2024 the industry will need to recruit another 19,000 people in order to keep up with current demand. Although we do not have figures for what the ambition 2030 strategy could do for employment, if we keep working towards it, it will have a tremendous impact.

I know that Stornoway black pudding—which was mentioned by Alasdair Allan—is top class, because I enjoy it regularly. However, I particularly want to mention some of our great north-east products. The annual north-east Scotland food and drink awards celebrate the excellence of our products; I would like to mention some of this year's winners. Middleton of Rora Dairy Produce Ltd has gone from strength to strength in recent years, and has won two awards through its passion for creating simple and pure Scottish yoghurt on the farm in Peterhead. I saw many people enjoying samples at the Royal Highland Show, and the company's passion for its products is clear.

Dating back to 1797, the Glen Garioch distillery in Aberdeenshire is one of the oldest whisky distilleries in Scotland, and I am lucky enough to have it in my region. Like many other people around the world, I find that there is nothing finer than a dram. Glen Garioch distillery has regularly received awards for the development and innovation of its products in recent years.

The list goes on: there is Mackie's of Scotland's ice cream, oatcakes from Kindness Bakers Ltd in New Deer, Mackintosh of Glendaveny Ltd's rapeseed oil, and Farmlay Eggs. I must declare an interest because my brother, Robert, and his family run the Farmlay Eggs business. Those are just a few of the recognised success stories from 2019. It is clear that the north-east is the place to be for great Scottish food and drink.

There is no doubt that Scotland's food and drink has been a great success story over the past 10 years. However, to keep that momentum going and to reach £30 billion by 2030, some key things need to happen. More young people need to regard farming, fishing and the food and drink industry as career choices. The jobs must be sustainable and well paid, based on our primary industries being more profitable than they are now.

In addition, much fairer shares of the profits and risks must be spread along the food chain. Too often, we see all sectors of the chain extracting their costs and an element of profit, which leaves the primary producer with a price which means that he is producing at a loss. That business model must change, and we must do that while we address our environmental footprint and move towards a carbon-neutral industry. No pressure.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Due to the number of members who still wish to speak in the debate, 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 Alasdair Allan to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Alasdair Allan*]

Motion agreed to.

17:38

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this evening's important debate, and I congratulate my colleague Alasdair Allan on securing it.

Food and drink fortnight, which is organised by Scotland Food & Drink, is an excellent opportunity to showcase the best of Scottish produce—fae ferm tae fork. Scotland's food and drink sector is world renowned for its provenance, its outstanding quality and its amazing diversity of delicious

flavours. It is worth more than £14 billion to our economy and employs 115,000—and then some—people across Scotland, and that number continues to grow.

Every corner of Scotland has its own unique brand of food and drink, and the south-west of Scotland is nae exception. In my South Scotland region, we have outstanding local produce, from Galloway-breed beef and award-winning cheeses at the Ethical Dairy—which was mentioned—to Loch Ryan oysters from Stranraer, which I, too, will be enjoying along with Minister Gougeon at the third Stranraer oyster festival this weekend. We have huge companies, such as those that produce Seriously Strong Cheddar and Rowan Glen, and Arla Foods; one-woman companies such as Treats, Darling?; and even forward thinkers such as the Station House cookery school in Kirkcudbright, which does a lot of work with families and local producers.

We have many outstanding food and farm festivals, agricultural shows and farmers markets in the south-west that showcase outstanding local food and drink that are bursting with flavour and creativity.

I give a shout out to Graham Nichol and Niomi Brough, who are just two of the hard-working people behind the Dumfries and Kirkcudbright food festivals. Graham was the omelette-making champion in Dumfries and Galloway until this summer. I defeated him and took his crown, which I now have to defend on his ain turf.

Members might be surprised to learn that, in south-west Scotland, Garrocher tea garden is growing and blending tea, Professor Pods is growing chillies for his sauces, and we have a wide range of award-winning dairy produce, from amazing ice cream to specialist cheeses and yoghurt. We must not forget the world-famous Ayrshire tatties, which now have protected geographical indication status. We have local venison, a wide variety of lamb, hogget and mutton, and the Little Bakery, which won the prestigious world's best Scotch pie award this year.

South-west Scotland also has the award-winning Sulwath brewery in Castle Douglas, which has been mentioned, and outstanding gin distillers, such as the Crafty distillery in Newton Stewart. I believe that I had a taste of Hills & Harbour gin with Mike Russell at an event in Parliament. We also have, of course, the newly refurbished and reopened Bladnoch distillery, whose reopening was described really well by Finlay Carson. I visited it on one of its other official opening days. Ninefold distillery, which is a new kid on the block, makes Dumfries and Galloway's first rum. Galloway really does have it all.

Since 2008, we have seen Scots exports increase by 56 per cent. They reached over £7 billion last year, and our manufacturing growth rate for food and drink is twice that of the UK.

Supporting the workforce is key to unlocking the £30 billion potential of the sector—that is the Scottish Government's target. Our farmers, fishers, growers, pickers and all those who work in our agricultural sector need to be supported.

I spent the summer recess visiting farms, attending agricultural events and food and drink events, and speaking to people on the front line. As colleagues have mentioned in the chamber, south-west Scotland has 48 per cent of Scotland's dairy farms. I have talked about that previously. Many of their employees are EU citizens who have chosen to live and work in, and be essential contributing members of, our communities. South-west Scotland is one of the top food-producing areas, and those EU workers are understandably concerned about the UK Government's actions towards EU workers.

In conclusion, I ask the cabinet secretary for assurances that he and the Scottish Government will continue to do all that they can to protect the sector and its hard-working people from the potential damage of a no-deal Brexit. I welcome food and drink fortnight and put on the record my thanks to all those in the sector and those who come to Scotland and choose to work in it.

17:42

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I, too, thank Alasdair Allan for the opportunity to debate Scotland's food and drink.

I was very pleased to see a renewed emphasis on food in last week's programme for government, including the commitment to finally bring forward a good food nation bill. Members may recall that it was in the debate on Scotland's food and drink fortnight this time last year that Parliament succeeded in getting that bill back on the Government's agenda. I am sure that we are all looking forward to scrutinising that bill when it has been introduced.

The good food nation paper from 2014 is a genuinely good piece of strategy work. It strikes the right balance between celebrating Scotland's unique larder and our strong export sector, and identifying the big challenges that exist for further action. It spelled out the challenges of having, for example, some of the highest levels of diet-related poor health in the world; an urgent need to tackle climate emissions; a lack of resilience and competition in the food supply chain; and deep-seated attitudes to food, which lead to poor habits and low expectations.

Unfortunately, we have made little progress on those areas in the past five years. Perhaps worse than that, we have stopped discussing our successes and failures together and passed off the food challenges that we face to other portfolios, such as health and education. That is why we urgently need cross-portfolio legislation. I hope that that will come through in the good food nation bill.

There are solutions from my region that I would like to celebrate. This week, I visited the heat project in Blairgowrie, which has established a food hub and offers online ordering and collection of local food. Later this month, I will be helping to launch a similar scheme by the hub G63 in Drymen, which joins other hubs in Stirling and St Andrews that bring consumers and producers together.

Those projects are direct, community-led responses to the declining food offer on our high street, and a lack of choice and access in many of our rural communities. Many of those projects have received funding from the climate challenge fund, which is very welcome. Given the climate emergency, we should be scaling the fund up, rather than down, in order to do more work on food.

It is with some irony that the dire standard of food at Blairgowrie high school, which was exposed in *The Courier* today, shows the urgent need to get quality local produce into public kitchens as well. The excellent food for life programme, which engages young people in menu design, local production and wider food education work, has been very successful. Perth and Kinross Council should learn from the success of Stirling Council in working with that programme, because it has delivered quality meals that are popular with young people, within the council's tight budget.

We should also pay tribute to projects and volunteers who are working on the front line of food poverty, such as The Gate in Alloa and Kirkcaldy food banks. I had incredibly moving visits to both projects, when I spoke to both the users and the volunteers who work so hard. I therefore remain uncomfortable celebrating record turnovers and export figures for Scottish food when families are still going to bed hungry every night.

A huge effort is under way to provide emergency food in Scotland. Last year, the charity FareShare distributed more than 1,900 tonnes of food to food banks, community kitchens, lunch clubs and other local charities. That is enough food for £4.5 million-worth of meals. We should bear in mind that that vast tonnage is actually just some of the spare food from our supermarkets and the wider supply chain. There is clearly enough food in Scotland at the moment for

everybody, but access and affordability are the real crises. That is why the importance of a right to food is central and should be in the good food nation bill.

In welcoming food and drink fortnight, we must also square up to those considerable challenges, join up action between portfolios and make our food system work for the health and wellbeing of everyone. I look forward to the publication of the good food nation bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Ruskell's speech drifted on to other issues, but I am fairly flexible when members are speaking to motions in members' business debates.

17:47

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I thank Alasdair Allan for lodging the motion, which celebrates the many successes of our food and drink industries.

In Edinburgh Pentlands, many of my constituents are employed by Burton's Biscuit Company, which has been manufacturing biscuits in Edinburgh since 1934. Burton's was recognised in an online survey as the seventh-best biscuit brand in the world, and in recent years it was awarded the export success of the year award by the Food and Drink Federation. I am also lucky to have the Edinburgh Beer Factory Ltd in my constituency, which won two world beer awards in 2018, making it the highest-performing UK brewery at the world beer awards.

Thanks to companies such as Burton's and the Edinburgh Beer Factory, the food and drinks industries are now worth a record £15 billion to the Scottish economy, and the sector is well on its way to doubling in value by 2030, to £30 billion.

Fiona Richmond, the head of regional food at Scotland Food and Drink, has said that

"Scottish food and drink is the envy of producers from around the world".

She is right. Even when we look closer to home, the reputation of Scottish produce is such that demand for it is increasing, with 82 per cent of Scottish consumers thinking that we produce the best whisky, 76 per cent thinking that we produce the best beef and 75 per cent thinking that we produce the best salmon. Well over half of UK consumers agree with them.

As an Edinburgh MSP and the co-convenor of the cross-party group on Scotch whisky, it comes as no surprise to me that this year's Scottish food and drink fortnight was launched at the Scotch Whisky Experience in Edinburgh, given the importance of whisky to the economy. The "Scotch Whisky Economic Impact Report 2018" showed

that the whisky industry is now supporting more than

"42,000 jobs across the UK. This includes 10,500 people directly in Scotland, and 7,000 in rural communities."

The sector's contribution to the UK economy has grown by 10 per cent since 2016 to £6.3 billion, as a result of continued export success. Scotland's national drink now generates two thirds of all the spirits gross value added in the UK. That success comes despite the industry in the UK continuing to pay the fourth-highest duty rates in the EU and one of the highest duties in the world, compared with other spirit-producing nations.

As we mark 10 years of the Scottish food and drink fortnight and showcase Scottish producers and consumers throughout the country, it would be remiss of me, as convener of the cross-party group on independent convenience stores, not to mention the vital role that retailers—in particular, independent retailers—play. For the past two years, convenience store owners in Scotland have benefited from £550,000 of Scottish Government grant funding to build their capacity to develop a food-to-go offering for customers. The grant programme is administered by the Scottish Grocers Federation. I am pleased to say that a condition for all applicants to the programme is that they must show a commitment to locally sourced Scottish produce.

So far, more than 120 stores around Scotland, including stores in rural and island communities, have benefited from the programme. The funding has enabled and encouraged convenience stores to develop new business with Scottish food and drink businesses, and has allowed stores to take advantage of the growing consumer demand for Scottish produce.

Scottish food and drink is one of Scotland's best performing industries. We are well on our way to achieving the target of being home to a sector that is worth £30 billion, which is why we must support the sector by buying local and trusting Scottish.

17:51

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): I thank my colleague, Alasdair Allan, for bringing the debate to the chamber, which allows us to highlight the importance of the food and drink sector to Scotland, and to champion some of the great success stories in our constituencies. I will do that without apology.

With local food and drink now being worth an estimated £1.3 billion, this is one of our most valued sectors.

I will get the B word out of the way right at the start of my speech. With the uncertainties that Brexit is bringing, we know that there will be a

great need for political will to be shown in the future to continue to support Scottish food and drink producers. The last thing that we need is another business—such as Isle of Skye Chocolate in Kate Forbes’s constituency—to be forced to close as a direct result of complications that have arisen due to the mess of leaving the European Union. However, I want tonight’s debate to be a positive one, so I will move on.

My hometown of Wick is home to the world’s best whisky. That is not only my opinion—it is the accolade that was bestowed on Old Pulteney’s 21-year-old single malt by Jim Murray’s respected “Whisky Bible” in 2012. It was only the second time that a Scottish distillery had won that coveted award and only the third time for a single malt.

In other whisky-related news, Brora distillery is to reopen and start production again, due to a multimillion pound investment by Diageo. Production of Brora whisky ceased in 1983, and bottles of it now change hands for thousands of pounds. Taken from the water that produced the famous gold rush in Sutherland, it is a much sought-after dram, and its re-emergence has sparked interest among whisky lovers all over the world—especially those abroad who can boast bloodlines that lead back to the terrible clearances in that part of Scotland.

Should members’ travels take them to Ullapool, a visit to the Seafood Shack is essential. I took the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, Mairi Gougeon, there in the summer, and she was very impressed—we talked about it again just this week. The Seafood Shack has a simple menu, based on the fresh seafood that comes ashore that day. I can thoroughly recommend the garlic crab claws and the monkfish or haddock wrap.

If members are looking for something a bit different, Shore the Scottish Seaweed Company Ltd produces a nutritious snack from local seaweed, which is sustainably harvested, by hand, on the Caithness shores.

Bogrow farm in Ross-shire, which is a reasonably new producer, is already producing fantastic quality meat and vegetables for the local market. Thanks to LEADER funding, this year it has expanded the business to develop a charcuterie and expand its butchery to meet the demand for locally produced quality products. That is just one example of a food and drink producer that, thanks to European funding, has been able to expand and develop.

Roaring Red Stag Ltd, which I visited in the summer, is also developing into a thriving business. It produces quality venison for the local and national market. However, the owners have pointed out that, due to their remote rural location,

it is a challenge to find support with routes to market and development of their business. I will speak to James Withers about that tonight.

In the time that I have left, there are too many quality producers to mention. Loch Duart salmon, Scrabster Seafoods Ltd, Rock Rose gin, Mey Selections, Caithness Chocolate, the Wolfburn distillery, Highland Fine Cheeses, Glenmorangie distillery—that list is by no means exhaustive. There is a plethora of distilleries, breweries, cafes, restaurants, farmers, crofters, bakers, confectioners and producers in Caithness, Sutherland and Ross.

I offer my best wishes to Dornoch Distillery Company, Scottish Salmon Company, Dunnet Bay Distillers, Highland Charcuterie and Smoke House Ltd, Cullisse Partners, Stacks Bistro, Gille Brighde restaurant, Greens restaurant and Kylesku Hotel for the Highland and Islands food and drink awards in November. Good luck to all of them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not know whether any members have missed anything in their constituencies. They have had a good try at naming everything.

17:56

The Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy (Fergus Ewing): I thank all members for contributing to the debate. Just about every member mentioned the distilleries in their constituencies, so I join the club and pay tribute to Tomatin, Royal Brackla and a new distillery that Gordon and MacPhail plan to open in Grantown-on-Spey, which will be extremely welcome.

I thank Alasdair Allan for securing the debate and for his reference to so many of the outstanding food and drink products in his constituency. He mentioned the Isle of Harris distillery, from where I purchased a barrel of whisky for my daughter for when she turns 18. Of course, that was for the purposes of her education. We took her to see the barrel, which has her name enshrined on it. She burst into tears, because she did not like the smell, and said, “Dad, I want you to sell it for £20.” I decided not to enter into a transaction on that basis.

To be serious, today’s debate is about celebrating success. All members have paid tribute well to the huge contribution that food and drink make in their constituencies. They mentioned a long list of companies, large and small, that contribute to the overall success of the industry.

We have an outstanding natural larder. We are the best place in the world for growing beef and lamb. The climate is exactly right, the animals are grass fed and the industry is environmentally

sustainable. As Peter Chapman knows, at a time when farmers are subject to somewhat unfair attacks, that message is increasingly getting across.

Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP): I will link the cabinet secretary's comments about barley, the farmers' contribution and whisky. Given his constituency interests, he will agree that Speyside is the home of Scotch whisky. Will he join me in paying tribute to James Campbell, who is the chairman of the Spirit of Speyside whisky festival and a keeper of the quaich. Over many years, along with his team, he has made a success of that festival, as have others before him. I also pay tribute to him for helping to create and make a huge success of the more recent Distilled event in Moray Speyside, at which distillers of whisky and gin and other producers are brought under the same roof at Elgin town hall. That has become a huge success for locals and visitors alike. Will the cabinet secretary recognise the enormous contribution that James Campbell has made?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ministers cannot take part in debates, so that is a technique for a lengthy intervention. Because of that, the cabinet secretary's time will be extended.

Fergus Ewing: That is the politician's equivalent of an illicit still. I pay tribute to James Campbell and his amazing achievements. He is a member of the Keepers of the Quaich. My mother, Winnie Ewing, is a member of that illustrious and select band of people. She once remarked that their dinners were the best that one could conceivably get.

I pay tribute to everyone who works in the sector, as have many others including Emma Harper and Angela Constance. They are absolutely right that we need those people and that everybody is welcome in Scotland, wherever they come from—whichever European country. It is important that we get that message out.

This morning, I attended a food resilience committee meeting along with James Withers, who is in the gallery, and representatives of the whole panoply. We had a discussion about preparing for a no-deal Brexit—not a political discussion but a practical one—and it is extremely important that we do that. I pay tribute to the work that James and his colleagues have done and to the Food and Drink Federation Scotland, whose reception to celebrate its 20th anniversary I hope and expect we will all attend shortly. It is doing a fantastic job in representing the sector in Scotland. As Dr Allan said, 10 years ago it was not receiving the airtime and promotion that it now receives.

Members referred to the good food nation bill, which we announced in the programme for

government, and I am pleased that they welcome it.

Mark Ruskell: Will the member take an intervention?

Fergus Ewing: I had better concentrate on the job in hand.

We will shortly be publishing the result of the consultation. There were more than 1,300 responses, so it has been a thorough piece of work and I am pleased to reassure members in that regard.

Mark Ruskell: Will the member take an intervention?

Fergus Ewing: No, I will not.

The success of the industry is well documented. Reference has been made to the record turnover of nearly £15 billion and the record exports of £6.3 billion, and retail sales of food and drink brands are at record levels. That is all as a result of tremendous hard work and close relations between Government, industry, third-party groups and communities. I want that to continue and, as many members have said, at the heart of that are our iconic protected food names—Scotch beef, Scotch lamb, Scotch farmed salmon and Stornoway black pudding. Those products embody our story, provenance, quality and heritage and they are enjoyed by people all over the world. I was pleased that Angela Constance mentioned the haggis that is cooked and sold in the canteen. It is delicious and it is my favourite canteen meal—I hope that Angela Constance will relay that to her constituents.

Members have kindly referred to the programme for government, which outlines about 20 commitments in all including the creation of a new food and drink academy to support businesses with high growth potential, the development of a new e-commerce platform so that companies can showcase and sell products on international markets, the development of a food and drink environmental plan and exploration of options to maximise the potential for the Scottish brand. More details on those commitments will emerge over the coming months.

I also acknowledge that, as Emma Harper said, small businesses play a vital role. There is a really exciting emerging development of innovative, active, vigorous, entrepreneurial small businesses in the food and drink sector and it is terrific to see those companies come forward. Mr Carson mentioned some and Gordon MacDonald mentioned the contribution that the Scottish Grocers Federation has made with its excellent food to go programme. We are always looking to see how we can expand on that and I spoke to John Lee about that just the other day.

I would like to mention some parts of Scotland that have not been mentioned. Arran, for example, is increasingly renowned as having a niche and a premium for quality brands, and I was delighted to sample some of the Arran cheeses today. I asked the young lady who offered them whether Alastair Dobson—Mr Arran—was present as well, and she said, “That’s my dad, actually, but I won’t tell him that you called him Mr Arran because it would make his head even larger.”

I pay tribute to all members for their contributions and, above all, to all the farmers, crofters, people who work in our catering sector—chefs and those working in hotels and restaurants—and everyone else who works in the food and drink sector. They play their part and contribute to the success and sustainable growth of a great industry that, perhaps more than any other, is associated with Scotland.

Meeting closed at 18:04.

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