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Thursday 5 December 2019

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 5 December 2019

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

General Question Time

Hoax Calls to Emergency Services (Aberdeen)

1. Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to concerns regarding the number of hoax calls to the emergency services in Aberdeen. (S5O-03873)

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): The Scottish Government condemns the making of any hoax call to our emergency services, although it is important to note that such calls reflect a very small percentage of the overall number of calls received.

Hoax calls are not victimless pranks but can distract and divert vital resources and attention away from people who are in life-threatening situations. Established United Kingdom-wide processes are in place with BT for emergency services, to deal with people who abuse the 999 service. Depending on the circumstances, such abuse can constitute a criminal offence.

Maureen Watt: I am sure that the minister will want to join me in thanking our emergency services staff for their hard work and dedication, particularly at this time of year.

How does the Scottish Government plan to work with, for example, the Scottish Ambulance Service and the police, to take appropriate action, perhaps through publicity, to tackle hoax calls?

Ash Denham: Our emergency services staff do amazing work every day, often in challenging circumstances, to keep the people of Scotland safe and well. They fully deserve our thanks and gratitude, particularly at this time of year, when demand for services can be high.

The Government is committed to doing everything that it can do to support our emergency services in the action that they take to reduce hoax calls, for example by working closely with partners and local communities to reduce false alarms and increase understanding of the impact of such calls.

The Scottish Ambulance Service uses social media to advise patients, during periods of high demand, to call the service only if there is an emergency. As part of its winter communications

plan, the service will warn of the impact of hoax calls.

Renewable Energy Technology (Exports)

2. Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it supports exports of renewable energy technology. (S5O-03874)

The Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation (Ivan McKee): Thanks to the Scottish Government's commitment and the targets that it has introduced, and thanks to the expertise and entrepreneurialism of our energy sector, Scotland is a global centre of excellence in renewables. Scotland's green energy export impact report, "Scottish Renewables Export Survey 2019", which was published earlier this year, highlighted that Scottish renewable energy businesses export to 72 countries.

The Scottish offshore wind energy council, which my colleague Mr Wheelhouse co-chairs, is looking not only to maximise supply-chain content of Scottish and United Kingdom projects but to support the supply chain to compete for overseas contracts. It has engaged with the Administrations in California, Massachusetts and New Jersey in relation to offshore wind opportunities. We want to build on our success and grow a successful and competitive global supply chain.

Gail Ross: What support is given to small and medium-sized businesses in the sector, such as JGC Engineering and Technical Services in my constituency?

Ivan McKee: I met JGC Engineering in Boston when I was there recently with a delegation of Scottish renewable energy businesses, which are looking to export to Massachusetts. I had a successful meeting with the governor of Massachusetts, Charlie Baker, in that regard, to promote the technology that we can export from Scotland.

Scottish businesses, including in the renewable energy sector, are being supported with an additional £20 million over the next three years, which the Scottish Government is investing to grow Scottish exports around the world.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I am pleased to hear that we are investing to grow exports around the world. What is the minister doing to ensure that wind energy projects in Scotland are supplied by companies from Scotland, instead of us being in the farcical situation whereby wind turbines are being imported from Indonesia to Fife, where, only a few yards away, the Burntisland Fabrications yard is standing empty?

Ivan McKee: Mr Findlay will be aware that the Scottish Government stepped in to support BiFab.

We are working with it to identify opportunities and ways in which we can support it in getting contracts. At the end of the day, it is a commercial business, but we take any suggestion of unfair competition very seriously, and we are looking to intervene to identify anything that may be deemed as such internationally.

The Scottish Government is hugely focused on the sector and wants to build up the supply chain—it intervened in BiFab precisely for that reason—to ensure that the opportunity and the technology are maintained in Scotland. Where it can, the Scottish Government supports private sector businesses in investing in the supply chain to provide jobs in the renewable energy sector in Scotland.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Will the minister outline the sort of policies that the UK Government has so far failed to deliver that would incentivise investment in renewable technology?

Ivan McKee: Scotland's technology is in a world-leading position. I attended an event at the City of Glasgow College this morning, where international opportunities for further exports of that technology were discussed. However, the UK Government has not been helpful in that regard. Its failure to follow through on the carbon capture scheme and the way that it changed the contracts for difference, resulting in a lack of support for onshore wind power technology, have not helped Scotland's drive to support its renewable energy sector and to use its world-leading technology to develop and export more internationally.

Funeral Directors (Code of Practice)

3. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in developing the draft statutory code of practice for funeral directors. (S5O-03875)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that everyone in Scotland receives the care, dignity and respect in death that they would wish in life.

Although there are no statutory regulations for funeral directors, or their businesses, in any part of the United Kingdom, we are working to change that in Scotland by introducing new statutory standards for funeral directors, underpinned by a licensing and inspection regime.

Earlier this year, I published the "Funeral Director: Code of Practice" for consultation. Once finalised, the code will set out statutory standards for funeral directors, which must be complied with. That will be a significant step forward in ensuring consistency of standards of care across Scotland. The analysis of the consultation responses will be

available early next year and the code will be published later next year.

David Torrance: Following the recent reports of an alleged fraudulent scheme linked to a Fife funeral director business, which has impacted on a number of my constituents, can the cabinet secretary clarify whether the financial regulation for the industry is under consideration for inclusion as part of any future code of conduct?

Joe FitzPatrick: The Scottish Government believes that the regulation of the pre-paid funeral plans market should be strengthened. As it is a reserved matter, we are urging the UK Government to take action to ensure that sufficient protection is in place for people who take out funeral plans. We will continue to call on the UK Government to take action in that area. The Scottish Government code of practice focuses on raising standards of transparency of the service that is offered by funeral directors, and standards of care of people who have died.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): As the minister has said, the purpose of the draft statutory code of practice is to ensure that

"every person in Scotland has a dignified and respectful funeral".

How will the newly developed funeral support payment ensure that that is the case, even for people who struggle to pay for funerals?

Joe FitzPatrick: The funeral support payment is to help people on low-income benefits who might otherwise struggle to pay for a funeral. We have substantially widened eligibility for the payment compared with the eligibility for the former Department for Work and Pensions payment, and we will help 40 per cent more people each year. In total, around 5,000 people each year will receive support.

Moreover, we have developed the new funeral support payment in line with our social security principles to treat all clients with dignity, fairness and respect.

Police (Response to Individuals Experiencing Mental Ill Health)

4. **John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce the amount of time that the police spend assisting people with mental health issues on matters that should not require their presence. (S5O-03876)

The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey): I thank John Mason for raising this important issue.

The Scottish Government, Police Scotland and partners are committed to working together to ensure that the right service provides the right response for individuals experiencing mental ill health. It is widely recognised that Police Scotland plays a significant role in assisting and safeguarding individuals who present to services in emotional or mental health-related distress or who are vulnerable in a variety of ways.

We have a collective responsibility to address the complex issues that arise from mental ill health. Police Scotland is working hard with partners to gain a clear picture of mental health-related demand so that we can fully understand the demand that is placed on our front-line officers and, importantly, so that we can work together to deliver the best outcomes for individuals.

We are continuing to deliver on the commitment that is set out in our programme for government to develop a 21st century approach to adult mental health. That includes our intention to establish a new adult mental health collaborative and the creation of the new multi-agency distress intervention group to develop and oversee new approaches to improving collaborative responses to distress. We are also on course to deliver our commitment to 800 additional mental health workers in four priority settings: accident and emergency, general practices, custody suites and prisons.

John Mason: I thank the minister for that answer, and I am glad that progress is being made. I spent a day with the police in August, and the subject came up repeatedly. If a police officer takes someone with mental health issues to accident and emergency, they have to stay with that person, which can be for some time. Is there another system whereby somebody from the health service could take over and release the police officers in such instances?

Clare Haughey: As I stated in my initial response, we know that police officers often play a significant and valuable role in assisting those in mental health distress. However, it is crucial that we develop a strong collaborative approach, with public services, the third sector and communities working together to improve support for those with mental ill health.

Police Scotland's new call-handling approach is being rolled out across Scotland, and it is already helping the service to respond more effectively to demand, putting resource where it is most needed and ensuring that people receive the support that best meets their needs. Working with other partners to address risk and vulnerability is a key feature of that approach. In addition, a new mental health hub service has been operational since March 2019, delivering dedicated support to people who contact Police Scotland in mental

health distress, with calls referred to psychological wellbeing practitioners.

The distress intervention group that I mentioned, in which Police Scotland is a key partner, will provide strategic leadership across the Scottish justice and health and social care sectors to ensure that more effective pathways are available to people who present to public services in distress.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I endorse Mr Mason's concerns. Will the minister again examine the supply and availability of medium and low secure facilities for those with serious mental health issues, as was raised at the Health and Sport Committee this week?

Clare Haughey: Mr Stewart will be aware that we are holding a review of all our forensic mental health services. The review is led by Derek Barron and we expect it to report next summer. The review's remit covers high, low and medium secure community forensic mental health services.

Out-of-hours Services (Vale of Leven, Inverclyde Royal and Royal Alexandra Hospitals)

5. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to concerns that the out-of-hours services at the Vale of Leven, Inverclyde royal and Royal Alexandra hospitals are not functioning effectively. (S5O-03877)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I agree that the current situation is not acceptable. I am aware of the challenges faced by Glasgow's out-of-hours service. Out-of-hours services covering NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde are currently under review. As part of that, Glasgow is recruiting 70 salaried general practitioners to work in the service. Recruitment started in early September this year, and seven salaried GPs have so far been recruited. It is important that Glasgow continues recruiting at pace to fill those posts, and that the health board takes on board the advice that it commissioned from Sir Lewis Ritchie on how to deliver a more sustainable out-of-hours service.

Jackie Baillie: Out-of-hours services at the Vale of Leven were closed for 128 days between January and September this year alone, and there have been more closures in October and November. In fact, the unit has been closed more often than it has been open, and there are also problems at Inverclyde and at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley. The result is that people end up at accident and emergency when they do not need to go there, and waiting times increase. I am sure that the cabinet secretary will share my

frustration that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde seems incapable of organising out-of-hours rotas. What can she do to ensure that this most basic of emergency services is provided in my local area?

Jeane Freeman: Ms Baillie will recall that, when I visited Vale of Leven hospital with her and others, we had what I thought was a very productive discussion with local GPs about the work that they undertake currently and how they could expand it. I share her disappointment that we have not yet seen that approach realised, but I think that those local discussions are the route by which we can resolve some of the out-of-hours matters.

I could not agree more with Jackie Baillie that, if the out-of-hours service does not work, along with people going to the pharmacy first service and NHS 24, we see people appearing for appropriate unscheduled care at A and Es, as opposed to the current situation that is often driven by people not knowing where else to go.

Today in the chamber, I am prepared to make my commitment to Ms Baillie that I will not only pursue what I thought were productive discussions at the Vale of Leven but talk to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde about the matter—and, of course, about other matters—and raise exactly how it proposes to improve the out-of-hours service and its delivery. I am happy to keep Ms Baillie updated on that.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary consider that it is unacceptable that although GPs from Inverclyde are regularly used to cover elsewhere in the health board area, reciprocal arrangements do not seem to apply? Further, the most recent health board figures reveal that out-of-hours services closed 40 times in 2018, rising to 77 up to 17 November this year.

Jeane Freeman: I do not consider it unacceptable that GPs across our cohort of areas, such as the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area, co-operate and help to cover for one another. What is not acceptable is if that is not reciprocal and co-operative. As I said in response to Ms Baillie, I will pick up the matter with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde—and with the British Medical Association's GP committee, with which I think that we have a productive relationship—to ask what more can be done to ensure that there is reciprocity and willingness to ensure cover across the piece. At the core of the issue is fixing the out-of-hours service in Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

NHS Forth Valley (Meetings)

6. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met NHS

Forth Valley to discuss the board's performance. (S5O-03878)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I met the chair and chief executive of NHS Forth Valley on Monday 2 December, when I chaired the board's mid-year review.

Alison Harris: In December last year, NHS Forth Valley was escalated to level 3 in the national health service board performance escalation framework, requiring tailored support. Although there have been improvements in accident and emergency waiting times and Forth Valley is no longer at level 3 in the framework, in 2018-19 it missed six of its eight national waiting time targets, and the areas that had seemed to be improving have begun to slip again. One year on from the previous escalation, is the cabinet secretary confident that Forth Valley will not be escalated again within a year?

Jeane Freeman: It is important to understand that we do not escalate boards lightly and that, when we do, we do so to provide the additional tailored support that they need to help them improve their performance. Of course, that tailored support ranges from what might be provided at level 2 or 3 to what might be the case at level 5, when intervention is much more direct.

Alison Harris is right that there have been improvements in A and E at Forth Valley and very welcome improvements in the 31-day cancer targets, with the most recent figures showing that the target was met 100 per cent. The discussion that we had on Monday was about what more the board is doing to improve on its 62-day target. The treatment time guarantee is improving, but there is more to be done with regard to out-patients. At this point, my focus is on making sure that the board has in place the right plans, the right recruitment options and the right financial performance to ensure that, when I do its annual review, we will have seen considerable improvements in its performance.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that a Labour MSP has attacked the Golden Jubilee hospital in my constituency for using a mobile catheter laboratory temporarily, as is done throughout the United Kingdom. Is it not an utter disgrace that Labour is willing to undermine the hospital, which has an exemplary record, and put vulnerable people in doubt at the worst time in their lives—when they are having a heart attack—which could cause them not to report the heart attack speedily, thus putting their lives in jeopardy?

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I am not entirely sure that that hospital is in Forth

valley, but the cabinet secretary can give a very brief answer.

Jeane Freeman: The Golden Jubilee hospital covers patients from the Forth valley area, Presiding Officer.

I agree with the member. Members need to decide: do they want us to focus on delivering high-quality patient care in a timely fashion, or do they want to make political points? The NHS in Scotland is doing what the NHS in Wales and the NHS in England are doing: it is ensuring that we have resources on time and in place to deliver that quality. I am interested in delivering high-quality patient care, rather than making cheap political points.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Programme for International Student Assessment (Results)

1. **Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** Scotland's programme for international student assessment—PISA—results for science and maths have never been lower than those released this week, have they, First Minister?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Compared with the previous PISA study, the performance in science and maths, according to independent statisticians, is stable. However, that is not good enough, in my view. We want to continue with efforts to see significant improvement in maths and science, as we have seen significant improvement in reading performance, as recorded in the most recent PISA study.

After the previous study, of course, we had the Scottish attainment challenge, and the pupil equity fund initiatives such as the First Minister's reading challenge, which focused on literacy and reading. That initiative is bearing fruit, and we are working to continue to bring the same focus to maths and science as well.

Jackson Carlaw: I welcome the figures on reading, but it is a little like people celebrating the fact that they have just had their kitchen redecorated when the front two rooms in the house are on fire.

The simple answer was, "No." They have never been lower. In fact, in science, the drop in performance is the biggest that has been seen since 2003.

In the period since the Scottish National Party first came to office, how many of the 40 countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Kingdom have experienced a bigger fall in standards in science, than we have in Scotland? How many?

The First Minister: I am not standing here saying that the performance in maths or in science is acceptable to me or the Scottish Government—I am not saying that in any way, shape, or form. However, after we saw a significant decline, the current study shows a performance that has stabilised. We now intend to bring to bear the initiatives and interventions that will see an improvement in maths and science that is similar to the improvement that we have seen in reading and literacy in this survey. That is the focus that a Government should bring.

Of course, as we have discussed in this chamber on many occasions, when we look at the broader indicators in Scottish education, whether on higher passes or national 5 passes, we see a picture of improving standards and, crucially, a closing of the attainment gap, which is also reflected in the most recent PISA study.

The Government will continue to be focused on delivering improvements in science and maths that are similar to the ones that we have already delivered in reading, and we will get on with that job.

Jackson Carlaw: Only in the First Minister's world can it conceivably be the case that the biggest fall in standards since 2003 represents stability.

The answer to the question that I asked is that just one country out of 40 has experienced a bigger fall in standards in science since 2006. In maths, Scotland has experienced the fifth-biggest fall. However, the Scottish National Party's response, which we have just heard, has been almost as alarming as the results themselves. Three years ago, Nicola Sturgeon said:

"The PISA ... results are not good enough and I want to see them improve."—[*Official Report*, 8 December 2016; c 11.]

This time, we have just had denial.

Professor Lindsay Paterson of the University of Edinburgh said that the PISA results

"would make any parent wince with shame. Even worse is the disgraceful political spin which the Scottish Government has struggled to impose"

on them.

As SNP members behind the First Minister laugh at that record, how is her Government going to get on top of the situation when it simply refuses to accept the facts?

The First Minister: First, in describing maths and science as "stable" I am quoting independent statisticians: that is just a fact. If I were standing here saying that I thought that that was acceptable—job done—or good enough, Jackson Carlaw might have a point. I am not doing that. We have brought a focus to bear on reading and literacy since the last PISA survey, and we have seen a significant and sharp increase in performance there, to the point where, again according to the independent statisticians, there are only five countries that are now performing better than Scotland. We are bringing that same focus to bear on maths and science.

We have a range of initiatives, including changes to the curriculum and the STEM—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—bursary, which is encouraging

people to make career changes and teach STEM subjects, because we are determined to see the same improvement in science and maths that we have recorded in reading. Those initiatives are going on along with the wider activity that is leading to improvement in higher performance—more young people leaving school with a higher and more young people leaving school with the gold standard of five highers—and more young people going into positive destinations. We will continue to keep that focus, whatever the Scottish Conservatives might want to throw at us—and the pupils and teachers across Scotland—in the process.

Jackson Carlaw: That is an even more lamentable response than I expected from a First Minister who wanted to be judged on education. Today, it is all across our newspapers what the people of Scotland think of her handling of public services. In schools, hospitals and justice—where, only this morning, the chair of the Scottish Police Authority has resigned—confidence is plummeting. After the previous set of PISA results, John Swinney told us that the SNP Government's "unwavering focus" would be on improving our schools, but Nicola Sturgeon's unwavering focus has been not on improving our schools but on forcing another independence referendum on Scotland. How much more Government failure does Scotland have to endure before she drops that obsession and gets on with her job?

The First Minister: When we took office, fewer than half of the pupils in Scotland left school with a higher qualification; now, almost two-thirds do. When we took office, just over 20 per cent left school with the gold standard of five highers; that is now more than 30 per cent. The Scottish household survey shows that 86 per cent of those with direct experience of schools say they are satisfied with the quality of education. I do not think that that is job done, but it is an indication of the focus and the progress that we are making and will continue to deliver.

Lastly, I think that it is a bit rich for Jackson Carlaw, as the representative of the party that has imposed a decade of austerity on Scotland, to stand up here and talk about the quality of public services. What we need to do over the next few days is take the opportunity to get rid of the Conservative Government. That is the best thing that we could do for public services the length and breadth of our country.

Scottish Police Authority

2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): What is the First Minister's response to comments by Susan Deacon, who this morning resigned her post as chair of the Scottish Police Authority, saying:

“The governance and accountability arrangements for policing in Scotland are fundamentally flawed in structure, culture and practice”?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I confirm that Susan Deacon has tendered her resignation. I am very grateful for the work that she has done over the past two years as chair of the SPA. Parliament will be interested to know that the justice secretary has spoken with the SPA vice-chair, David Crichton, who has agreed to take on the leadership of the SPA until a new chair is appointed through the full public appointments process.

Though I thank Susan Deacon and pay tribute to the work that she has done, I do not agree with her comments. I point to her letter of resignation, in which she says:

“I leave this role with our police service in a much stronger place than it was ... two years ago”.

I also point to the recent report of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland that says that there is now a consensus among key postholders in the SPA, Police Scotland and other stakeholders that the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 establishes the right model of governance of police and that the functions of the SPA are sound.

Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary also stated recently that the SPA has

“the strongest ... board that it has ever had”,

given its

“mixture and depth of experience in a number of different walks of life and professions.”

We and the SPA will continue to take forward the changes and reforms that this Parliament's Justice Sub-Committee on Policing has recommended, so that the SPA continues to strengthen its performance.

Richard Leonard: The First Minister is right in saying that, in September, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland published a report on the Scottish Police Authority, but that is about where her being right stops. The report found that the SPA is failing to hold the chief constable to account, failing to facilitate local scrutiny and failing on transparency. The report concluded that there is a fundamental conflict of interest between the SPA being a service provider to Police Scotland and being its scrutiny body.

The report made it absolutely clear that police scrutiny was in need of radical overhaul. What action did the First Minister take, between the publication of the inspectorate's report and Susan Deacon's resignation today, to ensure that Police Scotland is subject to adequate scrutiny?

The First Minister: As I am sure that Richard Leonard is aware, the SPA is making changes to address the issues that have been raised by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland and the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing on leadership, governance and accountability—and progress is being made in all that. However, that does not take away from the conclusion that the functions of the SPA are sound and that the model of governance of the police service by an independent police authority is the right one.

On Richard Leonard's question about progress, I again point to what Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary said when giving evidence to the Justice Committee on Tuesday 3 December. She stated that the SPA now has

“the strongest ... board that it has ever had”,

given its

“real mixture and depth of experience in a number of different walks of life and professions.”

Yes, issues have been raised in the lifetime of the SPA. Those issues are being addressed and will continue to be addressed. I would hope that Richard Leonard would welcome that.

Richard Leonard: For the past two weeks, the First Minister has toured the television studios up and down the United Kingdom, boasting about her record in Government. However, this week, we have had confirmation that our general practices are in crisis and that her education secretary is failing teachers and failing to provide the quality education that our young people deserve. Now, Police Scotland has been plunged into crisis. That comes on top of recent warnings from senior police officers that further cuts will be made in police numbers to meet current budgetary limits at a time when violent crime is rising in Scotland.

The Scottish National Party has been in office for 12 years. When will the First Minister finally take responsibility, apologise to the people and accept that none of Scotland's public services can be trusted in her Government's hands?

The First Minister: Of course, the level of crime is lower than it was when the SNP took office, and it is at one of its lowest levels in decades. We have invested to ensure that 1,000 more police officers are on the streets of Scotland. I know that Richard Leonard is quite happy for Scotland to be governed by a Tory Government, but during the time that we have been investing in 1,000 more police officers, the Tory Government has been slashing police numbers by 20,000.

This Government will continue to invest in our public services and we will continue to take forward essential reforms in our public services, which is why the people of Scotland will continue, I believe, to put their trust in the SNP and in this

Scottish Government to get on with the job that we are doing.

Borderline Helpline

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Does the First Minister share my concern that Borderline Helpline, which supports my constituents who are experiencing mental health problems and has received 90,000 calls since began 20 years ago, has been given six months' notice that it will lose all its funding, which comes from NHS Borders and the Tory-led Scottish Borders Council, despite independent valuations, including by SBC, considering it to be of exceptional value for money? The situation has been compounded by the fact that there has been no consultation. Does she agree that there should be a full consultation and that, at the very least, any decision on funding should be suspended until the impact of closure is assessed?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Services such as Borderline Helpline perform an important function and I encourage councils to undertake full consultations and ensure that they consider all the implications of such decisions. I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to consider the issue from the perspective of the health service, to see whether there is more that the Government can offer by way of assistance. I hope that the council will take seriously the issues that Christine Grahame raised.

Inverness Elective Treatment Centre

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In 2015, I welcomed the Scottish Government's announcement of a much-needed £16 million healthcare facility in Inverness. Work was due to start this summer, but was delayed until the end of 2019, and the price tag has more than doubled. I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport seven weeks ago asking about the facility and, despite two chasing emails, I have yet to receive a response.

Given that orthopaedic waiting times in the Highlands now exceed 78 weeks, my constituents and I would like to know when work will start on the elective care centre for the north of Scotland and when it will be operational.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I understand that the health secretary has written to Edward Mountain, but if he has not received the letter, I am happy to look into that and ensure that it arrives with him.

We are delivering a number of elective treatment centres around the country as part of our waiting times improvement plan, to ensure that

we build capacity so that the rising demand on the national health service is met.

I will ensure that Edward Mountain gets the response from the health secretary as quickly as possible.

Northern Isles Ferry Contract

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Yesterday, people in Shetland and Orkney were appalled to learn that there has been a second legal challenge to the awarding of the northern isles ferry service contract, which comes on top of an 18-month delay. Some people in the community are now questioning the competence of Transport Scotland. What reassurance can the First Minister give that the Government is doing all that it can to resolve the dispute quickly, to limit the uncertainty over the future of a lifeline ferry service on which people and businesses in the northern isles depend?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I share Beatrice Wishart's concerns about the issue. As she says, it is now a legal matter, so it would not be appropriate for me to go into details. Suffice to say, the Scottish Government is confident in the processes that we have undertaken, and we continue to defend that position rigorously.

Falkirk Gas Outage

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): The First Minister will be aware of the major gas outage that affected parts of Falkirk district from Sunday through the first half of the week. Currently, fewer than 250 of the 8,000-plus households that were affected remain unconnected. Will the First Minister join me in congratulating everyone who was involved in the Herculean effort to get people reconnected? I include in that not only the 300 gas engineers and support staff from SGN and beyond who descended on Falkirk district over the past few days, but the multi-agency response from the police, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Forth Valley, the Scottish Ambulance Service and Falkirk Council social services and housing departments—not forgetting the community. They all deserve praise for the way in which the multi-agency approach has been handled.

The First Minister: I thank everybody who responded so promptly to ensure that the fault was repaired quickly and that the process to safely reconnect customers, which required engineers to visit all affected properties, was able to happen in the timescale in which it did. That process is now close to completion. The reason for a few homes not being back on the mains gas supply is due to engineers not being able to access properties. I am advised that, as of 7 pm on 4 December, that number was reported to be 80 properties.

Everybody involved made a Herculean effort, to use Angus MacDonald's term, and is to be congratulated. The fault was obviously inconvenient for everybody who was affected, but it could have been much worse in terms of the time taken to fix it. My thanks go to everybody who ensured that the work was done so quickly.

Mossmorran Natural Gas Liquids Plant (Unplanned Flaring)

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The First Minister knows of the misery that is being inflicted on the people who live in the shadow of the Mossmorran ethylene plant, which is operated by ExxonMobil Chemicals Ltd—one of the world's most notorious corporate promoters of climate denial. ExxonMobil has failed to maintain the plant and, as a result, local residents endure regular unplanned flaring. The plant's operating permits have been breached, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency has issued final warning notices and, in view of health impacts, NHS Fife has called the flaring "unacceptable".

The plant is currently shut down, but a restart is imminent, and the Scottish Greens have called for the community to be given a break at least over the holidays. So far, ExxonMobil has committed only not to restarting from Christmas eve to boxing day. Will the First Minister join me in calling on the operators to commit to no flaring over the entire Christmas and new year period?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): On Patrick Harvie's specific question, I will undertake to ensure that the suggestion is discussed with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, and that it is, in turn, discussed with ExxonMobil. I do not think that that is an unreasonable request from the local community. I appreciate their very understandable concerns and anxieties about flaring at the Mossmorran complex.

The frequency of unplanned flaring recently has been completely unacceptable, and SEPA and the Health and Safety Executive are monitoring developments closely as the plant restarts. That has to be done with minimum impact and in a way that reduces the anxiety of the local community. I am happy to take that request forward, and to feed back to Patrick Harvie once I have had a chance to do so.

Patrick Harvie: The community will think that the request is more than reasonable; they will think that it is absolutely necessary that we get that commitment from the plant operator before the Christmas holidays.

On Channel 4's climate debate last week, the First Minister stated:

"We are in the transition".

Mossmorran is the second biggest polluter in Scotland, and many local people in Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath know that that is not the future that their community deserves. They demand climate action, to see the just transition taking place now, and to have a green new deal for Fife.

Can the First Minister tell the communities that surround Mossmorran, and the plant's workforce, when a just transition for Cowdenbeath will actually be under way? What investment will be provided for an alternative future and for lasting green jobs, rather than corporations profiting from wrecking people's lives and our climate?

The First Minister: The just transition is under way. It was exactly in order to look at the justness of the transition that we established the just transition commission. Currently, 170 or so jobs are provided at Mossmorran. Of course we all want to move to a greener energy system, but it is important that we do so in a way that provides new jobs, which is why we are investing so much in support for renewable energy. We need to accelerate that. I am absolutely in agreement with Patrick Harvie about that.

However, in terms of the transition, we have seen from past economic transformations what happens when we do not take people with us and instead leave them behind. We must not repeat those mistakes, which is why accelerating the transition, but doing so fairly and justly, is so important.

Police Scotland

4. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Police Scotland is in crisis once again. With the resignation today of Susan Deacon, that is now three chief constables, three chairs and four chief executives in just a few short years.

Today we have learned that the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland thinks that the Scottish Police Authority neither supports nor scrutinises the police, and yet the Cabinet Secretary for Justice thinks that the organisation is in a good place. Is not that just a toxic mix of chaos and complacency?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): No. I have to say to Willie Rennie that the police are not "in crisis", and that to say so does a disservice to the police officers all around our country who work so hard to keep us safe.

The chair of the SPA has tendered her resignation. She has her own reasons for doing so, but as I said a few moments ago, the vice-chair will take over the leadership of the Scottish Police Authority until a replacement is appointed, through the public appointments process.

In the meantime, the SPA will get on with the job of responding to the recommendations that have been made by the Parliament's Justice Committee and by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland, and will continue the improvements that are being made to governance and accountability.

We will continue to support the police officers of our country in doing the fantastic job that they do, day in and day out, in keeping crime levels low and ensuring that the public of Scotland are kept safe. We should all thank them for doing so.

Willie Rennie: Tell that to the one third of police officers who are turning up to work mentally unwell. The Government is not supporting the police; that is the last thing it is doing. The First Minister is in cloud-cuckoo-land if she is satisfied with the situation.

Last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice said that he was "very satisfied" with police mental health, but only 3 per cent of police officers agreed with him. This week, the First Minister said that violent crime is down, when it is on the rise. Now, the First Minister tells us that the centralised functions of the Scottish Police Authority are sound. The Government is way out of touch and way out of its depth. Ministers appointed all those people—every single one of them—and have left us with a mess of name calling and crisis.

For how many more years will we have to put up with the chaos? Centralisation has undermined our police: why will the First Minister not just admit that she is wrong, and scrap the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012?

The First Minister: Let me deal with the issues that I think Willie Rennie raised in that question. Firstly, I outlined to him last week the number of initiatives that are being taken forward to support the health and wellbeing of our police officers. The SNP Government has invested in, and supported, 1,000 extra police officers on the streets in Scotland, while police officer numbers elsewhere in the UK were being slashed. We have delivered the best pay rise for police in any police service in the UK. We will continue to support our police officers to do the fantastic work that they do to get crime levels down, and to keep the public of Scotland safe.

I have to say that I had thought that Willie Rennie might—on the morning after the leader of the Liberal Democrats was forced to apologise for the Liberal Democrats' support of Tory austerity, which has had such a damaging impact on our public services—have had a bit more humility when talking about public services.

CS Wind UK (Job Losses)

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): CS Wind in Campbeltown is set to pay off 80 per cent of its workforce, with a quarter of them having been made redundant earlier this week. That has a terrible impact on the workers, their families and the whole community in Kintyre. What will the Scottish Government do to ensure that developers include local content and contracts that are let in Scotland, in order to ensure that we all benefit from our natural resources?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Obviously, the situation with CS Wind is extremely concerning and regrettable. My thoughts are with the workforce of that company. Partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—support has been provided for the workforce, which I understand has been received positively.

More broadly, the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, Fergus Ewing, has already convened a summit in Campbeltown to consider the implications of that and other recent economic developments. A working group has been established to focus on the actions that we need to take to generate economic activity in Campbeltown, because we understand the blow that such a closure and redundancies on that scale strikes in a community of that size. Fergus Ewing will lead the work in the months to come, and will be happy to keep Parliament updated.

Children and Young People (Mental Health Treatment)

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): How many children and young people in Scotland have to wait more than a year for mental health treatment?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Too many children wait more than a year for mental health treatment. That is why we are investing £250 million in improvements to child and adolescent mental health services to reduce waiting times in the specialist services and—crucially—to build up community services. That includes getting counsellors into schools—that work is on-going—and establishing the new community wellbeing service, so that more services and resources are available for young people in the community, which will ensure that specialist services are there for those who need them. That work is extremely important, it is backed by investment and the Government will continue to take it forward.

Poverty

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): What is the First Minister's response to the recently published Office for National Statistics report, which has cut life

expectancy for children who are born in the United Kingdom? The report of the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, which was published earlier this year, accused the Tory Government of the “systematic immiseration” of a significant part of the British population. The findings of the ONS report coincide with the introduction of the Tory party’s austerity and welfare reform obsession.

How many more authoritative reports does the First Minister believe that it will take to shame Tory politicians into admitting that their Government policies have forced many people in my constituency, and across Scotland and the UK, into poverty?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The findings of the ONS report are deeply concerning and alarming. They illustrate the fact that austerity, welfare cuts and policies such as universal credit and the bedroom tax have all helped to push people in general, and children in particular, into poverty. The Resolution Foundation has also said that the Conservative manifesto plans at this election risk taking child poverty in Scotland to a 60-year high. That, in my view, is why we need to get rid of a Conservative Government at this election, because I do not think that we will ever shame the Conservatives into doing the right thing on poverty. We need to get rid of them completely, and Scotland has an opportunity to do that next week.

Munitions Manufacture (Funding)

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): After a long-running freedom of information saga, I confirmed that in 2009 Chemring Energetics UK successfully applied for Scottish Enterprise funding to invest in site expansion to, in its own words,

“take advantage of market moves that have resulted in gaps in the manufacture of explosives”.

The Chemring site in question specialises in components for, again in its own words,

“rocket propulsion systems, release of airborne weapons systems, missile guidance systems, arming units, and military demolition”.

The First Minister has repeatedly claimed that the Scottish Government does not fund the manufacture of munitions. Is it seriously her position that funding the expansion of a bomb-making factory is different from funding the direct manufacture of bombs?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am happy to respond to Ross Greer in more detail about the specific company, but it is absolutely the Scottish Government’s position that it does not provide funding for the manufacture of munitions—either directly or via Scottish Enterprise support.

Support that is provided is focused on helping firms to diversify and develop non-military applications for their technology. That is the position of Scottish Enterprise for all companies that apply to it for funding. On the specific company that Ross Greer has raised, I am happy to respond to him in more detail in writing.

National Health Service Staffing (Freedom of Movement)

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Is the First Minister aware of the comments that were made this week by the independent think tank the Nuffield Trust, which warned that ending freedom of movement of European Union citizens poses a “very real risk” to NHS staffing numbers? Does the First Minister agree that Scotland needs to escape Brexit and protect our public services?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We should take the warning from the Nuffield Trust very seriously. We know that ending freedom of movement will have an impact on our ability to grow our working-age population, and that that will perhaps have a disproportionate impact on the ability of the NHS and other public services to attract and recruit the staff that they need. Beyond that, ending freedom of movement sends the wrong signal about the kind of country that we are. We want to be a country that is open, outward looking and welcoming. We should do that in line with our values as a country, but we need to be able to do that to attract the people whom we need to have a growing and thriving economy.

I hope that all parties in this chamber will reject policies such as ending freedom of movement and creating a hostile environment, and that they will be determined to keep ensuring that Scotland is the kind of country that attracts people from all over the world to make the amazing contribution that immigrants make to our economy and to our society.

Drug Deaths

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Last weekend, three people lost their lives in the community of Lochee in Dundee due to drugs. Drugs workers predict that Scotland’s drug deaths rate—the worst in the world—will rise again this year. In August, Dundee’s drugs commission laid out 10 immediate, emergency recommendations, but not one of those recommendations—including the life-saving recommendation on same-day prescribing—has been implemented. I do not understand why.

For the sake of families across Dundee, will the First Minister urge NHS Tayside and Dundee City Council to implement those live-saving recommendations as soon as possible?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing has already engaged with the Dundee drugs commission and it is right that he has done so. The commission made several important recommendations. It is important that we make progress on those recommendations as quickly as that is feasible.

I am more than happy to ask Joe FitzPatrick to write to the member with an update on that work as well as on the progress of the work of our wider drug deaths task force. It is undoubtedly one of the most important issues that we face. We are determined to introduce changes in how we deal with drug misuse and how we support the users of drugs to ensure that we make a difference to those figures.

Scottish Police Authority

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): In answer to Willie Rennie's question on the Scottish Police Authority, the First Minister said that there was no crisis. In her resignation letter, the SPA chair said:

"the governance and accountability arrangements for policing in Scotland are fundamentally flawed, in structure, culture and practice".

Given those comments, will the First Minister and her Cabinet Secretary for Justice carry out an immediate review to learn what has gone wrong with the Scottish National Party's centralisation project, why another senior figure in public life has quit and what can be done to fix her Government's mess?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Susan Deacon is entitled to her opinion on that and I would be very happy to hear the basis on which she has reached that conclusion. However, I do not agree with that conclusion.

There has been no shortage of reviews of and inquiries into the Scottish Police Authority. Recommendations have been made and implemented. We see the improvements that have been made, which are recognised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. We will continue to take forward those improvements, listening to the views of Susan Deacon and others.

We do a better service to our police officers, who are working so hard across the country, if we support them in that work and support the Scottish Police Authority to get on with its central job of scrutiny and accountability.

Disability Employment Gap

5. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish

Government is doing to reduce the disability employment gap. (S5F-03763)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): In December 2018, we published "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Employment Action Plan", which sets out the steps that we will take to reduce the disability employment gap in Scotland by at least half. That includes setting a target for the employment of disabled people in the Scottish Government's workforce, as published in "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Scottish Government Recruitment and Retention Plan for Disabled People 2019". Although there has been a small reduction in the disability employment gap in recent years, we recognise that there is still a significant amount of work to do. We will publish the first annual progress report on the action plan early next year.

Stuart McMillan: The First Minister will be aware that Sunday 1 December marked international day of persons with disabilities. I welcome the Scottish Parliament's new powers over disability benefits, which mean that Scotland can put dignity and respect at the heart of our welfare system. Does the First Minister agree that providing more modern apprenticeships for people with additional support needs, possibly tied in with environmental projects, could be one way of increasing the employment level of people with disabilities?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree. Through the modern apprenticeship equality action plan, we offer enhanced contribution rates for modern apprentices who self-identify as disabled. In 2018-19, 3,700 modern apprenticeship starts identified as having an impairment, health condition or learning difficulty. That figure is up from 990 in 2015-16, when the plan was introduced. More than 60 per cent of modern apprentice frameworks now include outcomes or units that reference low carbon, sustainability or energy efficiency. There is still a lot of work to be done, and we will continue to work with employers to further reduce the disability employment gap.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Does the First Minister admit that she is failing Scottish disabled people, given that Scotland, with a disability employment gap of 35.8 per cent, is woefully dragging behind the United Kingdom, where the figure is 28.9 per cent?

The First Minister: As I said, the disability employment gap in Scotland has reduced. The reduction is too small, but the gap has reduced from more than 37 per cent in 2016 to 35.5 per cent now. We want to drive that figure further down, which is why we are taking the range of actions that are set out in the action plan, some of which I have touched on today.

Given some of the pressures that have been put on people with disabilities as a result of welfare cuts, all of us must recognise our responsibility to treat disabled people with dignity and to support them into employment, wherever possible. We certainly take that lesson seriously, and I think that it could well be learned by the current Conservative Government at Westminster.

Cancer Diagnoses

6. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to Macmillan Cancer Support's study, which suggests that there has been a 15 per cent increase in cancer diagnoses since 2015. (S5F-03770)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank Macmillan Cancer Support for its important report. Increasing numbers of people are being diagnosed with cancer, partly due to the ageing population, but also due to improved detection. The detect cancer early and screening programmes are increasing the proportion of cases of breast, bowel and lung cancers that are detected at early stages. We are working to ensure that we have the right staff in place to respond to that. NHS Scotland's staffing levels are higher than ever, and we are working in partnership with Macmillan to ensure that every cancer patient has access to a dedicated support worker, which will free up clinical staff time for healthcare.

It is our ambition—it should be everyone's ambition—to beat cancer and to support every person who is fighting it. I am very encouraged that we see a continued downward trend in cancer mortality rates.

Jamie Greene: I thank the First Minister for those words. Macmillan's figures show that 250,000 people are now living with cancer in Scotland, and that number is expected to rise to 300,000 by 2025. I know that the issue has affected many of us in the chamber. We commend the hard work and care that our staff in the national health service and in the third sector provide to those who are living with cancer.

However, the numbers speak for themselves. In a recent cancer patient survey, 40 per cent of patients said that they felt that they were not receiving enough care or support. Sixty per cent of nurses say that they felt under too much pressure, and there has been a 26 per cent increase in the number of nurse vacancies, which, undeniably, is adding to the pressure on staff.

Janice Preston, who heads Macmillan in Scotland, said that staff are

"struggling under the weight of the ever-increasing numbers of people who need their help ... It's heart-breaking to hear

from staff who feel they're failing cancer patients because they just don't have enough time."

How does the First Minister respond to those comments? Why does she think that so many cancer patients feel that they are not getting the care and support that they need?

The First Minister: Every cancer patient should get the quality of care, but also the quality of support—I think that is an important distinction—that they need. Staff numbers in our NHS are generally at a record high: we saw that in the figures that were published this week. In terms of cancer specifically, since 2006, there has been an 80 per cent increase in the number of consultant oncologists working in our NHS, and an almost 50 per cent—48.7 per cent—increase in the number of consultant radiologists. We need to continue to increase the number of staff in our health service.

In my original answer, I mentioned the Scottish Government's partnership with Macmillan. That is a pioneering partnership and we are the first in the United Kingdom to do that and to make sure that we are jointly investing so that every cancer patient has access to a dedicated support worker. That was widely and warmly welcomed when the health secretary and I announced it with Macmillan recently.

The partnership is important for two reasons: it gives cancer patients access to the emotional support that they need—as the member rightly says, there is not one of us in this chamber who does not know, through family and friends, the emotional impact that cancer has. Crucially, that kind of service also helps to free up clinicians' time so that they can focus on the clinical and healthcare aspects of treatment.

These are important issues and I thank Jamie Greene for raising them today. The increase in the number of clinical workers in our health services and the pioneering project and partnership with Macmillan will make a real, tangible and meaningful difference to cancer patients in the coming years.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The First Minister will be well aware that positron emission tomography scanners are a vital tool in cancer treatment, but those scanners are all concentrated south of the Highland line. Will the First Minister support my campaign to have a PET scanner located within the Highlands and Islands to help cancer diagnoses, and to send a message about sharing health services throughout the whole of Scotland and avoiding centralisation?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I absolutely understand the importance of PET scanning. We want to make sure that people have access to that kind of scanning and, of course, access to treatment as close to home as possible.

We will consider all of those issues in our capital investment programme. I am not aware of the specifics of the member's campaign, but I am happy to have a look at that and for the health secretary to discuss those issues with the local health board.

There have been a range of initiatives in recent years to look at the provision of cancer services. Those initiatives are about making sure that people get access to services as close to home as possible, and at the same time, recognising that people need the highest quality specialist care, wherever that is best provided. I am happy to ask the health secretary to liaise with the member about the specific provision of a scanner in his region.

ScotRail (Fares)

7. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that ScotRail fares will increase by 2.4 per cent in January. (S5F-03764)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): No increase in rail fares is welcome for the travelling public but this Government has taken action to keep fares down. Regulated ScotRail peak fares are capped at the level of the retail price index, and regulated off-peak fares at 1 per cent below RPI. That makes fares, on average, 1 per cent cheaper than they are in the rest of Great Britain.

Colin Smyth: Under the First Minister's Government, regulated rail fares have rocketed by 54 per cent. That is a massive £1,500 hike for a season ticket for a worker who travels between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Under the current Abellio franchise alone, it has gone up by 13 per cent. Given the fact that, since the first year of the franchise, it has never hit a punctuality target, why are Scotland's long-suffering rail passengers being hit by yet another fare hike? Why does the First Minister think that passengers, and not the private rail firms, should have to pay the price of Abellio's and this Government's failure in running our railways?

The First Minister: Of course, two thirds of the cost of running the railway is already met through the Scottish Government's subsidy to our rail services. Because of the capping arrangements on rail fares, on average, fares are 20 per cent cheaper in Scotland than they are elsewhere in Great Britain. No increase in rail fares is welcome. That is why we take that action to keep them as low as possible. We will continue to do that, just as we will continue to ensure that the franchise holder delivers on its commitments to improve the quality of service. We will continue to take forward longer term plans to look at the possibility of a public sector bidder for the franchise in future. We will

continue to take those hard actions. They are right and they balance the need to have proper funding in our rail service with keeping fares for the travelling public as low as possible.

12:45

Meeting suspended.

12:51

On resuming—

Art in Action Campaign

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-19957, in the name of Claire Baker, on the Scottish Contemporary Art Network's art in action campaign. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Contemporary Art Network's Art in Action campaign, which took place over the summer of 2019 and involved artists from the Mid Scotland and Fife region and across Scotland meeting with MSPs to champion the role of visual art in communities; recognises the importance and contribution of art and artists to Scotland's society, culture and economy; notes that the SCAN Visual Arts Manifesto calls on policy makers to place culture at the heart of representative policy and decision-making and for longer-term public investment to support the creative and professional development of artists, workers and organisations, and recognises that the forthcoming Budget and the Culture Strategy offer an opportunity for debate about the nature of arts and cultural funding.

12:51

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): We may be a select few this lunchtime, but I am delighted to lead this debate, which recognises the Scottish Contemporary Art Network's art in action campaign.

Some consider that a week before the general election might not be the easiest time to focus discussion on contemporary art. However, this debate comes at a fortuitous time. The Scottish Government has indicated that its culture strategy is imminent, the Scottish budget is on the horizon and internal discussion will, no doubt, be taking place on priorities. The Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee is about to publish its report on arts funding. This is a good time to raise the profile of arts and culture, and I thank all the MSPs who have signed the motion.

There are many building blocks to a better country, and one of those is culture. The Government's national performance framework recognises culture and creativity as an outcome. A healthy cultural infrastructure has a role to play in achieving all the national performance framework outcomes. Culture and creativity are not an add-on; they are part and parcel of how we live our lives.

The Scottish Contemporary Art Network, which is known as SCAN, is a member-led network that is committed to championing, cultivating and supporting the contemporary art sector in

Scotland. Its core aims are that the role, impact and benefits of contemporary visual art are properly recognised as central to our society, culture and economy, and that those who create and work in the sector are valued and supported in their ambitions.

During the summer, SCAN invited MSPs to be involved in the art in action campaign. That was a valuable opportunity for MSPs to visit a local gallery or studio and to hear directly about the concerns of artists who are trying to make a living; the connectivity of art to the local community; the value of contemporary art to the local economy; the power and potential of art to transform people's lives and support community cohesion; and the funding pressures that individual artists and organisations face.

My visit was to the Fife village of Strathkinness, which hosts the 201 Telephone Box gallery. The gallery, which sits in a residential street, is a former red telephone box that has been converted into a contemporary art gallery in a project led by local artist and curator Lada Wilson. Members of the local community and the Strathkinness Community Trust came along on the visit. It was clear that the gallery is valued in the village and enables people to connect with contemporary village art literally on their doorstep, prompting interest, discussion and conversation. The phone box was on BT's list for removal but, following its adoption by the trust, Lada Wilson drove the project to convert it into a gallery and now curates the programme. All exhibitions are complemented by an artist talk or presentation and sometimes a workshop.

My visit was just one of the visits that took place the length and breadth of the country, with 21 MSPs from all parties going to places where contemporary art is created to meet artists and to galleries where contemporary art is shown. Colleagues visited artists and art workers in venues as varied as Platform in Easterhouse, Cample Line in rural Thornhill, the brand-new Circus Artspace in Inverness, RIG Arts in a former tobacco factory in Greenock, the Pier Arts Centre in Stromness and Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art. I could go on and on, and I hope to hear of members' experiences later in the debate.

Scotland boasts a contemporary art scene that is lauded around the world. The artwork that contemporary artists create, make and facilitate can feed long-term change in our communities, building empathy and resilience, creating a space in which people from all backgrounds can explore new ideas and sparking a wide range of economic activity. There are many examples of the social benefits that artists bring.

At the start of the new parliamentary year, I hosted a reception in the Parliament for MSPs, to

recognise the art in action campaign and hear from artists about their experience of working in Scotland. It is difficult for contemporary artists to survive, to continue to produce work and to develop their talent, and we heard a call for politicians not only to value art but to invest more in it. Some of us heard words of wisdom from the advice bar, and we all got to hear the wonderful Karine Polwart sing.

The campaign demonstrated the impact that high-quality art has on local economies, inclusion of diverse heritages and cultures, environmental awareness, improving health outcomes and much more. Crucially, the campaign raised awareness of the inherent value of culture and creative activity to our nation's wellbeing and the need for progressive investment to unlock that potential for generations to come.

Now that MSPs have had the positive experience of their visits and have heard about the value of contemporary art, the question is how we support and value the work that is going on in Scotland when it comes to decision making.

At the end of 2017, SCAN, along with the Scottish Artists Union and Engage Scotland, launched the visual arts manifesto. Among its asks are

“longer term public investment that supports the creative and professional development of artists, workers and organisations”.

During its recent inquiry into arts funding, the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee heard evidence about the challenges for artists and cultural freelancers in making a consistent living. Submissions to the committee covered low income, insecure work and the additional pressures on women artists who have no maternity pay. Support for a universal basic income was expressed.

The committee also heard views on the current funding arrangements and the importance of long-term models to support career progression. There was support for committing a greater proportion of spending to culture—currently just 0.2 per cent of the Scottish budget goes to its arms-length funding body. There were calls for an increase in core funding and for other budgets to invest in the arts, whether the funding comes from public spending or private investment.

Art in action campaigners ask that a percentage of every major funding initiative in relevant policy areas be invested in creating a specific role for art, to match the ambition in the draft culture strategy. That would be just one way to recognise the skills and experience of artists and the cultural workforce and to invest strategically and sustainably for a more vibrant, innovative and resilient nation.

Contemporary visual art can support our understanding of the world. It can look to address some of the big debates and conflicts of our time, and it seeks to interpret the human condition. It can make us smile and think. It can provoke a reaction. In a time of uncertainty and division, art has the ability to ask questions and bring people together. This year's Turner prize—an award that is often seen as career defining—is being split between the four finalists, at their request, in what the artists described as a “symbolic gesture of cohesion.”

I will close with the Turner artists' words, which encapsulate the important role that art can play in society:

“At this time of political crisis in Britain and much of the world, when there is already so much that divides and isolates people and communities, we feel strongly motivated to use the occasion of the prize to make a collective statement in the name of commonality, multiplicity and solidarity—in art as in society.”

12:58

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I congratulate Claire Baker on lodging the motion and securing this important and timely members' business debate.

Claire Baker mentioned the culture strategy, the budget and the inquiry of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, of which she and I are members. The debate is timely, notwithstanding that it is happening a week before an election.

During the summer, I, with other members, took part in a visit in my constituency to RIG Arts Ltd in Greenock. I spoke to Karen Orr—Karen and her husband, Jason, are the leading lights behind RIG Arts. RIG Arts is at the heart of culture and creativity in Inverclyde. It works out of the old tobacco warehouse in Greenock, which Claire Baker has mentioned. It has a wide and varied history. It was a tobacco warehouse, then it was a billet for Canadian soldiers during world war two, and it is now the home of RIG Arts, which is providing creative opportunities in the constituency.

RIG Arts uses that old but beautiful building in an amazing way. Some areas are used as prop stores, while another area is set out as a cinema, with one side of the internal wall being used as a space to show films. There are also areas for artists to paint and to do their creative work. Another area is set aside for music—I am led to believe that the acoustics are outstanding. This year, the final concert of the Galoshans festival, which begins Inverclyde's winter festival programme, took place inside the tobacco warehouse. It was a genuinely wonderful occasion—the acoustics were great—that

highlighted the flexibility and the opportunity that the building can offer the Inverclyde community.

SCAN's website tells us that the Scottish Contemporary Arts Network is a member-led organisation that was set up to champion, connect and cultivate the contemporary visual art sector in Scotland. I very much welcome the art in action campaign, which saw 21 MSPs from across the parties visit artists and organisations around Scotland throughout the summer. Aspects that were touched on include regeneration of local economies, inclusion of diverse cultures, environmental awareness and improvement of health outcomes for individuals—matters in which RIG Arts genuinely excels.

In Greenock, a wide regeneration project that includes River Clyde Homes is taking place in the Broomhill area, where a new health centre is being built through NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde with support from the Scottish Government. RIG Arts was there at the outset with its cultural input. More than £50 million of investment is going into that part of town—the regeneration is welcome on its own—but the project is also about the multigenerational activity, diverse cultural elements and environmental awareness that RIG Arts is bringing to the area. That will, ultimately, have a positive impact on the health of many people who live there—notwithstanding that we will have a brand new £22 million health centre.

I will touch on another aspect in relation to the arts. Many members will be aware of George Wyllie, who stayed in Gourrock. George's work has been on show across Scotland over many years. The cabinet secretary is well aware that there will be a new cruise ship terminal in Greenock built with funding from the Glasgow city region deal project. The building will have a George Wyllie area to bring art to anyone who goes into the building and to encourage more people to go to it. Therefore, it will not be just a terminal for people coming in; there will be a tourism offer so that people will go and see it. Many members will be aware of George Wyllie's clock with two legs outside Buchanan bus station, and of the question marks along the River Clyde, from Port Glasgow to Langbank. They are part of his offer to the art world.

I am conscious of the time, so I will close. I again congratulate Claire Baker on securing the debate, and I welcome the SCAN art in action campaign. I wish it every success.

13:04

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I first thank my colleague Claire Baker for bringing the debate to the chamber. Unfortunately, I was not able to visit an

art in action project during the summer, but I have made contact with SCAN and plan to make a visit in the future.

As we know, art is not only about beautiful pieces of artwork in a gallery; it has the ability to transform the way we express our emotions, communicate ideas and interact with our environment. Art in action embodies that by addressing three key areas: art being very much part of our everyday lives, art acting as a catalyst for a richer society, and art being a crucial part of decision making.

We know that art can transform the mental health and wellbeing of many of our fellow citizens. As part of art in action's work, just up the road from my constituency, in Bonnyrigg, artists from Artlink Edinburgh and the Lothians—specifically Artlink's Ideas Team and its sensory workshops—have created artworks that work alongside weekly sensory workshops for people who have profound and multiple learning difficulties. The artists use a range of sensory art pieces including ambient sound, vibration, projectors, lasers and mirror balls, which are used to create beautiful and stimulating environments.

As I have said before in the chamber, I believe that social prescribing could have a transformative impact on our national health service. Having seen it work for people with learning difficulties in particular, I believe that it could also be used to tackle social isolation and a range of mental health issues. Stronger recognition of that value is important and will require bold action through Government policy.

In 2017, SCAN submitted evidence to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee for its inquiry on arts funding. It urged the Government and funders to think more strategically about supporting the sector. SCAN argues that decision makers should think differently about art, and that they should support and invest in the sector, which can bring real value to Scottish society at national level and at local level. At local level, funding is sometimes very squeezed.

The Scottish household survey found that 84 per cent of Scottish people say that their local area would lose something of value if it lost its arts funding and cultural activities, so it is important for Creative Scotland to consider rural and other areas very carefully when it makes funding decisions.

Scottish Borders Housing Association invited Impact Arts to develop an art master plan for the Stonefield area of Hawick as it undergoes a period of regeneration. Impact Arts, which has a stand in the garden lobby today, is demonstrating its strong ethos of partnership working. It collaborates with a

variety of partners from the third sector, local government, national Government, prisons and housing associations. It is working with partners including my local council—Scottish Borders Council—to develop a plan for regeneration of Hawick, and is conducting in-depth consultation and research. That work will culminate in the creation of an arts master plan that will cover key themes and priorities including identifying artworks, landscaping, communal space and creative play spaces.

We know that art has the ability to transform lives and to bring positive social and economic changes. Through campaigns such as SCAN's art in action, which is helping people with learning difficulties, and through the work of Impact Arts in the Borders, which is offering a new approach to housing regeneration, art has a pivotal role to play.

I want to make the important point that we need to ensure that that great work is funded properly. The Scottish Government needs to fund our arts sector properly in order to fulfil the aims of the draft cultural strategy. A properly funded sector will be able to deliver excellent projects, while supporting fragile arts infrastructure and the livelihoods of artists at national and local levels.

13:09

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): As others have done, I thank Claire Baker for bringing the motion and, indeed, for hosting the reception a wee bit earlier in the year, which she mentioned. I also had the opportunity to take part in a couple of visits over the summer and I thank SCAN and its colleagues for welcoming me.

The first of those visits was to the Platform in Easterhouse, where that local community resource had collaborated with the Glasgow Women's Library to explore the complex and challenging theme of what "home" means when a person is of more than one place, in an exhibition called "Home Where Home Is Not". Because it worked across the two sites, it brought together women who were involved in both projects and who might otherwise never have met one another, let alone collaborated on such work.

Later in the year, I went to the Glasgow Sculpture Studios, which I have to admit I had never visited, although I was aware of the facility. I was a wee bit blown away by the amount of work that I saw going on there—the people there were proud to inform me that it is the biggest arts production facility in Scotland. I was introduced to artists who work in contemporary sculptural practice. The visits that SCAN, through the art in action campaign, has organised with 21 MSPs across the country have helped to bring recognition of the role that contemporary art plays

across social policy and have underlined the need for sustained investment so that future generations can benefit from that cultural resource.

A key message from the campaign is that "Art is an essential part of our lives". It is important to recognise that art is about more than just what is possible to commercialise and its economic impact. We can measure a significant economic impact, but the value of art, and people's access to enjoying and contributing to it and expressing themselves creatively, is about far more than just its economic or commercial impact.

The work that I saw at the Glasgow Sculpture Studios is playing a big part in building strong relationships between the community, artists and the local environment through a range of projects and workshops. One project called "channels" helps to provide personal development programmes for young people between the ages of 16 and 25. Providing those workshops, in which young people can develop their personal skills, talents and confidence, simultaneously contributes to our creative sectors and improves the lives of young people.

On the tour, I met James Rigler and Kate V Robertson who are tenants in the studios. James told me that Glasgow Sculpture Studios are attractive for artists because of the resources that are made available—which otherwise they would never be able to afford—and said that the organisation fosters a spirit of collaboration between artists of different disciplines. Kate told me that she had been able to innovate in her work in ways that would not have been possible without access to the studios. She is also a founding member of the Sculpture Placement Group, which allows art works to be borrowed and displayed in community settings and commercial and public spaces, instead of sitting in art studios. That allows art to be tangible and real in people's everyday lives.

Those examples have a social justice aspect. The visual arts have been moving more in the direction of media that people can access on a laptop, rather than the expensive facilities that they would not have access to without places such as the sculpture studios. If we want the visual arts and contemporary art to be for everybody, rather than an exclusive occupation for those who can afford access to it, we need to address the funding issues.

The visual arts manifesto has already been mentioned, so I will not go into it in detail, but we should recognise that it asks all of us here at Holyrood to involve ourselves in the wider discussion about arts funding and support, which need to be sustained so that Scotland can be a place where cultural and artistic creativity can flourish and everybody can find an opportunity to

express their talent. I again thank Claire Baker for bringing the debate.

13:14

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): I am very pleased that we have had the opportunity to celebrate the Scottish Contemporary Art Network's art in action campaign and the important role that art plays in public life. I congratulate Claire Baker on securing this debate; I particularly liked her reference to culture as a building block for a better Scotland.

It has always been a pleasure to promote and highlight the excellence of Scottish culture, including the excellence of the art produced in Scotland.

That excellence has been clearly highlighted through the art in action campaign.

I have always been clear that the arts should be funded for their own sake, to help ensure that individual artists are supported to produce art for its own sake. Arts funding should provide opportunities for individuals and communities to enjoy and embrace culture, and to experience great art. Of course, we all know that the arts can also transform society and empower individuals. One of the strengths of the art in action campaign is that as well as showcasing high-quality art, it has shown the myriad different contributions that art can make to local communities.

I have enjoyed learning about the works that have been highlighted by the campaign, and it has been fascinating to hear about the way in which artists have worked with communities through projects in not only galleries and studios but all kinds of venues, inside and outside, from the seashore to a bus.

We have just heard from Patrick Harvie about the work on "Home Where Home is Not" at the Platform in Easterhouse and the Glasgow Women's Library, as well as the always-inspiring Glasgow Sculpture Studios. Stuart McMillan talked about RIG Arts and the tobacco warehouse in Greenock. I was very pleased to hear about the opportunity for a George Wyllie exhibition space at the proposed new terminal.

I am very supportive of many of the key messages of the art in action campaign. The campaign seeks to highlight the role that art plays in our lives. I absolutely agree that art is, and should be, an integral part of our lives, and I welcome any opportunity to celebrate the important role of art in communities.

The campaign also seeks to highlight the economic contribution of art, its role in our wider prosperity and the role that it can play in long-term

change. I am very clear that culture has the potential to transform lives, and I thought that that was very ably demonstrated by the examples that Rachael Hamilton gave. Art in action generally should be a central consideration in our goals in so many ways, including in relation to reducing inequality and improving wellbeing.

Funding for the arts is always an important question in discussions such as the one that we are having today. The campaign comments on the percentage of the Scottish Government budget that goes to Creative Scotland. Of course, spend on culture by the Scottish Government extends far beyond Creative Scotland, and spend on art comes from departments beyond the culture portfolio. I have long been clear that funding for the arts should not just come from specific culture funding, but should leverage in funding from other areas of public spending. That is both necessary and justified, because culture benefits so many other areas.

An initiative such as SCAN's art in action is always welcome, because it not only highlights artistic excellence but shows the very real value of culture beyond that, in contributing to improving lives in our communities in so many different ways. It is not about thinking about art in a transactional way; it is about celebrating art in and of itself and ensuring that excellent art is available for everyone to enjoy. It is also about recognising and promoting the much wider role that art can play and, importantly, that art practice plays.

We would all like there to be more money in the culture budget but, of course, that money has to come from somewhere. That is why I reject a silo approach to the culture budget and will continue to take a smart and pragmatic route, ensuring that we focus on the total impact of the money, not which budget it comes from.

Culture also benefits from spending on, for example, regeneration, city deals and justice and education. I am happy to give a few examples of that. Much of the tourism budget for the year of coasts and waters will go directly to artists and artistic activities. The south of Scotland economic partnership is helping to deliver a fresh approach to economic development in the south of Scotland, which has included the provision of funding for the Trimontium museum in Melrose. A wide range of organisations, including many public sector organisations such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise, provided funding to XpoNorth, Scotland's leading creative industries festival, which took place in July this year. Those are just a few demonstrations of the need for us to be pragmatic and recognise that funding for the arts goes beyond the culture budget.

As has been mentioned, we will publish our culture strategy soon, and I would like to highlight

the strategy's themes, as all three of them have great relevance to today's debate. The motion mentions support for

"the creative and professional development of artists, workers and organisations",

and the strategy's theme of "Strengthening culture" will engage with that issue. It represents a significant opportunity to rethink the boundaries between public, private and community so that new ways of working together in genuine partnership to support culture can be explored. That includes the provision of support through advocacy, championing and investing in culture, as well as brokering relationships within the sector and with wider industry, which is particularly relevant to contemporary art.

The "Transforming through culture" theme is focused on the role that culture, including visual art, can play in contributing to other policy outcomes, making art and culture central to those issues. The cultural sector provides services that are critical to the success, health, happiness, wealth and reputation of Scotland. The culture strategy will demonstrate the huge benefits that cultural services offer in tackling inequalities in our communities.

The third theme of the culture strategy is "Empowering through culture", which celebrates culture in our communities—culture as an essential part of public and civic life. Like the other two themes of the culture strategy, that is very much what the art in action campaign has been about.

A few weeks ago, we all received a beautiful work of art from the campaign by the artist Ruth Ewan. It is both a piece of art to be treasured and, through the words of Mary Brooksbank, an important message for us to absorb. I welcome the discussion we have had today and I hope all of us will keep Mary Brooksbank's message with us as we think about the challenges that we face as parliamentarians and as we continue to promote and celebrate the role that art plays in our lives and in the lives of our communities and the constituencies that we represent.

13:21

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

Trunk Road Network (Safety)

1. **Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it can help improve safety on the trunk road network. (S5O-03865)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Scotland has some of the safest roads in the world. In spite of that success, each collision or injury on the road network is traumatic for everyone involved, and more remains to be done to reduce the number of collisions. Through joint working with partners in other parts of the sector, we have achieved substantial reductions in the number of accidents and casualties as a result of our targeted programme of investment in our trunk road network.

Scotland's road safety framework sets out our wider programme to allow us to maintain progress towards our 2020 casualty reduction target, with key actions for the Scottish Government and our partners set out.

Bruce Crawford: Is the cabinet secretary aware that, in Transport Scotland's annual road safety review, an accident culture has been identified on the A84, near the Blair Drummond safari park? Additional road safety investigation work has been undertaken, which might result in the installation of a roundabout. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that any capital works that emerge from the investigation will be given the fullest possible consideration for inclusion in the next funding cycle for strategic transport projects?

Michael Matheson: I am conscious that Bruce Crawford, as the constituency member, has raised that matter with me on a number of occasions. Regular screening of the trunk road network has identified an accident cluster site near to a farm access point adjacent to the A84, which is the area to which the member referred. An investigation was carried out recently by BEAR Scotland to examine the nature of the accidents that have been recorded at that location, and potential solutions. As a result of that analysis, it has been recommended that monitoring of the effectiveness of the recent relocation of the electronic queue warning signs be undertaken, and that work will be taken forward.

I assure the member that Transport Scotland, in taking forward the strategic transport projects

review, will engage with local stakeholders, particularly the local authority, in order to understand transport priorities across the whole Forth Valley area. I give the member an assurance that the issue that he has raised will be given serious consideration as part of that process.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): One of the newest roads in the trunk road network is the Aberdeen western peripheral route. Since it opened, there have been a series of crashes, which have often been clustered around particular parts of the route. As long ago as May, commuters were warning that particular junctions were accidents waiting to happen. What work is being done to establish the underlying causes of such accidents? What steps are being taken to prevent further incidents, before it is too late?

Michael Matheson: I have no doubt that Liam Kerr does not want to give the impression that the AWPR has reduced safety on our roads in any way. In fact, it has improved safety on north-east Scotland's road network and is providing considerable benefits to the local community. From those whom I have engaged with in north-east Scotland, I know that there is broad welcome for the significant improvements that have resulted from the Scottish Government's investment in north-east Scotland's road network.

As with any major infrastructure project, evaluations are undertaken one year, three years and five years after the project's completion, in order to identify the benefits and any issues that have arisen. As I said in my answer to Bruce Crawford, a process is undertaken to look at any sites where there might be accident clusters. The data is analysed, including by Police Scotland, to look at the nature and cause of such accidents and at whether mitigation measures need to be put in place.

Overall, we are very satisfied with the significant improvements to north-east Scotland as a result of the Aberdeen western peripheral route.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): One of the roads in my constituency about which there are a lot of safety complaints is the A90 at the Toll of Birness fork, from Ellon to Fraserburgh and Peterhead. In lieu of any major infrastructure decisions on future dualling, there have been calls for a roundabout to improve traffic flow and the safety of the junction in the meantime. The A90 is a trunk road, but it borders on a council road. Can the cabinet secretary provide clarity on whether building the roundabout would be a Government investment?

Michael Matheson: The constituency member will be aware that there are two proposed housing developments to the west of the A90, each comprising in the region of 500 houses, which

means that there will be 1,000 houses in total being added to the local road network. That will, of course, increase queuing on local roads, as well as the amount of turning and manoeuvres that need to be undertaken at the Toll of Birness junction. Transport Scotland has secured planning conditions on those developments to contribute to a scheme that will improve the area at the Toll of Birness junction. That may take the form of a roundabout, as has been suggested, although other forms of mitigation might be appropriate.

It would now be for the developer and the local authority to develop those proposals and to agree them with Transport Scotland. The local authority, along with the developer, is in the lead in taking forward those measures in consultation with Transport Scotland. At present, we have not been provided with a timescale on when the council intends to take forward those issues with the local developer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): I have been relaxed about the length of supplementary questions so far. However, I am afraid that my relaxation has gone and I would like the supplementary questions to be nice and snappy. That has put you on notice, Ms Lennon.

Bus Services (Local Authorities)

2. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it will publish guidance on the provision of bus services by local authorities. (S50-03866)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 received royal assent on 15 November. A good deal of preparatory work will be undertaken on the significant volume of regulations and guidance required in relation to the new provisions on bus services. My officials have started to engage with local transport authorities, bus operators and other relevant stakeholders, and that will continue over the coming months with a view to beginning commencement of the provisions during 2020.

Monica Lennon: Increasing democratic control over services is an important issue to many, not least to hundreds of my constituents who use the vital X1 bus service between Hamilton and Glasgow. The cabinet secretary is aware that First Glasgow threatened to axe that service, but following a public backlash there has been a reprieve until Christmas on a use-it-or-lose-it basis.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that we need a system that puts the public, not the owners of big bus companies, in the driving seat? What reassurance can he give to my constituents who

rely on the X1 that they will not lose that vital service?

Michael Matheson: I am aware of the issue with regard to the X1 service. That matter is being pursued by the constituency MSP Christina McKelvie, who has raised it with me on a number of occasions. A service is now being provided and is well used.

Monica Lennon will be aware that the bus services improvement partnership provisions within the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 require local authorities to work in partnership with the bus industry. Going forward, I expect the local authority to consider doing that, in relation to services in the Lanarkshire area. The member will also be aware that Strathclyde partnership for transport has a responsibility to look at social need as part of the regional transport provision within its area. I encourage Monica Lennon to engage with SPT around any transport issues in relation to bus services in the Lanarkshire area.

Motherwell Railway Station

3. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the proposed upgrades at Motherwell railway station. (S5O-03867)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Transport Scotland officials are working closely with Abellio ScotRail to finalise a funding agreement to upgrade Motherwell railway station. Further details will be announced in due course.

Clare Adamson: Does the cabinet secretary know whether an active travel hub at Motherwell station is being considered as part of the upgrade proposals? Would he be willing to meet local organisations in my area that are encouraging cycling in the area, to see how they might engage in the process?

Michael Matheson: I am always happy to engage with the member's constituents. The groups within her constituency have an interest in that matter. The redevelopment of Motherwell station will include enhanced cycle parking facilities, in order to support active travel. That will be complemented by the work that North Lanarkshire Council is doing and by the Motherwell town centre transport interchange project, which will see access improvements to the station and enhancements for interchange between car, bus, bike and train.

The council's project will also encourage increased modal shift to public transport and active travel, which will provide a transport hub and a gateway into Lanarkshire. I understand that a communication plan is being developed to

ensure that stakeholders and customers are kept informed during the various stages of the work and I am more than happy to ensure that members are kept informed of the process.

Reaching 100 Per Cent Scheme

4. Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it expects to announce the preferred bidder to deliver the reaching 100 per cent scheme in the north area. (S5O-03868)

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands (Paul Wheelhouse): In response to a general question on 21 November that was lodged by Mike Rumbles, I announced that we have selected BT Plc as a preferred bidder for the north lot of the R100 programme.

Peter Chapman: It is clear that the R100 programme is well behind its original timetable, and Fergus Ewing pledged to quit if he failed to deliver on the R100 project by 2021. As it is very clear that the scheme will not be delivered on that timeframe, will the minister follow the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy's example?

Paul Wheelhouse: Oh dear. As we made clear in the information that we provided to, for example, *The Herald* newspaper for its coverage today, the contracts that were referenced have been awarded to resource the R100 delivery team and therefore do not correlate directly with the date of completion of the deployment. To answer Mr Chapman, we are currently looking to complete the procurement process.

I want to set out the Government's record on delivery on broadband for Scotland. We met our target for providing access to fibre broadband to 95 per cent of premises across Scotland on time and on budget. Indeed, we exceeded that target; more than 940,000 premises can now access fibre broadband, which is about 100,000 more than was anticipated. Digital Scotland superfast broadband gainshare funding will be deployed in 2020, so DSSB will continue into 2020 as we finalise the procurement process for R100.

We are going where others would not. Before the DSSB programme, there were no plans at all for commercial fibre deployment for Orkney, Shetland or the Western Isles. Now, more than 80 per cent of premises in those areas have access to broadband. We have gone faster, and 90 per cent of premises are now capable of accessing superfast broadband through DSSB, which far exceeds the original target of 77 per cent.

In saying that, I hope that I am giving Mr Chapman confidence that the Scottish Government will deliver on broadband. To be absolutely clear, the Scottish National Party is already well ahead of any United Kingdom party in

its commitment to deliver superfast broadband. Its timescale is ahead of any other UK party and it is investing £600 million, precisely because the Tories have failed to deliver. I remind Mr Chapman that broadband is a reserved matter, so we did not need to make the investment. We are doing it in the interests of Scotland.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The minister is refusing to admit that his target date of the end of 2021 for R100 is not going to happen. Is that not the modern-day equivalent of Monty Python's dead parrot sketch? Is he really sticking to the end of 2021 as the target date?

Paul Wheelhouse: It used to be the Liberal Democrats who were the dead parrots in politics, but from Labour's poll ratings, it is more likely to be the Labour Party now.

On the serious point that Mr Smyth raised, as I have explained to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee—*[Interruption.]*

If Mr Smyth will listen to my answer, he will hear that I have explained to the committee that we are in the depths of a procurement exercise that is governed by procurement law, and I cannot discuss the details of bids. I have committed to appear before the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee to discuss the matter as soon as I can—probably at the end of January—and to give the details that he and other members seek. We are not hiding from anything, but we have to see through the procurement process, which is governed by law.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Would it not be better for the minister to just come forward and say that the target is not going to be met by the end of 2021? He knows it. We know it. Everybody knows it. Why does he not just say it?

Paul Wheelhouse: As Mr Rumbles knows—because we have interacted in meetings of the committee itself on this point—I would dearly love to be more open about the future of the programme. He knows that I am governed by procurement law, and I have explained that at length to committee members.

The fact that I cannot give him the information that he seeks does not indicate a lack of respect to members of this chamber or the committee. I undertake to answer Mr Rumble's committee questions and those of his colleagues when I get the opportunity. I can say to Mr Rumbles—because I know that he is concerned about this point—that we are committed to 100 per cent coverage and that I am confident that we will have a good outcome for the people of Scotland.

ScotRail (Festive Season)

5. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action ScotRail is taking to prepare for the festive season. (S5O-03869)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): From 15 December, ScotRail will deliver approximately 10,000 more seats as it introduces its new timetable. ScotRail will also increase capacity in the lead-up to Christmas. On the pre-Christmas weekend, ScotRail will provide approximately 40,000 more seats compared to the same period last year. Over the five days between Christmas and new year, ScotRail will provide around 184,000 more seats compared to the same period last year.

The last trains of the day on Christmas eve and new year's eve will depart earlier than normal and there will be changes to train timetables over the Christmas and new year period.

Rachael Hamilton: I welcome the extra seats and carriages, but I have to express caution. Although morning peak services have been improved for commuters, there could be difficulties on evening peak services. Obviously, the festive period is a very busy time. Does the cabinet secretary have any comment on why the number of carriages on evening peak services has not been increased?

Michael Matheson: The member is right to recognise that there is a significant increase in capacity, with an extra 1,500 seats per day being provided for passengers on the Borders route, through a combination of more services and longer trains. Some services that are presently three carriages are going up to six carriages, and the number of two-carriage services is reducing in favour of larger trains. Across the whole of the day, capacity will be increased.

I assure the member that ScotRail is seeking to make the greatest use of its existing rolling stock. The enhancements that it will provide in the Borders are to help at times when there are particular difficulties on the Borders route and in areas where the volume of passengers using the service at peak times is a challenge.

Clearly, as further timetable changes are taken forward over the course of 2020, there will be an opportunity to look at what further capacity can be added, not just in the Borders but in other parts of the network.

Parking Enforcements (Consultation)

6. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to consult on penalty charge levels as part of

parking enforcements set out in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. (S5O-03870)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): We are currently developing a full public consultation on penalty charge notices, which will include notices related to the parking prohibitions that are set out in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. We expect to launch the consultation in early 2020.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Mount Florida community council, which is based in my constituency, has raised concerns that the current fixed notice rates are too low to deter motorists from being inconsiderate during events at Hampden stadium. Will the Scottish Government consult local authorities, residents and community councils to ensure that there is flexibility to vary the rate of penalty charge notices in potential problem hotspots such as Hampden?

Michael Matheson: I assure the member that the PCN review will include a full public consultation. We have been engaging with local authorities on the issue and we would welcome views from a range of stakeholders, including Mount Florida community council and members of the public, in the consultation process. I encourage those stakeholders to participate in the consultation once it begins.

We will explore a range of options through the consultation. We recognise that there are problem hotspots, but there is a requirement for us to balance the need for any changes to be fair and proportionate across the network with the need for charges to act as a suitable deterrent to address parking infringements. I assure the member that the issues that he is raising will be part of the consultation exercise and that there will be an opportunity to participate in that process.

Cycle Provision (Dundee)

7. Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to improve cycle provision in Dundee. (S5O-03871)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Since 2017-18, the Scottish Government has provided more than £2.63 million in funding to Dundee City Council to support the provision of cycling and walking infrastructure and behaviour-change projects. Additionally, Dundee City Council received a grant award of around £800,000 from round 1 of the European regional development fund to construct an active and low-carbon travel hub on Dundee's waterfront and to upgrade 1.4km of pathway.

Shona Robison: Is the cabinet secretary aware of Dundee City Council's application for funding to undertake a business case analysis for city-wide cycle network integration, to join up all the current routes? Does he share my hope that such an analysis will provide robust evidence of the positive impact of greater investment in and integration of Dundee's cycle network and provide the necessary impetus to take forward that bold and imaginative plan?

Michael Matheson: It is certainly a bold and imaginative plan, and I encourage the council to take it forward, because I am very supportive of measures that encourage walking and cycling for everyday journeys.

Of course, Dundee's bid will have to be subject to the normal scrutiny process, alongside other bids for the places for everyone funding programme, which is run by Sustrans on behalf of the Scottish Government.

I am aware that Dundee City Council is expected to publish its bike life report early next year, which will set out detailed evidence and local communities' views on the benefits that can come from investment in cycling and walking. I hope that that will contribute towards the council's ambitious approach to improving cycling and walking as options for everyday journeys.

Transport Infrastructure (Net Zero Economy)

8. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to develop a transport infrastructure suitable for a net zero economy. (S5O-03872)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government's commitment to taking climate action is clearly demonstrated in our draft national transport strategy. We understand that transport plays a key role in achieving our net-zero target.

That commitment is at the heart of our work on the second strategic transport projects review, which will set out our infrastructure investment priorities to help to deliver the target.

We are investing in low-carbon infrastructure. The Government has committed more than £500 million for bus infrastructure, it has doubled active travel investment to £80 million and it has spent £30 million on a comprehensive electric vehicle charging network.

Bill Kidd: I thank the cabinet secretary for his encouraging response.

Over the past few years, FirstGroup has closed a number of bus routes in the Glasgow Anniesland constituency. What steps will the Scottish Government take to ensure that constituents who

live outwith high-return areas are able to access sustainable public transport that allows them to continue to meet the requirements of life such as travelling to work, the doctor or the shops?

Michael Matheson: As we said in our programme for government, we are ambitious in relation to how we can utilise bus to support our zero-carbon targets. The member will be aware that the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 provides a range of new tools that local transport authorities can use to meet local needs and circumstances, whether they want to pursue partnership working arrangements with local bus service providers, pursue local franchising or run their own bus services.

Alongside the provisions in the 2019 act, we will bring forward transformational funding, with the biggest funding package in the history of devolution to support bus infrastructure, to make greater use of bus, tackle congestion and improve services.

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, as the local transport authority, has a lead role in helping to ensure that bus services are provided where social need is identified. I encourage the member to engage with SPT on the issues in his constituency.

Disability Sport and Participation

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on disability sport and participation. I call Joe FitzPatrick to open the debate—*[Interruption.]* I see that Mr FitzPatrick has undergone some kind of transformation. I call Christina McKelvie to open the debate.

14:54

The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie): It is obviously a wonderful transformation, Presiding Officer—I have much more hair, anyway. *[Laughter.]*

It gives me great pleasure to open the debate. Tackling inequality is a priority for the Scottish Government. We have to ensure that disabled people benefit from all that we are doing to improve the lives of everyone in Scotland. That is why, in December 2016, the Scottish Government published “A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People”, which is a disability action plan that contains five longer-term ambitions and 93 practical actions that the Scottish Government will deliver.

The action plan will take us significantly further forward in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and realising the rights of persons with disabilities. We are confident that that will add to the success and prosperity of our communities and country. The plan is our commitment to disabled people’s rights and contains an ambition on active participation.

Tackling social isolation and loneliness, which can affect anyone at any stage and age of their life, is also a priority. It is known that social isolation and loneliness can have a significant impact on a person’s physical and mental wellbeing, which is why we are tackling them with a preventative approach that allows them to be treated as a public health issue.

We understand that disabled people and people with chronic health conditions are at greater risk of social isolation and loneliness than others. The results on loneliness in the recent Scottish household survey indicated that people living with a long-term physical or mental health condition are more than twice as likely to experience feelings of loneliness compared with those living without such conditions. “A Connected Scotland: our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections” is a step forward in tackling those issues.

I recognise that sport has the power to change lives. We know that being physically active is one of the best things that we can do for our physical

and mental health. I am proud that the Scottish Government is determined to create a modern, inclusive Scotland that protects and respects human rights, a key element of which is the promotion of equal participation and access to sport.

There have been a number of high-profile successes in sport for people with disabilities. Scottish athletes won six medals at the world para-athletics championships in Dubai this year, and nine at the world para-swimming championships in London. We are going up the medal scale.

In March, the Scottish wheelchair curling team won the silver medal at the world wheelchair curling championships, which were held in Stirling. Since 2015, the number of Scottish para-athletes to be selected on to world-class programmes has increased from 27 to 33. The number of sports in which Scottish para athletes have been selected has also increased from nine to 11.

However, we know that having a disability, at both high-performance and grassroots levels, can still be a major barrier for many people who want to participate in sport and physical activity. The Scottish Government firmly believes that there should be no barriers at all to participating in sport. Everyone should be able to enjoy sport, whoever they are and whatever their background. I look forward to discussing with and hearing from members across the chamber how we can do more to remove the existing barriers, so that disabled people have every opportunity to improve their physical and mental wellbeing—and maybe to increase that bag of medals as well.

When I attended the special Olympics last year, I saw how people of all ages and backgrounds, supported by sporting organisations across Scotland that provide them with the tools that they need to achieve their own personal goals, can change their lives through sport and feel a sense of empowerment. It was an absolute joy to be there. I was involved in the special Olympics a long time ago—I may talk about that later.

Scottish Disability Sport is doing great work in highlighting the benefits of getting people to participate in sport. It works to co-ordinate, in the widest possible areas of sport, athletes and players of all ages and abilities who have physical, sensory or learning disabilities, and it works in partnership in order to develop opportunities for disabled people.

I congratulate SDS on recently winning the sportscotland transforming coaching award for its young start programme, which is an exciting programme that supports the transitioning of participants on their journey into being coaches. Currently, 79 per cent of the participants have

successfully achieved qualifications and are now deployed within the coaching workforce. It has been estimated that that has had an immediate impact on 1,500 individuals. That is great to hear.

I want to take us back a wee bit. While we are talking about success and legacy, I want to mention Janice Eaglesham, a former colleague of mine whom we lost in August this year. I first worked with Janice in the early 1990s, when I was working with a group of athletes in the learning disability sector. She was not only a brilliant coach but a fantastic inspiration to everyone around her, and many people whom I worked with went on to run with her Red Star Athletics Club. Many of them won medals in the special Olympics and other events.

You couldn't keep up with Janice: she was fast at everything and did everything at a pace. She stayed in the next building from me where we lived in Glasgow. She used to run with her greyhound, and I would stand at the window and just marvel at her. She gave that type of commitment to everything that she did, and it is absolutely right that she is recognised in the chamber today. *[Applause.]*

Janice Eaglesham is a great loss to disability sport in Scotland, at both national and international levels, and I hope that the Parliament will join me—in fact, it just has—in passing on our condolences to Janice's husband Ian Mirfin, who is a renowned athlete and sports coach himself, and all her family and friends. I hope that members are happy to do that today. By their applause, they have recognised her. Janice touched many, many lives.

I move on to some issues around equality. The Scottish Government works closely with sportscotland on equality in sport, and its new corporate strategy, sport for life, outlines a vision for an active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport and inclusion underpins everything that it does. The new inclusion principle underpins the commitment to show greater leadership, to influence and drive the changes that are needed to address inequalities, and to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to get involved in a sport that they love.

The sport and physical activity sector must recognise and understand that each individual has a specific range of different characteristics and complexities if we are to effectively address issues that may be preventing or constraining people from getting involved and progressing in any aspect of sport or physical activity. We need a really focused, person-centred approach.

For our part, the Scottish Government is committed to supporting equalities in Scottish sport, ensuring that people of all ages and from all

communities across Scotland have the opportunity to participate in sport and physical activity. Extra funds have been distributed by sportscotland to help meet the Scottish Government's priorities on reducing the inequalities in sports participation that I have just talked about.

In particular, the First Minister opened the national sports training centre in Inverclyde in 2017—the first sports training centre of its kind in the United Kingdom. Oh, what Janice Eaglesham and I could have done with that in the early 1990s—but we still did great work anyway. That state-of-the-art residential facility was designed with inclusivity in mind for disabled sports users—both performance and community users. It will ensure that Scotland is even better placed to support our disabled athletes in their preparations and will help to ensure that sport and activity are absolutely accessible.

Sportscotland is working with governing bodies to improve access to information and sporting opportunities for British Sign Language users. The process was started with consultation at the recent sportscotland equalities and inclusion conference to establish the needs of sports governing bodies in improving their work in that area.

I recognise the good work that is going on across the whole country to create opportunities for disabled people to engage and participate in sport. However, there is always more to be done.

At this point, I congratulate and recognise the work of the McGuire brothers, who are international world leaders in boccia, with many medals in their cache. They are constituents of mine, and I am always proud to meet them out and about, when they will show me their latest round of medals.

I welcome the support from across the chamber today as we examine new and innovative ways of developing and enhancing disability sport in this country, learning lessons from global best practice and creating an environment where disabled people can excel and harness the mental and physical benefits that participating in sport can bring—and, my goodness, doing that will push us up those medal tables.

15:04

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I start by declaring an interest: I am a coach, including to athletes designated with a disability.

I am obviously delighted to open the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, given the topic. I associate myself and my party with Christina McKelvie's comments about Janice Eaglesham. I have some athletes who worked with Janice. I was at her funeral, and the size of the congregation and the outpouring of love for her

and Ian tell us everything that we ever needed to know about Janice. As Ms McKelvie will know, if Janice wanted something, there would not be much point in turning her down. You would just accept it early on—it saved you an awful lot of time, because she was getting what she wanted. She was an incredible woman and she is sadly missed by the whole community.

I start by noting that I do not like the name “disability sport”. I ask members to accept that it is just sport. All the same rules and benefits apply, such as positively affecting physical and mental health, inclusivity and education. Those benefits may be felt more acutely in that community, given the increased barriers to participation, but we could be discussing access to sport for any demographic.

Sport allows for the development of self-awareness, discipline, teamworking, resilience, confidence and greater understanding of diet and nutrition and it tackles directly the scourge of isolation. If we are serious about closing the attainment gap, for example, we need to recognise the crucial impact that activities such as sport can have on learning. I have spoken before about the skills that are learned outside the classroom being crucial to learning inside the classroom.

However, the simple truth is that participation still relies far too heavily on the financial status of parents. Sport in general is becoming the bastion of the middle classes and that is starkly obvious in the disability community. Disabled people in Scotland are far less likely than non-disabled people to participate in sport. The overall picture is that people with a disability are less active across the board, have poorer experiences with school physical education and are therefore less likely to participate in sport as adults. Too many school pupils with a disability sit at the side during PE lessons because either the teacher is unsure of how to include them or the facilities to enable their inclusion are not available.

If we throw rurality or deprivation into the equation, there is a further huge drop-off in participation and opportunities to participate, which is felt even more acutely in the disability community, as shown by a few examples. I have spoken many times in this chamber about the powerchair footballers and how they humiliated the parliamentary team—

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Totally.

Brian Whittle: I am sorry. They totally humiliated the parliamentary team 6-0 in a 10-minute demonstration game during the Scottish championships. To this day, Alexander Stewart remains traumatised; when he left the park, it took about 10 minutes before we could get him to even blink.

That example demonstrates that, no matter what the sport, if we do not practise, we will be easily beaten by those who are committed and train regularly. The Ayrshire Tigers are my home team; I have spent quite a bit of time with them and hosted them in the Parliament. They say that transport and cost are preventing the expansion of the team to include all who want to participate, and that those issues threaten their existence. They get together to train and play several times a week. How would they replace that inclusion and participation—which is crucial to their health and wellbeing, as Christina McKelvie has mentioned—if the club was not there?

Disability motorsport gives the chance for a section of the community that is usually overlooked to charge around in a race-prepared sports car. I have been driven round in that car; believe me, Presiding Officer, there is no chance of dozing off. The camaraderie and the fact that people are prepared to recognise them as part of the community is a unique experience that is vital for anybody there. I know that that voluntary service is under threat due to finance, once again. It takes £40,000 a year to keep the car running and to get access to the race track.

I coach a young man who has learning difficulties, which is why I knew Janice Eaglesham so well. He has amazing foster carers who go way beyond the extra mile to ensure that he, and others in their care, miss out on nothing. He went to the European championships last year in Paris and came away with a bronze. He qualified for the world championships this year but could not go because of finance—the championships were in Australia. I have watched that young man develop in stature and confidence over the past few years to a point where he is now at college and living on his own, with the continued support of his foster carers. Just for the record, he runs 23 seconds for 200m, so he is very impressive—he is just a big ball of fast-twitch fibres. Where would he be without that opportunity to train with a squad of athletes, be treated exactly the same as everyone else and travel abroad to represent his country? That is the kind of approach that we need to embrace. We must make sure that there is an opportunity, no matter what the barriers are, to allow people such as that young man to achieve, with all the confidence and resilience that his participation has taught him, so that he can become that contributor to society.

What is the alternative for these sports participants? Is it a lifetime of care, of welfare, of seclusion and isolation? What would be the cost of that pathway, both financially and, more important, to their personal wellbeing and quality of life? I suggest that it would be much greater downstream.

The Scottish Government spends the best part of £18 billion on health and education, but only £40 million or so on sport. Given that there is agreement across the chamber on the huge benefits that sport and activity can bring to health and education—how sport can open up a whole new world of opportunity—is it not about time that we got serious about it and funded it properly?

I recognise that the word “sport” can be daunting to some people. Let us start talking about it from a health and wellbeing perspective. We are talking once again about the preventive health agenda in its most raw form. Nowhere else could it be more aptly demonstrated than in disability sport: inclusion; camaraderie; confidence; resilience; achievement; physical and mental health. Surely that kind of investment has to be an easy ask?

I finish by mentioning Kayleigh Haggio, a young athlete from my area, who won gold in the 100m racerunning, and took the world record at the world para athletics championships in Dubai. She is an incredible athlete, who has also excelled in the swimming pool.

Although sport is not primarily all about medals and international vests, it is great for youngsters to see what is possible. Just that ability to participate: surely that has to be within our gift.

15:11

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): As Scottish Labour’s spokesperson on sport and equalities, I am delighted to speak in today’s important debate on disability sport and participation.

Tuesday 3 December was international day of people with disabilities, and purple light-up day—a global movement designed to draw attention to the economic empowerment of disabled people. Empowering disabled people must be at the heart of issues such as improving participation in sport.

Scotland is fortunate to have many leading athletes and sports people of all abilities, and we must always take the time to recognise equally the successes of disabled and of able-bodied athletes. I am sure that members will agree with me that elite Scottish sporting role models should be representative of all backgrounds.

There are two conflicting themes in today’s debate: championing success in disabled sport; and reflecting on the low levels of participation across the disabled population, and the challenges that continue to prevent participation.

It is evident that sport can have a significant impact on the life of a person with a disability, no matter how complex that disability might be. A wide range of sports and activities are on offer for disabled people and I have been fortunate to meet

representatives of several of those activities. I recently met Ryan Galloway, the honorary secretary of the Scottish PowerChair Football Association, in Parliament. In addition to the Scotland powerchair football team, there are nine teams involved in the powerchair football league, each of which is run entirely by volunteers and relies on funding, donations and sponsorship. When I asked Ryan what challenges he faces in running the powerchair league, he said that changing places and toilet facilities—not just at venues, but at the service stations that players use when they travel across Scotland—were at the top of the list. Colleagues across the chamber will know that Jeremy Balfour and I have campaigned to increase the availability of changing places and toilets.

Many voluntary groups are working to support disabled people in sport. The Riding for the Disabled Association is dedicated to improving the lives of people with disabilities through the provision of horse riding, hippotherapy and carriage driving. With the help of more than 150 volunteers, the RDA Glasgow group offers 47 hours of classes per week, which provide opportunities for therapy, achievement and enjoyment; improve health, wellbeing and self-confidence; and benefit mobility and co-ordination.

Disability Snowsport UK believes that taking part in adaptive snow sport has the power to transform a person's relationship with their disability. It is committed to enabling all people to participate in a snow sport, regardless of disability, injury or experience. In the new year, I will meet Sean and Kieran from DSUK at Braehead to see at first hand the activities on offer and hear about the challenges they face. I believe that I will also have the opportunity to participate.

Unfortunately, disabled people have to overcome a range of barriers when participating in sport. This helps to explain why only 20 per cent of the disabled population meet the recommended level of physical activity; far short of the 52 per cent level of non-disabled people. Scottish Disability Sport reveals that almost half of disabled people fear that they would lose benefits if they were seen to be physically active. That is a major barrier and a clear sign that our welfare system is failing disabled people.

I recently met Kyle Anderson, a pupil from Lasswade High School, who told me of the work that his school does to support young people with disabilities. It has a unit called the pod, which currently supports 14 full-time and three part-time pupils with a range of disabilities. The pod works closely with the main school and pupils including Kyle participate in a PE class with the pod pupils. Sports include touch rugby and football, with the shared classes building confidence and social

skills and, more importantly, breaking down barriers. It has become a highlight of the week for both pod and mainstream pupils. I am sure that everyone in the chamber will agree that that initiative and the work that pupils such as Kyle and Lasswade school do is an example of good practice that could be replicated right across Scotland.

I shall finish with a quotation from a disability campaigner, Mary-Elaine McCavert, that I think we should remember when discussing any issue relating to disabled people.

“Disability has many faces. Each of these faces tell unique human stories that are equally valid. Yet, as we are entering a new decade, we carry into it the same challenges as before. The United Nations declared 1981 as the Year of persons with disabilities, yet 38 years later we still don't have full participation or equality. I cannot wait for the day disability is just seen as another notch on the spectrum of diversity. Something that doesn't need a day to celebrate it because it's as normal as 'normal' is. Yet that will not be possible until we have a world that is accessible for all. We risk erasing disability identity when we focus on ability alone because then we erase the inevitable challenges of living in a world that was not built for us. If we don't lean into our limitations caused by our disabilities, our requests for access might not be heard. Obtaining that very access to our world which will then allow us to demonstrate our vast abilities on an even playing field”.

15:18

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I was pleased to see, just last Sunday in my region of Lothian, the University of Edinburgh volleyball club host a low-intensity sports event at the Pleasance sports complex, not far from Parliament. The event was aimed at people with barriers to engaging in sport and physical activity, including disabled people. Students and members of the local community were able to try boccia, sitting volleyball and sitting netball. Boccia has been mentioned already in this debate and I am sure that Mr Whittle will remember the day that he and I mistakenly thought that we were challenging the excellent Stephen McGuire in the garden lobby.

Mr Whittle and I tend towards overcompetitiveness on occasion. Each time we competed with Stephen McGuire, he let us believe for a few seconds at least that we were about to beat him. Then he threw the final ball, his skill shone through and we were put firmly in our places. It was a fabulous introduction to that game, which is gaining in popularity.

I suppose that the essence of this afternoon's debate is that we want each and every person to have the opportunity to take part in the thing that inspires them. I think that we all agree that we need to do more to ensure that not only disabled people but all people have the full opportunity to take part in sport.

The report for the Scottish Government by Professor Grant Jarvie of the University of Edinburgh shows that only 20 per cent of disabled people take the recommended level of physical activity, compared with 52 per cent of non-disabled people. There is work to do with both groups but, clearly, the figure of one in five disabled people is not good enough and we can do more.

Conversely, research has shown that when disabled people take part in sport, they are almost as likely to take part frequently—more than 15 days a month—as non-disabled people are. Therefore, it is important that we break down the initial barriers to participation.

Mary Fee has spoken of the barriers around access to changing places and access to toilets in changing places, and that is key. I was pleased to have an amendment agreed to in what is now the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 that ensures that local planning authorities have to account for the provision of toilets. We have discussed that issue more widely in the chamber, and we know that it does affect people, because they wonder whether they can get out and about. Any such barrier leads to social isolation. Accessible venues with the appropriate facilities and equipment are vital.

Earlier this year, we debated the incredible development of powerchair football in Scotland. It is another sport that is developing rapidly, but the lack of basic facilities means that only a few sports centres across the country are able to hold powerchair football events. When we met participants recently, we heard that the sport has had a profoundly positive impact on their lives.

From my experience in athletics, I know that ensuring that coaches have the appropriate skills and understanding is also hugely important. I congratulate sportscotland on the work that it is doing to ensure that coaches are supported to coach people with particular requirements.

Today's debate gives us an opportunity to discuss the challenges that are faced by disabled people who are participating in sport as well as to celebrate the progress that is being made and the incredible achievements of Scottish athletes and players. As has been mentioned, in 2019 we have seen some outstanding performances. I, too, associate myself with Christina McKelvie's comments about Janice Eaglesham. She is a huge loss, but what a contribution she made to the lives of so many people in this country.

The Peak sports centre hosted the largest wheelchair curling event outside the winter Paralympics when the world championships came to Stirling. Some 12 nations took part. Scotland put in a very impressive performance to become silver medallists, just behind the champions China.

In October, Allan Ritchie won the bronze medal on day 2 of this year's world shooting para-sport championships in Sydney, and Sam Fernando of Fife Athletic Club won a silver medal in the 3,000m steeplechase at the Brisbane INAS global games for athletes with an intellectual disability.

Last month, Scottish athletes took an incredible seven medals at the world para-athletics championships, including golds in the T35 100m and 200m for the incredible Maria Lyle, and a tremendous double gold and two new world records for Scottish racers, as mentioned by Mr Whittle, Kayleigh Haggio and Gavin Drysdale.

Anyone who has had the pleasure and privilege of meeting those young people will know just how formidable they are in competition and in the effort that they put into all aspects of their lives. I had the pleasure of meeting Gavin Drysdale in the Parliament. At that point, we were discussing his preparations for his highers. These young people are succeeding in so many ways.

Gordon Reid, the wheelchair tennis player from Alexandria, reached the French open singles final and the doubles semi-finals of the Australian and French opens.

Kayleigh Haggio and Gavin Drysdale were two of six contenders for the para-sport athlete of the year award, at the recent Scottish athletics awards. I was struck by the fact that the para-athlete and the athlete of the year award winners were on the stage to receive their awards at the same time. There is great effort to ensure inclusivity.

As well as celebrating, we need to look at what has been done at all levels to expand the opportunities for disabled people to participate in sport. There is the app from sportscotland in participation with Scottish Disability Sport, which helps coaches to access video training and support the athletes who they coach.

I am conscious of time, Presiding Officer, so I hope that you will let me know when I need to wrap up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I always do that, so you are absolutely fine.

Alison Johnstone: Thank you.

Ensuring that disabled people can become coaches is hugely important. The inclusive coach project, which is funded by sportscotland, matches potential disabled coaches with mentors, who meet them regularly to identify their strengths and areas that they might need to develop.

Despite those measures, there are still too few disabled coaches—only around 7 per cent of coaches are disabled, yet one in five Scots are disabled—and I look forward to hearing

suggestions from the minister about what else can be done to support them.

Mary Fee and other members commented on the need to ensure that we remove financial barriers. They affect everyone, not just people with disabilities, but we know that disabled people are more likely to be in poverty than non-disabled people, and the costs of transport to training and fixtures can be prohibitive. I was saddened to hear Brian Whittle's example of a talented athlete who was unable to take advantage of a fabulous overseas representative opportunity because of lack of finance. That is another area that we need to address. For powerchair football, it can cost as much as £1,500 to put on a taster day, so finance is clearly a barrier to the development of new sports.

"A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People" is the Scottish Government's action plan to deliver on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The plan pledges:

"Disabled people's participation at all levels of sport and physical activity will increase through an action plan developed in partnership with disabled people through a new Equality in Physical Activity and Sport Forum by 2019."

Three years on from the publication of that plan, I would welcome an update from the minister on progress and how disabled people's participation in sport and physical activity is being measured, so that we can tell what progress has been made.

It is heartening to see so much positive growth and achievement in disability sports in Scotland, but we still need to do more to ensure that we remove any remaining barriers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mike Rumbles to open the debate on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. There is a little time in hand. You can see that I am being generous today. Enjoy it, Mr Rumbles.

15:27

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): After Tuesday, when I prepared a six-minute speech and, without notice, was told that I had only four minutes, I am now facing the opposite situation. However, I will deliver the speech that I have prepared. Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

Like other speakers this afternoon, the Liberal Democrats believe that everyone should have the chance to realise the benefits of participating in sport and living a more active lifestyle. Active lifestyles help to improve the quality of life in later years, reduce mental health risks, improve health overall and increase people's employability. It has been good to see consensus breaking out in this afternoon's debate.

Back in 2016, the Scottish Liberal Democrats said that the Scottish Government should develop a long-term strategy to give access for all to opportunities that are appropriate for people's ability and commitment to sport, while particularly recognising that funding should be available for talented individuals to achieve their potential. We suggested that funding to support growth in sport and physical activity could come from healthy eating initiatives such as a sugar tax, and we said that we would protect sports and arts funding through the national lottery.

It is vital to recognise the role that teachers and schools play in promoting access to sport, and we also want to support carers by providing free community benefits such as free passes to leisure centres.

Since the present Government came to power, annual investment in Paralympic sports has risen and there has been investment in Scottish disability sport. I am happy to give credit where credit is due, as it is in this case.

However, Scottish Disability Sport reports that participants and performers with a disability still have the lowest participation levels in sport and physical activity. It is widely recognised that there is a lag between current practice and the philosophy of inclusion in physical activity and sport, which we have heard about already, for people with a disability.

As Mary Fee and Alison Johnstone highlighted, it is not really surprising to see that only 20 per cent of people with disabilities take the recommended level of physical activity, compared with 52 per cent of non-disabled people. I make no excuse for repeating those statistics, because they are stark, and we should not rest until that activity gap is closed.

Interestingly, Scottish Disability Sport also reports that almost half of disabled people—47 per cent—fear losing their benefits if they are seen to be physically active. What a disincentive it is that half are worried about engaging in sport because of the perception that they might lose their benefits.

It is vital that we listen to disabled people and involve them in the development of sporting activities. Training and education have the potential to address many of the issues around access to sport and physical activities in general, and they help in raising awareness about access, attitudes and assumptions.

It is essential to show disabled people participating in non-elite and non-competitive sports—in ordinary sporting and physical activities—as well as the elite disabled activities that we see so often on television.

I echo Brian Whittle's and Mary Fee's sentiments. Would it not be better to get to debate sport for everyone, rather than highlight disability? I look forward to the time when we get to that position.

15:31

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): We can all take great pride in the achievements of our athletes in Scotland and the records that they continue to break, but it is particularly inspiring to celebrate the achievements of people who break those records and have those achievements despite living with a disability.

I am especially proud of a record-breaking wheelchair racer from my constituency, Shelby Watson. At just 17, Shelby set world records at the 2015 Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association world games in the 400m and 1500m events. She broke the European 100m record as well. Shelby was born with cerebral palsy, which means that she cannot walk and has other disabilities. Despite that, she trains twice a day, every day, as well as undertaking a full-time college course in childcare. She is a truly inspirational young woman.

There are clear barriers to participation in sport for those who have disabilities, including physical inaccessibility and a lack of inclusion. We should not forget that a fifth of the Scottish population has a disability and only a fifth of people who have disabilities take on the recommended level of activity, yet seven out of 10 disabled people want to take part in more sport and physical activity.

Only one in four clubs in the United Kingdom thinks that it has appropriate facilities, adequately trained staff and suitable equipment for disabled people to participate, which means that three quarters of clubs need some additional support. That can contribute to the isolation of disabled people and limit their chances to pursue a healthy lifestyle.

As others have said, Scottish Disability Sport has played an integral part in the development of inclusive sport in Scotland. Its volunteers and staff work hand in hand with local authorities and leisure trusts to deliver the social, mental and physical benefits of activity and sport, which are so important to individuals with disabilities and, indeed, to us all. Working with local partnerships, it has enabled 345 children to receive inclusive sports coaching in the past year, and there have been more than 200 new entrants to the sport of boccia in the past two years.

The south of Scotland is home to a very active disability sport network. In March, Dumfries and Galloway coaches and athletes took part in the special Olympics world summer games in Abu

Dhabi. That was the first time that any athletes or coaches from Dumfries and Galloway had been chosen to be part of the Great Britain world games team and they were all immensely proud to be there.

D&G Disability Sport has entered a team to take part in the 2020 special Olympics GB national alpine skiing championships, which will take place in Switzerland in early February. The team of four skiers, accompanied by three coaches, will compete at the games for the first time in a special Olympics winter games. Having started skiing only earlier this year, the athletes have been training arduously on the dry ski slope in Carlisle. They have made tremendous progress in a short period of time, taking part in their first competition in June. Already, they are prepared to take the next step and compete in the slalom and giant slalom events in Switzerland next year.

In June, D&G Disability Sport will host the Dumfries and Galloway special olympics mini games, which will include swimming, boccia and table tennis. It is a regional competition that is sanctioned by Special Olympics GB and sits within the competition advancement pathway. Participation makes athletes eligible to advance to the Special Olympics GB national level of competition in that sport. It is a great opportunity for athletes to compete, and to progress, in their sport.

Just last month, the world para athletics championships took place in Dubai. Scotland had seven athletes represent Great Britain in the event, producing a host of awe-inspiring performances. There was an astounding double gold and two new world records for Scottish racerunners Kayleigh Haggo and Gavin Drysdale. In Scotland, the four-year Get Out Get Active programme received £376,000 in funding. Due to the outstanding success of that programme, funding will be extended for an additional four years, and more than 8,000 disabled people across the UK are already participating.

Improvements to accessibility of sport in Scotland continue to be made. Between 2017 and 2018, 22 national events were organised across seven sports. Five regional para-sport festivals took place, with more than 300 athletes participating. More than 100 individuals across 13 sports were newly introduced. In addition, 14 education and training opportunities took place in the sports of canoeing, goalball, boccia, and swimming, with more than 300 coaches and volunteers benefiting.

We must continue to ensure that everyone in Scotland, irrespective of their background, is able to fully participate in society and in sport. Our success as a nation relies on creating a society in which obstacles to opportunities are eradicated to

allow the people of Scotland to achieve their potential. That should be all the people of Scotland, without any limitations at all. I congratulate, again, all the inspiring people in this area of sport, who have done so much to make our country proud of them.

15:37

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con):

Today's debate is one that I am glad to speak in, having some considerable experience over my 75 years—sorry, my 76 years—of a fair few of the challenges that have been discussed so far. In fact, it is almost 77 years. [*Laughter.*]

It goes without saying that access to sport and exercise is vital for the health of everybody in Scotland. When a group in society is unable to fully benefit from sport, we need to consider what action we can take to improve the situation. That situation is the case for disabled people for a number of different reasons—from physical accessibility to personal or social attitudes. However, whatever the reason, we can, and must, do better as a nation.

For most of my life, my participation in sport has been impacted by disability. Some sports are easier to adapt to, while others are more challenging. Playing croquet, for instance, is less challenging than my other favourite pursuit, which is sailing. Even then, support has been available through the charity Sailability Scotland, whose work I will take a moment to highlight. Working with the Royal Yachting Association, of which I am a member, and Scottish Disability Sport, Sailability works with sailing clubs and centres to promote sailing for all those with any form of physical, sensory or learning disability. That can mean helping with the setting up of new, disabled-friendly sailing clubs, or working with existing ones to adapt their existing practices. It can mean maintaining a fleet of boats that are suitable for disabled people to use, or organising competitive racing events for disabled people.

Sailability's work has made it possible for hundreds of disabled sailors to enjoy quality time on the water, and, since its founding in 1992, the charity has played an instrumental role in getting disabled people involved in sailing. That is largely done by adapting existing practices to support those who are not able to benefit from them. Without my left hand it can be difficult to manoeuvre a boat and pull the necessary ropes at the right time. However, by changing the way the system works, I have been able to go at exactly the same speed as my competitors and I have often won—although it does sometimes involve holding a rope with my teeth, which can be quite uncomfortable. That principle can be applied to many different sports. Entirely new kit is not

needed when changes to existing equipment can make a difference and can bring sport to a completely new group of players.

I have received some excellent submissions from organisations in the run-up to this afternoon's debate, as I am sure every member has. I am grateful to all of them for their thoughts. Scottish Disability Sport has been instrumental in driving up engagement and participation in disability sport. I am particularly impressed by its commitment to delivering disability inclusion training to coaches across the country by running more than 100 programmes, involving 1,600 candidates in the past year alone, as well as working with 15 universities to improve access to sport. I am sure that inclusion will be at the forefront of its work in the years ahead.

I am also encouraged by sportscotland's outline of the financial contribution—to the tune of more than £500,000 per year and almost £2.5 million over four years—that it is continuing to make to Scottish Disability Sport. That is in addition to its active schools and direct club investment programmes. The work that it is doing is exactly the kind of work that we should celebrate.

Finally, I recognise the work of the Scottish Football Association, which has been working to develop para-football since the launch of its first strategy in 2012. That has made a clear difference—going from one disability-friendly competition to 14 in seven years. In turn, that has enabled more than 7,000 participants to enjoy their sport and 6,000 coaches to be educated in disability inclusion.

In Scotland today, it is estimated that one in five people has some kind of disability—approximately 1 million people. We know that disabled people in Scotland are far less likely to participate in sport than non-disabled people. We know the devastating impact that a lack of exercise can have on people's health, and that is no less true of people with a disability. Without any prospect of getting out and enjoying physical activity, it is all too easy to get in a rut and, by the time one reaches middle age, it is a struggle to break out of a downward spiral.

Whenever people have negative attitudes about disabled sports, just show them footage of our athletes in the Paralympic games breaking records and inspiring a new generation.

If accessibility is the problem, let us see how we can work with clubs to help them bring their sport to more people in their communities. Let us look at starting the process as early as possible, by developing pathways from schools and communities into competitive sport.

We take great pride in being an inclusive society for disabled people and it is true that there has

been a massive improvement in recent years. However, disabled people's access to sport still lags stubbornly behind and more must be done. There are so many fantastic role models for disabled people when taking up sport—we only need to glance at some of the performances at the Paralympics to tell us that.

Let us work together in opening new pathways into sport for disabled people and encourage them to get involved at any opportunity. With the right support and equality of opportunity, there is nothing that we cannot do.

15:43

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): As someone who believes in the benefits of sport and physical activity, I am honoured to speak in today's debate. I firmly believe that everyone, regardless of geography, social background or whether they have a disability, should be able to enjoy sport equally. I know that that sentiment is reflected in Scottish Government policy, as the minister has outlined.

I will go over a few of the steps that the Scottish Government has taken in relation to broadening engagement with sports. Two years ago, the First Minister opened the first inclusive sports training centre in Inverclyde; in 2018-19, the Scottish Government increased sportscotland's core funding by £2 million for the development of sport in Scotland; and the Scottish Government has pledged to underwrite any potential shortfall in national lottery funding for sportscotland of up to £3.4 million.

The nature of the relationship between the Scottish Government and sportscotland in providing funding is critical to the development of disability sport in our nation and to ensuring that there are opportunities for participation for all. As an MSP, I get to see some of the work that sportscotland does in our schools and in our constituencies to broaden sporting opportunities for all members of society.

Other members have given examples of good practice in disability sports across the country. As is customary, I will focus on examples in my constituency. North Lanarkshire figure skating club, which is based at the Time Capsule leisure centre in Coatbridge, is an inclusive club with members who have additional support needs. Members of the club and their parents have reported a massive difference in members' social and physical activity, which has such an amazing impact on the trajectory of their lives. Some members have gone on to compete in the special Olympics, with some winning gold medals in Vienna. I am told that one of the coaches—Rebecca, to name-drop—taught the children and

trained alongside them, thus demonstrating the positive impact that North Lanarkshire figure skating club has on our skaters and on the community as a whole. The club and sport in general help to relieve all the skaters' worries and anxiety, as well as those that their families might have, and it acts as a safe haven for all members.

About a week ago, the club contacted me and my neighbouring colleague Alex Neil regarding a 200 per cent rise in rent since it was founded in 2008. Initially, it was charged £40 per hour for use of the ice rink at the Time Capsule, but that has now increased to a whopping £149 per hour. That is obviously putting pressure on the club, which is why it has written to us, and it has led to many of the families who participated dropping out. That is concerning, given that the club has been so successful. Today, for the record, I make it clear to the club that Alex Neil and I will be writing to NL Leisure to ask that the situation be resolved to allow the success of the inclusive club, which began in 2008, to continue.

The Time Capsule leisure centre also hosts North Lanarkshire's inclusive ice skating programme, which is for people with any type of impairment. The programme is flourishing, with more than 30 families registered. The leisure centre also hosts the Monklands disabled swimming club, which meets weekly, is thriving and is always looking for new participants. A lot is going on, even just in the Time Capsule.

I have spoken about the Coatbridge shining stars group in the chamber many times. With its founder Katie Slaven, the group does amazing work with children and young people with complex additional needs. That absolutely fantastic work includes individual sessions with personal trainers, and kick boxing and sensory circuit sessions, which are provided by a qualified trainer. I know that the minister is still considering fitting in a visit to the shining stars, so I mention the group again, because they would really appreciate a visit. I know that the minister is keen to come along.

Although there are countless sports that we could focus on—I could certainly have mentioned many more examples in Coatbridge and Chryston alone—I want to talk briefly about football, as I am the convener of the cross-party group on the future of football in Scotland. I thank the SFA for the briefing that it sent to members. The SFA has invested heavily in identifying, and catering to, the needs of disabled athletes. Since 2012, the SFA has educated more than 6,000 coaches on the challenges that para-athletes face and their support needs. The investment has led to the number of players multiplying from 1,000 to 7,000 in just eight years.

In the same timescale, the SFA has gone from hosting one disabled-friendly tournament annually

to hosting 14. That is still not enough, but it is definitely a massive improvement. The rapid rise in the numbers of participants in the various versions of football in Scotland culminated last August in the founding of Scottish Para-Football, which is the world's first para-football affiliated national association. That is something of which we can all be proud.

As members have mentioned, in October, Willie Pettigrew of the Scottish PowerChair Football Association visited Parliament and had an exhibition in the garden lobby. When I spoke to him, he told me how powerchair football had helped to reduce his isolation and improve his mental wellbeing, and how it builds players' self-confidence.

I was alerted at that point to the concern that powerchair players up and down the country still have about access to toilets, particularly in older facilities—other members, including Mary Fee, have mentioned that. Of course, we know that that concern applies not only to powerchair players, but to players of other sports. I would urge the Government, sportscotland, local authorities and other stakeholders to consider what renovations may be required in some of those older buildings. As constituency MSPs, we can all think of buildings in our own areas where improvements might be needed.

We can be proud that Scotland is home to many of the most inclusive sporting projects in the world. We boast huge successes in the para-sports, with world champions in tennis, discus and sprinting, to name just a few. However, if we want to be a truly equal society, we must do more—all the members who have spoken in the debate today have reflected on that. We must encourage disability sport to continue to flourish on equal terms, and we must continue to listen to the needs of those who are involved at a grass-roots level.

15:50

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I start by declaring an interest: I am the honorary president of the Dunbartonshire Disability Sports Club, and I have been since 2013. I intend, therefore, to be unashamedly parochial, as a lot about the model that has been developed in Dunbartonshire can be commended to other areas.

Others have talked about elite athletes, and it is right to praise their achievements, but I want to talk about the young disabled people in my area. In 2009, Tommi Orismaa, football development officer at West Dunbartonshire Council, was taking a group of young disabled people and their parents to a game of football in Falkirk. Why Falkirk? I do not know, but during the journey, the parents spoke about the very few opportunities

that there are for children and young people with additional support needs to participate in sport, particularly after school hours.

As a result of that feedback, three public meetings were organised and 135 people from across the local disability community in West Dunbartonshire came along to discuss the lack of physical activity opportunities for children and young people with additional support needs. The decision to create a volunteer-led disability sports club was unanimously agreed to, and so the Dunbartonshire Disability Sports Club was born. The club held its first multisports session in March 2010, with around 27 children and young people with additional support needs in attendance.

Over the past 10 years, the club has expanded its activities. Having started with one multisports session per week, it is currently delivering five physical activity sessions per week for 56 members. The club works in partnership with West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust, the council, local sports clubs, Children in Need, Shared Care Scotland, the Big Lottery Fund and STV to create club activities such as swimming, football, multisports, residential sports camp and the disability sport youth group. New activities evolve all the time.

During one of the residential sports camps, parents' health was raised, and the club acted and started a parents' group. Since 2017, the club provides weekly spin classes and massage and fitness classes for parent and carers who are affected by disability. The club has taken a holistic approach.

The unexpected benefit of the club has been the connections and support groups that the families have created over the years. Families brought together by the club go on holiday together, take the children on social outings together and, importantly, are able to talk to other parents in a similar situation about their challenges and how they cope.

Let me tell members, in the words of two mums, about the impact that the club makes. The first mum said:

"Liam is autistic, with severe learning difficulties. At a disability tennis session we attended, we were aware that all of the children knew each other and we were joining an already established club. One of the club organisers, Allan Clark, approached me and gave me information on the Dunbartonshire Disability Sports Club. This was local to where we lived, so we decided to give it a try. At the time, we were struggling to get Liam to engage with anything; he was a teenager struggling to fit in and connect with others. Most of the things we tried, he showed absolutely no interest in and wanted to leave after a short time. When we arrived at the multisports club, Liam recognised some of the children he went to school with and, although he didn't join in, he didn't want to leave. The coaches constantly encouraged Liam to participate and, slowly, he started to join in the activities. With the support from the coaches and

other members of the club, he now participates in all of the sessions.

Over the two years that Liam has attended the club he has become more confident, more active, less isolated and communicates more with the group and at home. On arriving at the multisports session on Saturdays, he runs from the car park into the sport hall in front of me and has joined in the activity before I get into the hall. He now also attends the swimming sessions on Sundays and is enjoying learning to swim.

Being part of the club has contributed to Liam being more confident when interacting with other groups; he is more active and is more comfortable in trying to be part of new experiences."

This is what Max's mum had to say:

"My son Max has learning difficulties and was very isolated and lacked confidence to take part in most activities as he thought he was getting judged by other kids for his lack of ability to play games and sports. Max was not interested in sports and physical activity.

Since joining the club in 2017 it has provided him with an environment where he feels comfortable and confident to take part in sport without feeling judged. He participates in weekly multisports sessions and weekly swimming sessions and loves to play football (before joining the Club he would never kick a ball with other children).

His newly discovered confidence has resulted in him trying after school basketball, and he participated in a school football tournament earlier this year. His school has also seen a difference in his confidence and behaviour and awarded him with a special achievement award for PE in May. The changes to Max's confidence have had a positive impact on our whole family, and we are so grateful for the work Dunbartonshire Disability Sports Club does for children in the community."

One could not put it any better than those two mums have done. Sport for disabled people is inclusive, empowering and builds confidence. It helps participants and their families and it would not happen without volunteers such as Allan Clark and the coaches who do so much to make sport accessible. Let us have more of it, please. That requires more support from every level of government.

Not to be outdone by Fulton MacGregor, I want to invite the minister—indeed, both ministers—to visit Dunbartonshire Disability Sports Club.

15:57

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Sport should be for everyone, because, as the minister mentioned in her opening speech, it has the potential to change lives.

As the Scottish Disability Sport report noted, 21 per cent of the Scottish population have a disability and seven in 10 disabled people want to take part in more sport and physical activity, yet only 2 per cent of the coaching workforce and 8 per cent of club members report having a disability.

The Scottish Government's "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People" delivery plan, which was published in 2016, notes three key actions on sport. First, as Alison Johnstone mentioned:

"Disabled people's participation at all levels of sport and physical activity will increase through an action plan developed in partnership with disabled people".

Secondly:

"sportsotland will invest in disabled people and athletes and ensure that the needs of disabled people and athletes are addressed through investment to Scottish Disability Sport, Active Schools Network, the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and Gold Coast Commonwealth Games."

Thirdly, there is a focus on the creation of

"A new parasport facility for Scotland in Inverclyde, with an investment of £6 million"

which

"is being built to promote the inclusion of disabled athletes in sport."

In 2017, the First Minister opened the new national sports training centre in Inverclyde. The £12 million redevelopment was funded by sportsotland and the Scottish Government—partnership working with inclusion at its heart.

As Fulton MacGregor mentioned, at a national level the Scottish Football Association has led on the advancement of football opportunities for people with a disability since 2005. In 2017, the SFA rebranded its work as "para-football"; that terminology is regarded as more positive and empowering than the previous negative "disability football". Since 2012, the SFA has educated more than 6,000 coaches specifically within para-football.

Across the country, more clubs are improving the ways in which they support the inclusion of all athletes in sport. Last year, I was delighted to support my local team, Glenrothes Strollers FC, as the club hosted its first pan-disability football festival. I met club officials and local football stalwart, Joe McCafferty, at the festival, which brought together 120 young people from across Scotland to compete in the tournament. Over the past three years, Glenrothes Strollers has worked in partnership with the Scottish Football Association and has moulded the landscape of disability football in Tayside and Fife to establish 10 centres to allow people to access the sport. In recognition of its efforts, the club picked up the 2017 SFA community award.

Glenrothes is also home to the Disability Sport Fife headquarters at the Michael Woods sports centre. DSF began life back in 1977 and is a branch of Scottish Disability Sport. In 2017, it celebrated 40 years as the disability sport lead body in Fife for children, athletes and players of all ages and abilities with a physical, sensory or

learning disability. DSF leads the development of inclusive sport and active recreation for children, young people and adults with a physical, sensory or learning disability across the kingdom. DSF has sent a paralympian to every Paralympic games since 1992.

Ahead of today's debate, I spoke to para-athlete Stefan Hoggan. Stefan is an ambassador for Disability Sport Fife and Scottish Disability Sport and he works to encourage young disabled people to get and stay physically active. Stefan started swimming at the age of three. He was born without a lower right arm and took up para-triathlon in 2015 after missing out on competing at swimming in the 2014 Commonwealth games. He finished sixth at the world para-triathlon event in Detroit. At the age of 24, having represented Scotland for more than 10 years, Stefan retired from professional sport. He now coaches the next generation of competitive swimmers at Carnegie swimming club. Stefan told me that it was thanks to Disability Sport Fife's support that he was successful in sport in the first place—the organisation helped to build his confidence and allowed him to thrive in other fields, including, as some might know, politics.

Nationally, Scottish Disability Sport has delivered more than 100 disability inclusion training opportunities for 1,608 candidates. SDS is training and working with more than 15 universities and colleges to embed inclusion across tertiary education. Disability inclusion training has also been embedded in the curriculum delivery to all trainee PE teachers in Scotland.

Returning to Glenrothes, I highlight Stuart Padley, a member of the Royal Navy who recently competed in the Invictus UK trials. Stuart has been supported by Help for Heroes following a stroke in 2018 and will take part in the Invictus games in 2020. Commenting on what is yet to come, he said:

"Taking part in the Invictus Games in The Hague next year will enable me to move forward with my recovery and be part of a team with similar challenges. I have found that focusing on sports has helped immensely with my mental well-being and fitness. It has made me more determined than ever to carry on with the Invictus journey."

Stuart Padley's journey, much like Stefan Hoggan's, has been about the positive impact of sport on his life. Despite what life has thrown at both those men, sport has been a pathway through which they have honed their talents to the fullest. Fundamental in both those journeys has been the support of partners, whether that be Help for Heroes or Disability Sport Fife. That backing must have been a driving factor in both those success stories. Stuart asked me to thank all military personnel, Help for Heroes and his family and friends for all the support that they have given him.

The Scottish Government is working to ensure that sport is more inclusive for all. From investment in the national para-sport facility to the work of sportscotland across Scotland, more clubs than ever before are focused on developing inclusive practices on participation in sport. Grass-roots football clubs such as Glenrothes Strollers are playing a huge role in challenging discrimination in sport and enabling inclusion for all.

I pay tribute to Glenrothes Strollers, Disability Sport Fife and Stefan Hoggan for their work, and I wish the best of luck to Stuart Padley from Glenrothes in the Invictus games next year.

16:03

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate on disability sport and participation. I thank all the organisations and individuals who sent briefings and testimonies ahead of the debate, including sportscotland.

There should be no barriers to participation in sport in Scotland for anyone, regardless of ability, background, age or place. As deputy convener of the Health and Sport Committee and as a member for the South Scotland region, I am aware through contact with people and organisations of some of the challenges that persons with disabilities face in accessing sport and sporting activities. Those challenges range from poorly accessible sporting facilities and a lack of sporting teams for disabled people to the costs associated with purchasing sporting equipment. We heard from Fulton MacGregor, Mary Fee and Alison Johnstone that adequate accessible changing facilities are also a barrier to participation.

I fully support the minister's reference to tackling loneliness and isolation as an issue to be considered in the debate. In 2016, in an attempt to better understand some of the barriers and challenges and to put in place policies to improve participation, sportscotland and the Equality and Human Rights Commission commissioned a research report into equality in Scottish sport. The report's authors looked at who currently participates in sport and the barriers to participation, and suggested potential solutions that would encourage participation in Scottish sport, particularly by disabled people.

The research was interesting. It found that, in Scotland, people with accessibility needs are less active. They have poorer experiences of school PE and are less likely to participate in sport as adults. It also found that disabled people are less likely to use leisure facilities, often because of stigma. On a more positive note, the report concluded that when people with disabilities take

part in sport and exercise, they are more likely to take part frequently and commit to the sport or activity for longer periods.

How can we support people with disabilities to be able and confident to become involved with sport and physical activity? I am pleased that since the research study in 2016, the Scottish Government has proactively taken steps to improve participation and support for people with disabilities in that regard.

The Scottish Government's "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People" delivery plan sets out ambitious plans for disability sport. It includes three actions on disability sport and is backed up with combined investment of more than £37 million, to deliver state-of-the-art sporting facilities across Scotland, funding for disability sport clubs and groups and access to training and education for sports instructors. That is all very welcome and I am pleased that many sporting organisations have commended the plan.

I will highlight some of the fabulous disability sport groups across my South Scotland region, which are breaking down barriers and encouraging people with disabilities into sport. Dumfries & Galloway Disability Sport, which is co-ordinated by Laura Vickers, from Dumfries and Galloway Council, helps to provide opportunities for people who have a physical, sensory or learning disability to take part in sport or physical activity.

D&G Disability Sport holds numerous classes during the week. On offer are football, judo, table tennis, the splash club and ice-ability at the Dumfries ice bowl, which is a prep for wheelchair curling and skating. All the classes are well attended, and, according to Laura Vickers, many families view the services that are provided as a lifeline for those who take part, which contributes to socialisation and promotes physical activity and a healthy mind—that relates to what the minister said about the need to tackle isolation and loneliness.

This year, D&G Disability Sport has entered a team into the 2020 special Olympics national alpine skiing championships, which will take place in Switzerland from 1 to 8 February. Joan McAlpine did an excellent job of describing the team and the alpine skiing plan. The team is excellent. I look forward to visiting it next year and I wish it every success in the Olympics.

Another event that is worth highlighting is the SkiffieWorlds coastal rowing championships, which were held in Stranraer this summer. The St Andrews team has adapted its St Ayles skiffs, which are now accessible for wheelchair users. Minister Joe FitzPatrick will be joining me for a St Ayles skiff row during Easter recess next year; I will welcome him to Stranraer then.

I have one more fantastic D&G sport to mention. Dumfries and Galloway is home to a slightly more unusual sport, tambourelli, which members may be aware of from a motion that I lodged earlier this year. Tambourelli, a shuttlecock court game, was invented in Newton Stewart in the 1970s and has spread across the world. Small communities of players run active clubs in England, Scotland, Germany, Japan and Sweden. The aim of tambourelli is for the team of four players to stop a shuttlecock landing in the court on its side of the net. The players hit the shuttlecock with a bat that is like a tambour—something that is similar to a tambourine but without the bells. *[Laughter.]*

Tambourelli is completely adaptable for people with a disability, including wheelchair users. This year, the world championships were held in Newton Stewart and various teams, which included wheelchair users, took part. I hope to join players in March when the season starts.

I welcome this debate and I congratulate the Scottish Government on the steps that it has taken to improve disability sport and promote participation.

16:09

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

This has been an excellent debate, with thoughtful and considered speeches by members from across Parliament. My only disappointment is that the debate was scheduled to take place in this twilight zone slot. I hope that next year the business managers will put their heads together and perhaps schedule another such debate for a more prime-time slot for us all.

The minister set the tone for the debate in a very positive and upbeat speech. I hope that my saying that does not ruin her future political career.

A number of members have given first-class examples from their regions and constituencies. In particular, I want to mention Jackie Baillie and Jenny Gilruth, who both mentioned many such examples.

Members including Mary Fee mentioned good timing. As members will know, Tuesday was the international day of people with disabilities. I am sure that the business managers had an eye on that.

We all know the truism that participation in sport is good for health. I have lost count of the many long hours in which we have debated that in the chamber or in the Health and Sport Committee. Members—not least Brian Whittle—have said that. As members know, Mr Whittle is an award-winning athlete in his own right. As I have said before, I suspect that he is faster in one running shoe than I am in two. If people want to know the context of

that remark, they should look up—I think—the Moscow Olympics.

As we have heard from many members, 52 per cent of non-disabled people get the recommended level of daily physical activity, compared with only 20 per cent of people who have disabilities. As 21 per cent of Scottish people have a disability, that number is obviously appallingly low.

Brian Whittle: I thank David Stewart for taking an intervention—I will not talk about shoes.

Several members have mentioned that one in five people in Scotland has a disability. Would not it be better for us to say that 100 per cent of Scots have abilities and that it is up to us to try to match those abilities to pathways?

David Stewart: I strongly agree: I was going to mention Brian Whittle's speech. It is also important that we avoid labelling. I think that Brian Whittle is making that point.

It is clear from speeches by members across the chamber that we need a more inclusive programme throughout the country in order to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to get involved. No one should be left behind.

We have heard about innovative organisations across the country. I echo what many members have said. Scottish Disability Sport does excellent work in ensuring that the philosophy of increased inclusion is translated into actions and practice. SportsScotland is doing sterling work in focusing on several areas of inclusion, including young people from the most disadvantaged areas, women and girls, and—particularly in the context of this debate—young people with disabilities.

A number of members have said that half of people who live in poverty have a disability or are in families with disabled members. It is no secret that poverty and inequality come with many health-restricting issues. Adding to them a lack of physical activity will only make that worse.

We heard from Alison Johnstone about an issue that SportsScotland's research shows. Once disabled people start to take part in sport and physical activity, they are as likely to take part frequently as people without disabilities are. It is clear that that is the first step into access, where there are barriers.

We have all talked about barriers. They can be social or personal, and physical accessibility has been touched on. Transport, poverty and lack of opportunity can frequently be barriers.

I am conscious of the time, so I will touch on only a couple more issues.

Brian Whittle said that sport in general, team working and avoiding labelling are key. I was

struck by the issue of sport becoming a bastion of the middle classes, which he mentioned.

There are other issues. Barriers are created by rurality. I know about those from my Highlands and Islands region. Transport costs are a major factor.

Mary Fee mentioned the important issue of empowering people with disabilities, and said that role models should represent people from all backgrounds and of all abilities. She gave the pertinent example of the Riding for the Disabled Association. Riding provides therapy and mobility, and adds to confidence.

Alison Johnstone made the valid point that it is important to develop coaching and to develop people who have disabilities to be coaches. Obviously, we need to do more work in that area: it is certainly vital.

In conclusion, I say that physical activity and social prescribing are vital in helping to manage some disabilities.

We need to translate into action the obvious cross-party consensus for increased engagement in sport by people with disabilities. We need to increase physical and psychological provision and access in order to provide people who have disabilities with more opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity.

You would expect me to end with a quote, Presiding Officer, so, as Nelson Mandela said:

“Sport has the power to change the world ... Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair.”

16:15

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I congratulate all members who have taken part in the debate. I also congratulate the Scottish Government and the business managers. This is the third day in a row that we have had mention of disability in the chamber. It is really encouraging that that is happening. We have had contributions from various members. It perhaps demonstrates the slight cultural change that has taken place in society, such that we can talk about disability in sport, in welfare and with regard to employment. I have been really encouraged this week—if slightly overworked.

I also thank all the third sector organisations and other organisations that have provided briefings for today's debate. I have found them to be very helpful in preparing for the debate.

I wish to pick up on comments that were made by Mary Fee and other members about how we can normalise disability sport, so that we do not talk about “disability sport”, but just about “sport”. I do not often get to talk about sport, which is my

great love outwith a few other things. I was very fortunate, having been brought up in a middle-class family, to be able to do lots of different sports. I learned to swim, I went to the Drum riding centre here in Lothian to learn to ride, I learned to ski and I learned to play golf. I put on the public record that I will never in all my life forget that 30-foot putt.

I was fortunate in that I was able to learn all those things, but I was never going to be a Paralympian. I wanted to play sport because I liked playing sport. There is, in our talk about the subject in the chamber, a danger that we highlight just the people who go on to represent us at the Commonwealth games, the European championships, the Olympics or whatever. That is absolutely great, but we do not ask the person in our street who goes to the local bowling club whether they are going to be bowling at the Commonwealth games.

If members have a moment during the election campaign over the next couple of days, I refer them to a really interesting article on the BBC sport website by Hannah Dines, who was a Paralympian cyclist a couple of years ago. She says that she is really concerned that people are inspired by what she does only because she is disabled. She says that she has become “inspiration porn”, which is a really interesting comment.

There is a danger that we see sport as being about people who have achieved to a high degree, rather than just being about going to the park to kick a football around with a few mates, going to the golf club, or whatever. We will have reached the equilibrium that members have mentioned when we simply say, “Oh, I hear Johnny’s off to the squash court,” or “I hear Jeremy’s gone to the tennis club,” and we do not even mention the person’s disability.

Brian Whittle: If I may intervene on one of my own, I say that I totally agree that what we are considering here is participation across all demographics. Does Jeremy Balfour agree that one of the great ways to get people involved in sport is to see the pathway to aspiration: people have to be able to touch it. Perhaps that is why we highlight the shop window that is international sport. That applies across the board—not just in disability.

Jeremy Balfour: I do accept that. I remember—to show my age—when David Wilkie came to our local swimming club and we all got to have our photo taken with him. Undoubtedly, he was a great Scot, from Edinburgh, who had won an Olympic gold medal. That perhaps inspired us to do a bit more swimming.

We need the showcase people, but we should not think that because a person who has a disability plays a bit of sport they will go on to become a Paralympian. That is the point that I am trying to make. We will do that by putting our resources into the grass roots, which is so important. I mention comments by Mary Fee, Alison Johnstone and others about the basics: whether we have the right changing rooms in our sporting facilities, whether people can get there by public transport, or whether there is the financial backing that allows for hire of a sports hall or ice rink. I accept that we need inspirational models, but we also need to make sure that our resources are allocated appropriately to the grass roots, and that we see disability sport as being like any other sport—we enjoy it and we celebrate together.

I thank the Government for the debate. It has been inspiring. I hope that it has raised the topic’s profile again among our political groups, because I think that there is consensus, based on which we can move forward.

I hope that one day everybody who wants to play sport, whatever their ability or lack of ability, will be able to do so and enjoy it.

16:21

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): I am delighted to close today’s debate on disability sport and participation and I thank members across the chamber for their contributions and for the way in which we have conducted the debate. It is not always the case that we agree to have a debate without a motion, but with such a debate, we all have the freedom to contribute without any danger of becoming partisan. That has allowed us to focus on the important issue to people across Scotland of the importance of sport and physical activity and how they can be used intentionally to bring about positive change for disabled people, just as they can for everybody in society.

Like other members, I was particularly encouraged by the ways in which organisations such as Scottish Disability Sport and sportscotland are working together to use the collective power of sport and physical activity to create positive, lasting change for disabled people.

Brian Whittle spoke about the importance and potential of sport and physical activity in the preventative health agenda. He was absolutely right. We know that physical activity is one of the very best things that we can do, not just for our physical health but for our mental health. David Stewart also made the point that that applies to everyone, irrespective of ability or disability.

It is good that, throughout the Scottish Parliament’s existence, the sports portfolio has

been part of the health portfolio, and it is particularly good that sport is included in the public health portfolio. As we move to a preventative approach, that is exactly the right place for it to be.

Scottish Disability Sport has been a leader in the area for many years, and it was great to hear so many people speak about the subject. I join others in paying tribute to Janice Eaglesham MBE, whom I had the pleasure of meeting to discuss SDS's work. I was so impressed, not just by the activity that SDS was delivering but by her personal commitment and drive, which absolutely shone through—members from across the chamber spoke about that. Her loss has been felt deeply across the sports community. The work on disability sports activity that many sports governing bodies are now delivering can be seen as a fitting legacy of the important influence that she had on disability inclusion in sport in Scotland.

Mike Rumbles: The debate has been very consensual, but an issue that has not been tackled has been the Scottish Disability Sport report that showed that 47 per cent of disabled people feared losing their benefits if they were seen to be physically active. It is a perception, but what can the Scottish Government do to change that perception?

Joe FitzPatrick: The very important point that Mike Rumbles and other members have made is about the type of society and welfare system that we have. I certainly hope that, as we develop our social security system in Scotland, people will not have that fear. Some people in the medical profession say that, if we could turn physical activity into a pill, it would be called a miracle cure—I am misquoting, but they use words to that effect. If we have a way of improving people's health, surely we should encourage them to take that action rather than making them afraid of losing their benefits.

There have been many examples of para-athletes achieving success. Alison Johnstone mentioned the wheelchair curlers who were inspirational in the world championships in March, on home ice in Stirling. I was pleased to visit the national curling academy in Stirling, where I heard at first hand about the developments that Scottish Curling is making to ensure that it is inclusive. I even managed to have a go—I was told that I was not too bad, given that it was the first time that I had tried curling. I tried it both ways: using the stick and on the ground—

David Stewart: Did the minister feel when he was curling that it was a bit like his political career, in that he was on thin ice for much of the time?

Members: Oh!

Joe FitzPatrick: I am pleased to confirm that the ice arena in Stirling has very firm ice.

There are many other fantastic examples of people who have been real advocates for disability sports, including Neil Fachie in cycling and Toni Shaw in swimming. Brian Whittle was right to say that it is important to have examples to encourage people. We all need examples. We are particularly pleased about the work in women's sport, which is encouraging more girls and women to get involved. It is right that people with disabilities have role models, too.

Mike Rumbles and others were also right to say that we need to focus our efforts not just on the elite end, but on all levels of participation. I was pleased to hear Jackie Baillie, Emma Harper, Jenny Gilruth and others wax lyrical about the fantastic work that is being done in so many parts of Scotland. That was really good.

In his closing speech, Jeremy Balfour raised a really important question that a few folk touched on: how do we normalise disability sports?

It is a fact that one person in five has a disability, and it is a fact that many people with a disability find it more difficult to access sport. We need to consider how we can balance the normalisation of disability sport with challenging those barriers. In an ideal world, we would just say that 100 per cent of people have ability, but we need to recognise that people with disabilities have additional challenges. That is why Jeremy Balfour was quite right to say that it is appropriate for us to have had the discussions that we have had throughout this important week.

There are some extremely good examples of occasions on which disability sport has been put on a pedestal at the highest level. For example, the EDGA Scottish open was contested over the same course as the Scottish open. I would encourage members who have not seen an EDGA golf contest to see one, because this year's EDGA Scottish open was absolutely thrilling—it was just as thrilling as the Scottish open, which took place after it.

It is important that we recognise the amazing partnerships that exist across Scotland. I want to highlight the partnership between Scottish Disability Sport and the Spirit of 2012 trust. Together, they have been delivering the get out, get active programme, which is focused on getting some of the least active people—disabled and non-disabled alike—moving through fun and inclusive activities.

I see that time is tighter than I had hoped.

Alison Johnstone and David Stewart mentioned coaching. SDS also runs the UK disability inclusion training course, which helps participants with the tools that they need to teach sport to disabled people. That is an extremely important programme that is going from strength to strength.

Fulton MacGregor, Jenny Gilruth and Tom Mason all talked about football. We all know that football and football clubs are a powerful force for good in our communities. As Fulton MacGregor mentioned, the Scottish FA launched the world's first-ever affiliated national association for para-football earlier this year. Scottish para-football brings together under one umbrella nine organisations governing various styles of para-football in Scotland: the Amputee Football Association Scotland, Football Memories Scotland, Frame Football Scotland, Team United, the Scottish PowerChair Football Association, the Scottish National Cerebral Palsy Football Team, the Scottish Mental Health Football Association, the Scottish Deaf Football Association, and the Scottish PAN Disability Football League. I know that other sports are all working hard to look at how they can follow that fantastic example.

I will quickly touch on a visit that I made to Ireland recently to discuss work that is being done there to challenge some of the barriers that we have talked about today. Disabled people, both active and inactive, in Ireland were asked about their experiences, challenges and needs in relation to their participation in sport and physical activity, and from the vast feedback received the sport inclusion disability charter was developed. It commits sport in Ireland to be open to and understanding of all people with disabilities; to access training for people to facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities; to develop and deliver inclusive activities; to review facilities, venues and equipment; to make organisations more accessible; and to promote the inclusive nature of activities in a variety of formats.

I focus on that because, if we are going to tackle barriers, it cannot be left to the Government or SDS. It needs to be done across the board, by bringing together our sports' governing bodies, which are doing some really good work. It is really important that we work together to encourage all that good work.

I have so many more things I wanted to say and I apologise for not having covered all the points that have been made. It has been a good debate and I thank everyone who contributed to it. This is an area where, as a Parliament, we can work together to make sure that we make real progress for people with disabilities to make sure that they can benefit from sport and physical activity in the same as everyone else.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): That concludes our debate on disability sport and participation.

I am minded to accept a motion without notice to bring forward decision time to now.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4, Decision Time be brought forward to 4.33 pm.—[Maurice Golden]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time*Meeting closed at 16:33.*

16:33

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): As there are no decisions to be taken, I close the meeting.

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

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