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Wednesday 22 January 2020

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 22 January 2020

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

Portfolio Question Time

Government Business and Constitutional Relations

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first set of questions are on Government business and constitutional relations. Question 1 has not been lodged.

Citizens Assembly (Costs)

2. Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the costs for the citizens assembly of Scotland. (S5O-04020)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): We announced a budget of £1.37 million for the citizens assembly last October. That remains the estimated budget. Final costs will be published after the citizens assembly has finished its work.

Donald Cameron: Since announcing the taxpayer-funded citizens assembly, the Scottish National Party Government has done little to allay fears that it is nothing more than a talking shop for another divisive independence referendum. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that if the citizens assembly were to recommend that there should not be another independence referendum, the Scottish Government would respect that decision and take a referendum off the table?

Michael Russell: Mr Cameron should talk to his colleague Jamie Halcro Johnston, because he was at the citizens assembly this weekend as part of the politicians panel that is a resource for the assembly. I welcome the constructive engagement from the Tory party with the assembly, and I welcome that that the Scottish Labour Party leader, a Green Party representative and Angela Constance, representing the SNP, were also there. The only party that was not there was the Scottish Liberal Democrats. They are becoming the Free Presbyterians of Scottish politics—they just do not take part.

Why does not Mr Cameron acknowledge that good work is being done by the Conservatives in supporting the citizens assembly, for which we are all pleased and grateful?

Neurodiversity Debate (Proposal)

3. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will consider bringing forward to the Parliamentary Bureau a proposal for a debate on neurodiversity. (S5O-04021)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): I thank Daniel Johnson for highlighting the important issue of neurodiversity. The Scottish Government is committed to creating a fair and equal Scotland, where people are treated with dignity and respect.

Proposals for Government business in Parliament are set by the Cabinet prior to consideration by the Parliamentary Bureau. Individual ministers seek debating slots ahead of that, according to a variety of factors and available opportunities.

I advise Daniel Johnson that, between legislative, committee and Opposition business, the upcoming parliamentary calendar is extremely congested.

Daniel Johnson: The Government has received much criticism in recent months for its failure to hold education debates in its own time. In relation to neurodiversity, it is eight years since Parliament had a debate on dyslexia. Such conditions cut across numerous portfolios and acute need is created in people who have neurodevelopmental disorders. Will the minister commit to a proper in-depth debate, so that we can establish consensus and look at how the policy agenda can be taken forward?

Graeme Dey: I acknowledge entirely the importance of the subject and Mr Johnson's championing of it, and I know that the Minister for Mental Health, Clare Haughey, would be happy to see the subject being explored in the chamber.

However, I have offered Daniel Johnson a realistic and honest assessment of the pressures on plenary debating time for the foreseeable future. I suggest that a practical and positive way forward would be for him to bring to the chamber a members' business debate on the topic. That would allow him and other members the chance to contribute, and it would allow the minister the chance to outline the Government's position.

Brexit Preparation (Local Government)

4. James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to local authorities in preparation for Brexit. (S5O-04022)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): The Scottish Government is providing support in a variety of ways. It has worked collaboratively with the

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, allocating £50,000 to each local authority—a total of £1.6 million—to support planning for European Union exit. It has also fully funded two seconded officials to COSLA as a dedicated resource to support co-ordination and operational readiness across councils.

In addition, the Scottish Government has administered almost £1.4 million of Her Majesty's Treasury operational contingency funding to local authorities in support of additional costs relating to export health certificates.

James Kelly: I draw the minister's attention to the particular case of Glasgow City Council, in respect of funding. A 2019 report demonstrated that the cost of Brexit to Glasgow could be up to £2.35 billion and 38,000 jobs. A disorderly Brexit would therefore have a devastating impact on Glasgow. I urge the minister to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to Glasgow City Council's funding in preparation for Brexit.

Graeme Dey: The Scottish Government engages closely with COSLA and with local authorities directly on Brexit—which is not of our making, as Mr Kelly well knows—and we will continue to do so. We engage closely on funding and preparation, and we recognise the role that local authorities continue to play in steering Scotland through a Brexit that is not of our making.

Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Bill

5. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with victims of crime regarding the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Bill. (S5O-04023)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): The Scottish Government recognises that some victims of crime may oppose giving the right to vote to prisoners, and that has been taken into account in our proposal, which restricts voting to those who are serving sentences of 12 months or less.

During the development of our public consultation on prisoner voting, which was launched in December 2018, officials met representatives from Victim Support Scotland. On its launch, the consultation paper was provided to victims' groups. A total of 265 responses were received. I extended a personal offer to meet members of the victims organisations collaboration forum Scotland prior to the introduction of the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Bill, and that invitation remains open. I would be happy to meet victims' organisations to discuss the issue.

Liam Kerr: The Scottish National Party's plan to extend the franchise to prisoners would be a slap in the face for victims of crime, so I am interested to know whether that fact has been taken into account. The extension would be logistically challenging, it would put candidates and prison staff in unnecessary danger, and it is based on a misunderstanding of case law.

Would the cabinet secretary's time not be better spent on addressing issues such as overcrowding, lack of throughcare and the exhaustion of and dangers to prison officers, rather than, yet again, on putting criminals before victims?

Michael Russell: The gross misrepresentation that we have just heard does no credit to Liam Kerr. He is aware that the ruling from the European Court of Human Rights means that we have to make a change in the process. The question is how we do that. We are doing so proportionately and thoughtfully, and we are trying to do it sensitively. As I said, I am keen to talk to victims and their representatives.

What we have just heard is a knee-jerk reaction: it contained no facts and does nothing to take the issue forward. We should all regret that a member chooses to behave in such a way.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Is the cabinet secretary continuing to engage with legal experts on the bill? There are legal experts who remain concerned that the blanket disenfranchisement of prisoners who are serving sentences of more than one year is illegal and could be struck down by the European Court of Human Rights.

Michael Russell: Mark Ruskell is aware that I disagree with that opinion and knows that we have thought very carefully about the issue. He also knows, because he is a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, that at stage 2 the committee supported the Government's proposal on one-year sentences. The bill will come to the chamber for stage 3, when members will decide what they wish to do.

I am always happy to debate and discuss, but I think that we have put forward the right proposal at this time and I urge members to support it.

Referendums (Scotland) Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 is from Brian Whittle.

It would help if you were paying attention, Mr Whittle.

6. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what legal and other advice it has received regarding the implementation of the Referendums (Scotland) Bill. (S5O-04024)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): The Scottish Government draws on legal advice as appropriate from its lawyers, counsel, external solicitors and the law officers. Other than in exceptional circumstances, the Government does not comment on the content or source of legal advice, and legal advice remains confidential. That reflects the public interest in the provision of free and frank legal advice, and maintains the right to confidentiality of communications between legal advisers and clients.

I confirm that the Scottish Government has started discussions with the Electoral Commission and the Electoral Management Board for Scotland regarding the creation of guidance that is required under the framework.

Brian Whittle: I recognise the Scottish Government's desire and drive for independence. The clue is in the name. What consideration has been given to the majority of Scots who have expressly indicated their objections to even holding another divisive independence referendum?

Michael Russell: If Mr Whittle had been paying attention on 12 December, let alone today, he would have discovered that the result of the general election was that, out of 59 Scottish members of the UK Parliament, 47 are SNP—plus one, and we know the details of that.

That means that when people were asked in a first-past-the-post election—because those are the rules that applied—they said that they wanted the right to choose. That is the position of Scotland. It is the duty of the Scottish Government to deliver on that instruction—[*Interruption.*—]and the antidemocratic position of the Tories, which we can hear from all the shouting, cannot stand on this matter.

It would be far better if the Tories were to accept that that right and that mandate exist, rather than trying to resist them. It makes them look very bad and very negative; it makes them look as if they do not care a jot about for what the people of Scotland think, which is actually true.

Independence Referendum (Section 30 Order)

7. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Prime Minister's decision not to grant a section 30 order in relation to a second independence referendum. (S5O-04025)

The Cabinet Secretary for Government Business and Constitutional Relations (Michael Russell): The rejection by the United Kingdom Government of the people of Scotland's right to choose is further demonstration of the

need for Scotland's future to be put in Scotland's hands. That is an utterly uncontroversial opinion.

We are keeping our options open for how to respond to the UK Government's refusal to accept the mandate that was given to the Scottish Government by the people who live in Scotland. The First Minister will provide an update on the Government's next steps shortly.

Gil Paterson: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will agree with me that the Prime Minister's undemocratic rejection of Scotland's right to choose is simply unsustainable. For the avoidance of any doubt, will the cabinet secretary outline what measures the Scottish Government is taking to protect Scotland's interests ahead of our being dragged out of the European Union next week by a Tory Government that Scotland did not, and is likely never to, vote for?

Michael Russell: There will be a range of events and announcements next week that are designed to draw attention to two things. The first is that Scotland did not vote to, and does not wish to, leave the EU. The second is that we wish to remain close to the EU so that we can re-enter it within the shortest period possible.

It is very significant that, from a week on Friday at 11 pm, the only route for regaining our European citizenship will be choosing independence and using that as the means of re-entering the EU. Other routes are blocked. The status quo finishes.

I encourage the people of Scotland to think on that, to continue to support that position—as they are doing in increasing numbers—and to move forward so that they have the right to choose. That is the issue: do they wish to be part of the EU, as they have repeatedly said they do, or do they wish to be part of Boris Johnson's bonging Brexit?

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): How long is a generation?

Michael Russell: According to the UK Government and the procedures that it has put in place in Northern Ireland, it is four years. That is the time they have in which to decide—or eight years, if there is no cross-community support. That is the UK Government's definition of a generation. I just wish that it would keep to it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member who was to ask question 8 is not here, so we will take a short pause before we move on to the next set of portfolio questions.

Culture, Tourism and External Affairs

Historic Environment (Preservation of Buildings and Landmarks)

1. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to preserve buildings and landmarks of historic interest. (S5O-04027)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government preserves and protects buildings and landmarks of historic interest through the work of our lead public body, Historic Environment Scotland. That work includes providing £14.5 million annually for grant schemes that enable the repair and revitalisation of the historic environment.

Last year, funding of £180,000 was provided to the internationally celebrated New Lanark world heritage site for its annual maintenance plan. In addition, targeted funding was given for individual local concerns such as the David Livingstone centre in South Lanarkshire, which received over £600,000 for conservation-standard repairs.

Margaret Mitchell: The Hamilton mausoleum, which was built as a monument to the 10th Duke of Hamilton, is an iconic landmark of huge cultural and historical interest in Lanarkshire, but it has water damage and needs repair urgently. The save the Hamilton mausoleum trust has been set up, and a local campaign has been launched by the *Hamilton Advertiser* to raise funds to repair the damage before costs spiral out of control. Will the cabinet secretary add her support to that initiative, and can she suggest any organisation that could match fund or provide any other support to ensure that that essential work is completed as soon as possible?

Fiona Hyslop: I am aware of the importance of the Hamilton mausoleum and the campaign that is being run. Indeed, it was the subject of a question from Monica Lennon at my previous portfolio question time. I know that there is cross-party support for the campaign, including among my Scottish National Party colleagues and among the member's party.

As I said in my answer a few weeks ago, Historic Environment Scotland has not been approached about the building, but it would welcome the opportunity to work with any parties that come forward to identify ways to secure its sustainable future management. I know that the leader of South Lanarkshire Council has acknowledged its commitment to preserving the cultural importance of the building, but I think that everybody has to come together to make sure that there is a sustainable future for what is an

important part of Scotland's and Lanarkshire's heritage.

Year of Coasts and Waters 2020 (North Ayrshire)

2. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will support residents and community groups in North Ayrshire seeking to take part in the year of coasts and waters 2020. (S5O-04028)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government is providing match funding via EventScotland for a number of events in North Ayrshire to celebrate Scotland's year of coasts and waters 2020. They include the making waves festival at Irvine's beach park and harbourside, "Signal at Dusk" by Cryptic on Irvine beach, the Fife yachts regatta off Largs, visits from travelling galleries, participation in the national skiff rowaround and performances by the Nevis Ensemble.

We have also launched the micro local area grants fund, to fulfil our programme for government commitment to offer one-off grants to enable community groups, charities and social enterprises right across Scotland to hold themed events that are related to the year of coasts and waters 2020. Applications may be made via the YouthLink Scotland website until 14 February.

Ruth Maguire: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer. As she mentioned, a number of events are already planned, including the opera and art on Irvine beach. Will she join me in encouraging local groups to apply for the available funding to put on more events and in encouraging folk from around the country to pay Ayrshire a visit? Would she like to join us at one of the events that are planned?

Fiona Hyslop: Having seen the programme that has been put together in North Ayrshire, I would be delighted to try to attend some of the events. As the member points out, the major events have already been organised, but such is the interest and the demand from community groups to do more that we have opened up the small grants scheme.

The year is an opportunity for people across Scotland to celebrate. We have much to tell about our coasts but also about our waters—our canals, lochs and rivers. That is the story of Scotland, and I look forward to hearing those stories when the year gets into full swing. Members who have already seen the giant, 10m-high puppet Storm parading through Glasgow as part of Celtic Connections will know that it really is capturing people's imaginations in this, the year of Scotland's coasts and waters.

Christmas and New Year Celebrations (Edinburgh)

3. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what funding it provides to support the Edinburgh Christmas and new year celebrations, and what criteria are applied. (S5O-04029)

The Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development (Ben Macpherson): In 2019, Edinburgh's Hogmanay received a £160,000 award from the EventScotland international programme to support the torchlight procession on 30 December, together with £48,500-worth of international marketing support. The EventScotland winter festivals fund awarded £3,000 to the Edinburgh International Magic Festival's hogmanay house at Lauriston castle.

Between 2019 and 2021, City of Edinburgh Council will receive £400,000-worth of funding from the platforms for creative excellence—PLACE—fund to present international artists, working in collaboration with Scottish street theatre companies, as part of the street party at hogmanay.

We have started the year of coasts and waters 2020, and Edinburgh's maritime heritage has been the focus of the latest message from the skies initiative, with a free event of poetry and outdoor light projections running until 25 January, supported by £150,000-worth of funding from the festivals expo fund.

The assessment process for, and the funding of, the festivals expo fund and the PLACE fund are administered by Creative Scotland, while EventScotland administers the winter festivals fund and the international funding programme. Different criteria apply to each funding process, and they are set out on the organisations' respective websites.

Alison Johnstone: The minister will be well aware of the reported controversies surrounding this year's celebrations—in particular, the concerns that commercial interests have trumped those of community wellbeing, and wellbeing more generally. We want local people and visitors alike to enjoy celebrating in our capital city, but we must commit to protecting Princes Street gardens' precious parks, which are a much-loved part of the world heritage site. What can the Scottish Government do to protect our parks and public assets and ensure that our communities have full access to them?

Ben Macpherson: Responsibility for Underbelly's contract to produce Edinburgh's Christmas resides solely with City of Edinburgh Council. For clarity, the Scottish Government has never provided any funding support for that festival.

As Alison Johnstone has alluded, City of Edinburgh Council is debating the future of all the winter festivals, including the use of Princes Street gardens for Edinburgh's Christmas and the hogmanay celebrations. I encourage residents and businesses to engage with the consultation on those matters, which the council will launch soon.

Alison Johnstone's supplementary question conveyed the important message that such festivals attract people from all around the world as well as visitors from Scotland, including from the city of Edinburgh. As we move forward in our consideration of issues such as the use of public space, we should seek to enhance the celebrations and ensure that we preserve Edinburgh for years to come.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The minister will be aware that Marketing Edinburgh has had 89 per cent of its funding cut because of the Scottish Government's cuts to council funding. Marketing Edinburgh's former chief executive, John Donnelly, has expressed his concern that Edinburgh will soon be the only European city left without a marketing organisation.

Does the minister agree that, although we need tourism management to deal with the risk of overtourism in Edinburgh, the Scottish Government should also properly support the council financially, to ensure that we continue to attract new tourism in a sustainable way and provide consideration for local residents?

Ben Macpherson: Questions about City of Edinburgh Council's provision of marketing are for the council to consider. I reiterate what I said in my initial answer. As part of the award for Edinburgh's most recent hogmanay celebrations, the Scottish Government provided £48,500-worth of international marketing support through the EventScotland international programme.

Edinburgh Festivals (Summer 2020)

4. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what organisations it has met to discuss Edinburgh's preparedness for the festivals in summer 2020. (S5O-04030)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government regularly meets representatives of all the major Edinburgh festivals, and also participates in both the festivals forum and the thundering hooves steering group.

Both forums are key to the planning of the Edinburgh festivals, incorporating lessons learned from previous years to maximise preparedness for forthcoming editions. On both forums are representatives of Festivals Edinburgh, British Council Scotland, City of Edinburgh Council,

Creative Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Government. The festivals forum also includes Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, Edinburgh tourism action group, Marketing Edinburgh, the University of Edinburgh and VisitScotland.

Jeremy Balfour: As we have heard, the Edinburgh festivals clearly represent a benefit to the economies of both Edinburgh and Scotland. However, in the wake of the 2019 festivals there have been complaints—especially from Lothian Buses and local residents—about the City of Edinburgh Council's lack of planning. Will the Scottish Government commit to reducing such problems in 2020, by working closely with those affected by the festivals?

Fiona Hyslop: In my initial answer I gave a comprehensive list of the organisations with which the Scottish Government works on planning issues. I point out that ministers are frequently told not to interfere in local council affairs, but in the very next week we are often urged to do just that. We have to respect the democratic independence of the City of Edinburgh Council on the majority of the issues that have been raised so far.

I turn to the specific transport issues that have been mentioned, which exist not only in Edinburgh but more widely across Scotland. An Edinburgh events transport summit was staged on 5 December 2019, which involved a number of organisations such as the Scottish Rugby Union. Clearly, some such issues relate to the particular times at which events are happening in various places. Through the working group of the festivals forum, which I mentioned earlier, Transport Scotland has helped to facilitate discussions among festival organisations and events organisers, who met on 20 November 2019. As I also said earlier, an Edinburgh events transport summit was staged on 5 December, precisely to address the issues that the member has raised.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): What impact will the Tory Government's plans to impose further restrictions on European Union workers coming to Scotland have on our internationally acclaimed festivals this year?

Fiona Hyslop: There are a number of issues, not least of which is that the people who live and work in Scotland are deeply affected. We have serious concerns and want to reach out: on Monday, at an event in Edinburgh, the First Minister again reiterated our commitment to and support for EU workers.

Issues about artist movement will be discussed, as I previously indicated to Parliament, at the visa summit that we are holding in February 2020.

There is also an issue about visitors, and make no mistake that the UK Government's attitude

towards Europe will affect how people see this country. It is essential that we send out a message that we in Scotland are open and want to welcome visitors to our festivals and also at other times of the year. The Scottish Government will do everything that it can to ensure that tourists still come to Scotland and our festivals, and it will support our fantastic offer to the world when it comes to the arts.

Traditional Culture (North East Scotland)

5. Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it supports traditional culture in the north-east. (S50-04031)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I have something to say before you give your answer.

Mr Chapman, I anticipated an apology because you have come in to the chamber late. You have come in just before your question. I know that we are ahead of schedule, but these are follow-on debates. I say that to all members. It would have been better if you had apologised, because I was toying with not calling you, then I felt magnanimous and you have spoiled it.

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government is committed to supporting and promoting traditional Scottish culture and the Scots language.

We fund a variety of groups and initiatives that are supporting the Scots language and traditional culture across Scotland and in the north-east—such as the Doric Board, which offers financial awards of between £250 and £1,000 to provide support to projects that promote Doric culture and heritage, and “Scots Radio”, which broadcasts in Scots and engages with the Scots speaking community. Together, they have also successfully established Aberdeenshire's first ever Doric Film Festival.

Creative Scotland provides regular funding to a variety of arts and cultural groups in the north-east area—such as the Aberdeen Performing Arts, Dance North Scotland, Creative Dundee, Deveron Projects, Dundee Contemporary Arts and the Dundee Repertory Theatre. In addition, the Scots trad music awards took place in Aberdeen last year with funding from Creative Scotland and support from MG Alba.

Peter Chapman: Presiding Officer, I apologise for coming in late. I hope that that has put me back in the good books.

I thank the cabinet secretary for that full answer. She is right that the Doric language is a big part of the culture and heritage of the north-east, and as a

member for that region I shall ask the rest of my question in the Doric.

The Doric tongue is the maist important dialect that is spoken in the north east o Scotland and is an important pairt o life across the north-east. Doric is heard iveryday in work and skweels aa across the north-east, an I believe that it should be thocht o as just as important as English an Gaelic.

The Scottish Government his spent a lot on Gaelic, an his seen great success in keepin the language alive and relevant. Will the Scottish Government commit tae the same levels o fundin fir Doric tae prevent it fae deein, an tae preserve an important pairt o wir culture in the north-east?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have redeemed yourself, Mr Chapman. That was delightful.

Fiona Hyslop: The member will be aware—particularly when budget negotiations are taking place—that I cannot commit to anything related to future funding. I take his point, but he will appreciate that there is a journey to go in relation to our support. The setting up of the Doric Board, however, is really important.

The member makes a vital point about Doric being spoken right through families' lives. It is a normal part of everyday life in every part of the north-east. I commend the many young champions of Doric, not least Iona Fyfe, who got the young speaker of the year award at the Scots language awards.

Those things are developing pace and profile. It is important that we champion Doric. I am happy to do so, and I appreciate the member's interest in the issue.

Scottish-Irish Relations

6. Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it promotes Scottish-Irish relations. (S5O-04032)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The bilateral relationship with Ireland is a priority for the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government office in Ireland opened in 2016, and in the past four years a team of five officials have worked to deepen our political, cultural, community and economic links and increase our engagement.

As an expression of our on-going commitment, the Scottish and Irish Governments have recently launched a joint strategic review in which we will take stock of the current relationship and identify priority areas for future collaboration. Following internal and external consultations, it is envisaged that a report will be collated by officials in the second quarter of 2020. It will highlight the value

of current Irish-Scottish relations and make recommendations for future co-operation.

Tom Arthur: My constituency of Renfrewshire South is home to many, including myself, who are of Irish descent, and many of my constituents maintain strong family connections with Ireland. What opportunities will there be for my constituents and the Irish diaspora across Scotland to engage with the strategic review?

Fiona Hyslop: Many people across Scotland have family and other relations with Ireland, including, as Mr Arthur said, constituents of his. The warmth of that relationship was testified to by the warm reception that Simon Coveney, the Tánaiste, received from members across the chamber when he came to Parliament.

We want everyone to take part in the strategic review. We know that people have lots of different interests in a variety of areas, including trade and culture. Individuals can take part through the joint questionnaire that has been launched, which seeks the views of individuals and groups of stakeholders. The questionnaire, which is open until 20 March, can be found on the Scottish Government's website. We are delighted that the Irish Government is also promoting it—in other words, it is a joint initiative. If people want to express their view on the current state of that relationship and what they would like to be done in the future, I would direct them to that questionnaire.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I must admit that, until the question was lodged, I had not been aware of the questionnaire. Could the cabinet secretary say more about what is being done to promote it? Given that the desire is to receive a diversity of responses from all of Scotland's people, how can we ensure that an inclusive approach is taken to that work?

Fiona Hyslop: The questionnaire was launched just before Christmas, and we promoted it again over the weekend in the normal press. I did interviews with the Irish media at the time. There is a social media link to the questionnaire, which I will circulate when I get back to my office later this afternoon. I look forward to Claire Baker and other members communicating that through social media. It has already received hundreds of responses, which is very good for a Scottish Government questionnaire.

Although the response so far has been strong, I would appreciate all members championing the questionnaire throughout their constituencies and using their social media accounts to promote it.

Ironworks Music Venue (Inverness)

7. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it

will provide an update on progress with finding a new location for the Ironworks music venue in Inverness. (S5O-04033)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): The member will be aware that I have encouraged public agencies to work constructively on the issue. I am aware that, on 2 December, Mr Stewart met the Ironworks Venue Ltd and other public sector partners to discuss a location for the Ironworks.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise expects to have the review of the business model options and financial forecasts later this month, and a meeting will soon take place between Ironworks Venue Ltd's property adviser and the developers of the Rose Street hall.

With our partners, we will continue to support the Ironworks in finding another venue.

David Stewart: I am very grateful to the cabinet secretary for her reply and for the helpful meeting that I recently had with her.

The Ironworks has had the threat of homelessness hanging over it for many months, and I have been campaigning vigorously to ensure that a new home is found. The Ironworks has iconic status in the Highlands and is a key element in the Highland capital's cultural gravitational pull. Will the cabinet secretary ask her officials at Creative Scotland to redouble their efforts to save this jewel in the crown of Highland cultural life?

Fiona Hyslop: The member has been persistent in supporting the finding of a new venue for the Ironworks. It is very important that we spread the message that the Ironworks venue is not closed and that it is continuing to hold events. We must make sure that those events are well supported. To ensure that it continues to be a venue for the future, it is important that the business model is sound, that the activity continues and that the concerts continue to flow.

I absolutely recognise that the Ironworks has iconic status. It is extremely popular, and I have been very impressed by the good will that has been shown towards it and by the drive of public agencies to make sure that it can continue, so that it continues to provide fantastic opportunities for music making and concerts in Inverness.

Scheduled Monument Protection (Auchterarder Castle)

8. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to Historic Environment Scotland's decision to delist Auchterarder castle from scheduled monument protection. (S5O-04034)

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs (Fiona Hyslop): Auchterarder castle was removed from the schedule of monuments on 19 September 2019. Compiling and maintaining the schedule is a legal function of Historic Environment Scotland and ministers do not have a role in that. On the same date, the castle was designated, together with an adjacent farmhouse, as a category C listed building. There is currently an appeal against that listing and it would therefore not be appropriate for ministers to comment further.

I wrote to the member about the issue on 13 January in response to her recent letter, and it was also raised with me by Roseanna Cunningham, who is the local constituency member.

Liz Smith: I am very aware of the legal issues and why the cabinet secretary cannot make further comment on them. She will know that the issue has caused considerable concern among the local community, not least because the site has strong historic connections to the Robert Bruce castle and so on. Does the cabinet secretary think that a precedent is being set? Will she review, with Historic Environment Scotland, the criteria that are used when it comes to descheduling such monuments?

Fiona Hyslop: Historic Environment Scotland is well aware of the issues and concerns that have been expressed locally. Designations and redesignations happen quite frequently; that is normal practice. However, there must be reference to the criteria.

Quite often, people are concerned about whether changes in designations will affect the future of a building and lead to any threats. I make it clear that the castle is designated and protected through its recently established status as a listed building. Any proposed change to the castle will require listed building consent, and it is a criminal offence to demolish, significantly alter or extend a listed building without consent. I think that people underestimate the issues relating to listed building consent.

Liz Smith raised concerns about the schedule of monuments, which is a different type of designation and listing. Historic Environment Scotland takes such issues extremely seriously and, following correspondence from Liz Smith and Roseanna Cunningham, who is the local MSP, it is alert to the issues relating to what can be designated as being of national importance as opposed to local importance. Liz Smith's points are well made.

Local Government (Funding)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-20528, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on investing in our future.

14:37

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Local government is at the heart of our communities and is the key vehicle through which our Parliament supports people in their lives. Our councils deliver the services that we all use day in and day out and that shape our communities. They are how our communities get to influence the decisions that matter throughout everybody's lives, such as those relating to nursery, work, our environment, and care and support. Therefore, it is disappointing that the Scottish Government's amendment would delete all our motion, in which we identify the raft of issues for which local government is crucial. The amendment also refuses to acknowledge that cuts have been disproportionately passed on to our councils.

Over the past few weeks, we have been working with and listening to our local government colleagues and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. They are clear that the Scottish Government needs to provide fair funding settlements to local authorities and integration joint boards. A fair settlement is one in which local authorities are not forced, yet again, to go through the vital services that they provide to find what the Scottish Government refers to as efficiency savings—which are, in reality, cuts. A fair settlement is one in which the true cost of national and centrally decided policy commitments—which are made by the Scottish Government but delivered by local government—is included in full in the funding that local government receives. A fair settlement is also one in which due consideration is given to the long-term impact of the inadequate funding of local services on the people and communities whom we and our councillor colleagues represent.

We all know that, without adequate funding, local authorities are forced not just to cut back on services such as community services, libraries and fixing potholes but, increasingly, to charge for services, which hits those on the lowest incomes hardest.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: Yes, briefly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is time in hand, so do not worry about interventions. That goes for the whole chamber.

John Mason: Is the member arguing that, in recent years, the national health service has had too much money and that local government has not had enough?

Sarah Boyack: No. I recommend that the member looks at the *Official Report* of the Local Government and Communities Committee, in which members across the parties talk about preventative spend. The issue is not just about money for local government; it is about a joined-up approach that enables people to be cared for by local government, so that they can avoid going into NHS facilities in the first place.

Local government in Scotland is as diverse as the communities that it serves, and every council has to deliver the education that our young people need. However, the ring fencing in the Scottish Government budget leaves little scope for the differing educational needs of our communities to be reflected in our schools.

Although teachers' wages are rightly increasing, local government is facing an insurmountable challenge to ensure that classrooms are adequately staffed, not just with teachers but with classroom assistants and other vital support staff. How can it be right that access to music tuition increasingly is for only those students whose families can afford it?

It is not just through schools that local authorities have the capacity to impact and shape educational opportunities. Through community investment, they have the power to enable school students to enjoy and learn about the local environment that they live in, enable them to take part in community projects and make sure that we have empowered communities.

Our motion talks about the critical issue of transport services. Our local councils provide the day-to-day transport infrastructure that we need, but cash-strapped councils struggle to repair vital infrastructure. The climate emergency means that we urgently need to rethink how we do transport: we need more bus and active travel commuting options. However, the Scottish Government's ring fencing of funding has meant that, as councils grapple with tough decisions, non-core-funded services get cut. Whether it is having to leave a pothole for an extra six months or deciding against making crucial improvements to transport links, those are the realities of day-to-day cuts to council budgets.

An example of what we need to do is the Labour amendments to the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which enable our authorities to run and invest in their own bus services. However, that needs investment in skills and capital investment in buses. It would be a win-win for councils across the country to own and operate their local bus

services. We just need to look at services in my area. Affordable public transport that people can rely on enables an increase in low-carbon bus use, which is vital to meeting the Government's ambitious climate targets.

Dignity and independence are crucial for people. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union highlights the right to dignity in its first article. That should be protected and respected. When we translate that right from aspirational politics into day-to-day reality, local government is responsible for upholding it.

What does dignity mean? It is the ability for people to live independently in their own homes and to know that they will be looked after when they need to be. Local government is responsible for supporting people throughout their lives—whether that is through providing social care, ensuring that infrastructure that they need for work and other activities is in place, or making the best of slashed budgets to look after them while they are at school.

Respecting and protecting dignity through adequate service provision at the local level is a vital aspect of long-term planning. To pick up on John Mason's point, by investing in social care, local authorities are not just supporting people as individuals but relieving the burden on the NHS through enabling them to live at home, as long as they can do so safely.

However, in 2018-19, delayed discharges cost the NHS £129 million. That is hampering local government's ability to carry out preventative spending tasks.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Everything that Sarah Boyack described seems eminently desirable. Will Labour bring forward an alternative budget to say how we will pay for all the asks in her speech?

Sarah Boyack: We are all keen to see the Scottish National Party Government's budget as well.

In considering the key issues, we must not just look to the future, but reflect on the past. This Government could and should have done much better on issues such as making homes accessible for those whose care needs have changed. The Scottish Government is wasting vital healthcare money, which, if it was better spent, could result in instant impacts in our communities.

An Oxfam report that came out this week highlights poverty and the huge number of people acting as unpaid carers. The Scottish Government itself estimates that almost half of carers—45 per cent—in the most deprived areas of the country care for people for 35 hours a week or more, which is almost double the level in the least

deprived areas. That is not even going into life expectancy, in which, in the that city we are in, there is a more than 20-year gap between the people who are best off and the least well off.

Local government is crucial in tackling the key issues that we face now and will face in future, whether it be tackling the drug deaths epidemic or fighting climate change. That will need leadership, investment, and staff with new skills and knowledge. I am sure that the Scottish Government will acknowledge that there is also a challenge within the Scottish Government.

In an evidence session to the Local Government and Communities Committee, Unison stated:

"Over the past 10 years, there has been a growing crisis in terms of experience and skills in local authorities; one in seven local authority workers has left employment since the beginning of ... austerity."

I am not just blaming the SNP Government; there are others in the chamber who could be lobbying for more money, and another budget is yet to come that will be helpful to us all.

I return to the Unison quotation:

"People who have become old enough to withdraw their pensions and have been offered voluntary redundancy have left local authorities, so there has been an experience gap, or an experience brain drain. That is a direct result of the cuts."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 2 October 2019; c 2.]

Without the funding to ensure that the right number of adequately trained staff are in place, how does the Scottish Government expect local government to tackle the issues on a local level? By disproportionately cutting local government funding, the SNP Government has been making a false economy, which is seeing Scotland stagnate and is having an impact on local economies throughout the country.

Local government cannot continue to address these challenges while it is facing a disproportionate level of public sector spending cuts. In real terms, budgets fell by 7 per cent between 2013-14 and 2019-20, compared with the 2 per cent cut to funding that the Scottish Government experienced over the same period.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): On several occasions, the member has said that there has been a disproportionate cut to local government budgets. The corollary of that is that is there has been a disproportionate uplift in other portfolio budgets. What other budgets should be decreased to transfer resources to local government? If it is not a question of rebudgeting, is it a question of taxation? What are the Labour Party's taxation policies? I ask in all sincerity; I want to hear proposals and policies.

Sarah Boyack: Well, we will not be throwing money into preparing for a second independence referendum, that is for sure. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, no. Excuse me! I cannot hear anything and I want to hear the debate.

Sarah Boyack: If we are going to empower local communities, let us start with our local councils and let us start now. Being a valued and essential partner is utterly meaningless if proper and fair funding is not addressed.

To pick up on Tom Arthur's point, we have yet to see progress on the SNP's pledges for an overhaul of our local taxation system. We are happy to sit with the ministers and have the debate. We would prefer to scrap the council tax and replace it with a progressive alternative based on up-to-date valuations, and give councils new revenue-raising powers, including land value capture. We would get on with implementing the tourism tax, which was one of my bits of unfinished business from the previous parliamentary session. In doing so, Labour would recognise the vital and equal roles of local government and our devolved Parliament in ensuring that the people of Scotland get the services that they deserve. We are all here to represent our constituents and our elected colleagues in local government.

I move,

That the Parliament commits to supporting people and communities; believes that local government has a crucial role in doing that, and that the role of the Scottish Government is to ensure that it provides fair funding settlements to local government; commits to work with them and support them to ensure that education fully prepares young people for a rich and fulfilling life; considers that transport services enable people to fully engage with activities and work; recognises that local government has a pivotal role to play in looking after people, allowing them dignity and independence throughout life and providing quality care and support in their community; believes that local government has a crucial role to play in tackling some of the defining challenges facing Scottish working people, from the climate emergency to the drugs death epidemic; expresses dismay that local government has experienced a disproportionate level of public sector spending cuts, with real budgets falling 7% between 2013-14 and 2019-20, compared with the 2% cut to funding that the Scottish Government experienced over the same period, and therefore calls on the Scottish Government to provide investment in the services that communities need.

14:49

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): Today's debate is important because it gives us a chance to recognise the importance of local government in supporting our people and communities.

Working with local government, we have jointly articulated the type of country we want Scotland to

be—fairer and more inclusive with opportunity for all. That is captured in the national performance framework, which focuses on people and the places where they live, and on improving outcomes and wellbeing for all, especially for the most disadvantaged in our society.

In securing those shared ambitions, we face fiscal, economic, social and political challenges. That is why central Government working in partnership with local government, as the two spheres of governance in Scotland, will be critical. In a country of 5 million people, there is no other way of working; it is what Campbell Christie challenged us to do in his report nearly 10 years ago. Such partnership is critical if we are to empower our communities, deliver positive outcomes and maximise the impact of our resources.

Indeed, today I have just come from Sighthill in Glasgow, which is undergoing the largest regeneration project outside London. The massive transformation of that area in the north of the city will see new housing and infrastructure, driven by massive ambition for the people and place, and enabled through local and national Government, among others, working in partnership. Along with investment along the canal, the north of Glasgow will be transformed. The project shows the positive effect that can be generated through national and local government working together.

I am the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, but I know that the impact and reach of what local government brings to our communities is wide and varied, and it touches on the portfolios of many of my Cabinet and ministerial colleagues. Indeed, the Labour Party motion outlines the ways in which local decisions and local government interplays with our day-to-day lives in terms of education, health and social care, transport and the climate emergency.

That is why, as my amendment outlines, despite Tory austerity and cuts to the Scottish budget, we have endeavoured to be fair in our funding settlements for local government. In 2019-20, we delivered a funding package of £11.2 billion to local government, a real-terms increase of more than £310 million. That represents around a 27 per cent share of our overall budget. During this parliamentary session, local government has received a cash increase in its overall budget settlements of £862 million, which represents a real-terms increase of 2.4 per cent. Guided by our commitment to partnership, that is why new fiscal powers are being transferred to local government as part of the 2019 budget deal.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): A report from the Accounts Commission from just the other week said that since 2013-14, there has been a real-terms reduction to council funding of

7.6 per cent. Where is the cabinet secretary getting her figures from?

Aileen Campbell: I remind Graham Simpson that, if we had followed his party's budget proposals last year, South Lanarkshire Council, the council on which he was a representative, would have had £29.9 million less to run services in that area. Again, we will take no lessons from the Conservative Party about how we continue to treat local government fairly.

Perhaps we should also think about how we treat councils here in the Scottish Parliament compared to in other parts of the United Kingdom. When we do that, we see that a lot of councils across England are struggling. English councils have faced a cash-terms revenue budget reduction of 14.7 per cent between 2013-20. If we look at those figures, we get a sense of the level of rightful protection that we have given our local authorities, because of their importance in delivering for our communities. That work and that financial support enables us together to work hard for the people of Scotland, addressing the challenges of persistent inequality and climate change, and delivering inclusive growth and wellbeing.

Our transformative work to expand the hours of flexible, high-quality childcare provision symbolises the power of partnership working and collective leadership to improve life chances and invest in our future. Our collective support for children and families continues through the life journey of our young people. Preparing our young people for a rich and fulfilling life is rooted in the education that they receive, and we can be proud that spending on education is being prioritised and school spending per pupil is consistently higher in Scotland than in other UK countries. Ensuring that every child, regardless of their background, has every chance to succeed, is why we invest to tackle the attainment gap, with the Scottish Government and local government investing at record levels in our young people's education.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The cabinet secretary is quite right to point out that, if we accepted the Tory proposals for the budget, the cuts to public services would be even deeper. Indeed, Tory failed austerity plays a big part in that.

I question the point about joined-up working, which is not taking place. The cabinet secretary talked about schools but, in Fife, hundreds of thousands of pounds have been stripped out of every secondary school in the current academic year, which is having a real detrimental impact. I see the cabinet secretary looking at the Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy—it is hundreds of thousands of pounds per secondary school. Class sizes are increasing to over 30. I

should declare an interest in that my granddaughter is in a class of around 33. The approach is just not working and we are not tackling inequality and poverty while those problems continue to grow in our communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Rowley.

Alex Rowley: I accept that the Scottish Government is working under financial restraints, but does the cabinet secretary accept that we need to focus more on tackling inequality and poverty by giving resources to local government?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should have been on the list to speak, Mr Rowley, but I do not mind, because we have time in hand.

Aileen Campbell: I absolutely agree that we need to tackle inequality in our country. That is why, as I announced last year, we will be taking forward the Scottish child payment, which will put money directly into the pockets of people who are the most vulnerable, and it is why we have invested £750 million during the current session of Parliament to tackle the attainment gap, which will help to ensure that every child has equal access and opportunity to succeed. That includes £33 million to support care-experienced children and young people; £120 million of pupil equity funding, which goes directly to headteachers; and £50 million to continue the challenge authorities and schools programmes for a fourth year. We are absolutely continuing to invest in supporting the most vulnerable in our society but, as I will go on to say, we do so with one hand tied behind our back.

Our joint partnership and funding approach extends to the learning estate. At least one new school project is being delivered in every local authority area in Scotland, which I assume includes Fife, through the joint £1.8 billion schools for the future investment programme. The Scottish Government's £1.3 billion contribution will see the construction or refurbishment of 117 schools and will benefit more than 60,000 pupils by summer 2020.

Our shared commitment to delivering for our young people can also be seen in our ambitions for housing, on which we have made the biggest investment since devolution, and for health and social care, on which, in 2019-20, we increased our investment in social care support and integration of health and social care to more than £700 million.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the minister reflect on the fact that the learning estate investment programme, or LEIP, is not an investment programme but a maintenance programme, and that not a single penny goes towards building schools? It is simply for

maintenance, so will she correct the record on that matter?

Aileen Campbell: We have the schools for the future investment programme and we are investing to support the most vulnerable pupils in our country. We are certainly proud of that record, and we will continue to invest in education.

Daniel Johnson: I was talking about LEIP.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): It is better than the private finance initiative for schools.

Aileen Campbell: Absolutely. I am reminded by my colleague of PFI, which was an utterly failed attempt by Labour to invest in schools across the country, and one that we will continue to pay for, for generations to come.

We are certainly not complacent and we need to think about the future. Last year, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Scottish Parliament, which provided us with a useful opportunity to think about what next for the governance of Scotland and to consider where power should lie, how we empower our communities and what needs to change to ensure that governance in Scotland is fit for purpose for the next 20 years and beyond. That shared endeavour between the Scottish Government and COSLA has included significant work by my colleague Kate Forbes to look at fiscal empowerment for local government and providing it with more fiscal autonomy.

Our commitment to that can be seen in the changes that we are making to the local taxation landscape, which are giving greater fiscal autonomy to our partners in local authorities. We have introduced the first primary legislation on non-domestic rates since devolution and our commitment to a package of measures on local taxation, including providing new tax powers to local authorities, will, if supported by Parliament, be the biggest empowerment of local authorities since devolution.

However, as I said at the start of my remarks, all of that partnership work and focus on outcomes and wellbeing faces enormous challenge. Our resources have been constrained by a decade of United Kingdom austerity, and the UK spending round announcements in September did nothing to reverse that damage. Our discretionary resource budget from the UK Government will in real terms be around 2.8 per cent lower in 2020-21 than it was in 2010. That is why it is absolutely unacceptable that the UK Government has failed to adequately engage with the Scottish Government on the budget timetable.

On top of that, I remind Mr Rowley that we are trying to tackle poverty with one hand tied behind our back and against a backdrop of callous and

cruel social security cuts, which stymies our efforts to deliver positive outcomes for the most vulnerable. Analysis published in 2018 found that UK Government cuts would reduce social security spend by up to £3.7 billion by 2020-21. Those are brutal cuts that leave us trying to mitigate their worst impacts by mitigating the bedroom tax and providing crisis grants but, as United Nations special rapporteur Philip Alston said,

“mitigation comes at a price and is not sustainable.”

As we debate where and what we should spend our money on and how we should ensure positive outcomes in the communities that we are elected to represent and serve, members must hold us to account and scrutinise the choices that we make. However, let us not forget the hurt and pain that has been caused by austerity and welfare reforms, and let us not forget to point the finger of blame fairly and squarely at the UK Government.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will Aileen Campbell take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is just closing, Mr Findlay.

Aileen Campbell: Let us not forget that if any of the parties that are taking part in the debate want us to make different choices or have different priorities, they must be open and honest and point to where we should shift the spend from.

The motion rightly recognises the pivotal role that local government plays in looking after people and communities, and contributing to the wellbeing of our country. Regardless of what party we represent, we all agree on the importance of local democracy and the local sphere of government. We all agree that local government must be supported, which is why the Scottish Government has continued to treat local authorities fairly, and to work in partnership with them to make good on the aspirations and aims of our national performance framework.

I welcome today's opportunity to illustrate the value that we attach to our partners in local government, and I welcome the chance to give examples of where we have backed that up with action and investment.

At the COSLA conference that was held a few months ago, I said that, regardless of whether we have “MSP” after our name or “Councillor” before it, we are all elected to ensure that we do our best for the communities that we serve. I hope that, in the spirit of co-operation and collaboration, the debate is constructive and enables thoughtful consideration about service delivery and outcomes, and enables us to focus on working hard to embed a positive future for our country.

I move amendment S5M-20528.2, to leave out from “commits to supporting” to end and insert:

“considers that local government is a valued and essential partner in delivering services for the people of Scotland as co-signatories to the National Performance Framework; recognises that, since the start of the current parliamentary session in 2016, local government has received a cash increase in its overall budget settlement of £862 million, a real terms increase of 2.4%, as a result of the Budget agreements between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party; considers that local government’s share of the overall Budget has been maintained at around 27%; notes the new fiscal powers being transferred to local government as part of the 2019 Budget deal; further notes that discussions on the power and responsibilities of local government are ongoing, and calls on all parties to act responsibly by bringing forward constructive proposals for the Scottish Budget.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Murdo Fraser to speak to and move amendment S5M-20528.1. If you take interventions, Mr Fraser, I will extend your time accordingly.

15:01

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for selecting the issue of local government funding as the subject of the debate. It is a well-timed debate, because we now know that the Scottish Government will present its budget on 6 February. The timing is also helpful from the Scottish Conservative perspective, given that, at the weekend, we set out our asks to the Scottish Government. Labour’s debate is well timed to enable us to outline to members the very reasonable requests that we are making of the SNP Government in relation to next year’s budget.

I will put the debate in context and reflect on some of the comments that we have heard from Sarah Boyack. It is true that local government has been the whipping boy of SNP budgets over the past decade. Every local authority in Scotland has had its budget cut, even though the SNP Government has had increases in its block grant. Looking at the 2019-20 budget, we see that, according to the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing, the non-ring-fenced revenue funding that is available to councils fell by 2.5 per cent in real terms, which was a decrease of some £230 million.

I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government will argue that there were additional revenues in the form of specific ring-fenced resource grants, which took the total revenue funding up in real terms. However, those were funding streams that followed specific additional commitments, which meant that the core sums that were available to local government to do all the important things that it has to do fell in real terms. I note that that was in the year when the Scottish Government’s block grant from Westminster increased.

If we look at what went before, last year was not untypical. According to SPICe, in the period

between 2013-14 and 2018-19, the local government revenue budget decreased at the rate of 7.5 per cent in a period when the Scottish Government’s equivalent budget decreased at a rate of just 2.8 per cent.

The Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy (Kate Forbes): It is an accepted fact that local government funding forms 27 per cent of the overall Scottish Government budget, which it has done for a number of years. If Murdo Fraser is arguing that local government is getting less, and if the 27 per cent proportion has remained consistent over the course of the past few years, I assume that he accepts that his party has severely cut the Scottish Government budget.

Murdo Fraser: That does not give the entire picture, as the Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy will understand. During that period, the Scottish Government has put extra obligations on local councils that they did not have before, so, although the level of funding has stayed steady in proportionate terms, local government has been given extra duties and commitments—in childcare, for example—without receiving proper funding in addition. Therefore, the minister is not quite correct in her interpretation of what has been happening.

In the same period of 2013-14 to 2018-19, some councils have had drastic cuts to their per capita funding. The largest cut in real terms was for the Western Isles, at £572 per head, and the greatest reduction in real-terms revenue funding per head for a wholly mainland authority was for Glasgow City Council, which saw its funding reduced by £270 per head.

I listened with great interest to the picture that Aileen Campbell painted of local government across Scotland, which would be unrecognisable to councils and council officers—even those from her own party who are in administration and who struggle with having to make budget cuts.

As Sarah Boyack reminded us, in addition to the cuts in funding, we have seen an increase in ring fencing. Those of us with long memories recall the historic concordat between the SNP and COSLA back in 2007, which was part of an initiative to remove ring fencing. At the time, it was held to be a great step forward that freed up local government. Here we are, 13 years on, and the historic concordat is long forgotten. Ring fencing has crept back in.

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I will in a second. Let me make my point.

Ring fencing has increased even in the course of last year from 6.6 per cent of total revenue

funding to 12.1 per cent. In the course of one year it has doubled, although COSLA would put the figure much higher.

Kate Forbes: COSLA has complete autonomy over 92 per cent of local authority budgets this year. Eight per cent is ring fenced, compared with 25 per cent under the last Labour Administration, so we have reduced ring fencing.

Murdo Fraser: COSLA would give very different figures from those that the minister has just quoted.

In the past year, the level of ring fencing has doubled. On that direction of travel, it will not take long for the figure to get up to where it was in 2007.

Increasing ring fencing puts additional pressure on council services in the areas that are not ring fenced. According to Audit Scotland, council services outside of health, police, early learning and childcare, secondary school attainment, higher education and social security could face a real-terms reduction of between 1 and 16 per cent in their budgets.

We can see the impact of such budget ring fencing across Scotland. Local authorities have to make tough choices and cut services and the opening hours of libraries; reduce grants to important third sector organisations; close schools and reduce teacher and classroom assistant numbers; and cut school crossing patrollers. Alex Rowley referred to the situation in Fife schools, which is replicated across Scotland.

Councils then have to raise money by other means, either by raising the council tax by the maximum of 4.79 per cent—12 councils did that last year—introducing charges for garden waste collection, or even considering the introduction of the hated car park tax that resulted from the SNP's grubby deal with the Green Party last year.

Councils are also raiding their reserves, last year to the tune of £157 million. In the past three years, 23 of Scotland's 32 local authorities have drawn from their reserves, and some are simply running out of money.

All those cuts are being made at a time when the Scottish Government's overall budget is going up. It is raiding the budget of local government. What does that mean for the budget in the coming year, 2020-21? We know that the block grant will be the highest in a decade. We expect at least £1.2 billion in Barnett consequentials, due to increased spending on health and education south of the border. According to the Fraser of Allander institute, we are looking at a 2 per cent real-terms increase in the block grant from Westminster. Against that backdrop, there is no need for either additional tax rises or cuts to council services.

At the weekend, the Conservatives set out our requests to the SNP Government in relation to the forthcoming budget: no additional increases in personal taxation, although we would prefer the gap to narrow; a fundamental review of business rates, and at the very least the maintenance of existing reliefs; and the reduction of the large business supplement to the rate that applies south of the border.

On spending, we want to see all Barnett consequentials arising from health spending down south applied to the NHS in Scotland, an extra £50 million for the police, and, crucially in the context of this debate, no more real-terms cuts to local government core funding.

On local councils, our request reflects COSLA's demands: at least an inflation-linked increase in the core revenue budget and all new commitments to be fully funded from the centre. That is a realistic and affordable request and it is the right one at this time. It is the minimum that our councils require, and is contained in our amendment.

The approach that we are taking is very reasonable. For too long, local councils have borne the brunt of cuts from this SNP Government. For too long, this Government has treated local government as a cash cow. It is time that that stopped and, with more money in its budget for the coming year, this Government has no excuse to make further cuts. On that basis, I am pleased to support Labour's motion.

I move amendment S5M-20528.1, to insert at end:

"by including in its forthcoming Budget for 2020-21 an increase in local authority core revenue and capital funding from the Scottish Government of at least the rate of inflation, and providing full funding in addition to this for all new and additional commitments."

15:09

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): The Greens welcome this debate on local government. In our view, much work remains to be done to reform how we are governed in Scotland in order to ensure that we have strong, autonomous and empowered councils.

Our amendment was not selected, but it covered our key positions. In particular, I draw members' attention to the fact that we called on the Scottish Government and all political parties to redouble their efforts to achieve further fiscal devolution to local government and to replace the council tax with a modern, sustainable and progressive system of local land and property taxation.

Over the past 20 years, local democracy has been not only neglected but undermined by successive Governments, through, for example,

the council tax freeze. The failure to strengthen local government has been a source of continual comment by those who have observed the work of this Parliament.

In November 2016, in the aftermath of COSLA's commission on strengthening local democracy, I secured a debate seeking Parliament's endorsement of the commission's final report. The commission included representatives of the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Labour, the SNP and the Greens. The Conservatives lodged a wrecking amendment to my motion, and it was agreed to by the Tories, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats.

Parliament does not have a good record on having serious debates about local government. However, it is obvious that Scotland is not a normal European country with regard to how we govern ourselves. Local government in Scotland is not local and it does not govern. Indeed, at the beginning of devolution, in 1999, the McIntosh commission noted:

"It could be said that Scotland today simply does not have a system of local government in the sense in which many other countries still do. The 32 councils now existing are, in effect, what in other countries are called county councils or provinces".

COSLA picked that up and, in 2013, said:

"Scotland is one of the most centralised countries in Europe. It is no coincidence that our European neighbours are often more successful at improving outcomes, and have much greater turnout at elections. We cannot hope to emulate the success of these countries without acknowledging that they have more local councils, local elected councillors represent fewer people, and that these councils and their services are constitutionally protected and their funding secured by law, even with regard to national policy making."

In Scotland, we have 32 local authorities, yet the Netherlands has 408, Norway—which has a population similar to Scotland's—has 428 and Belgium has 589, while in Germany there are more than 11,000 councils at the lowest tier of governance.

On fiscal empowerment, only 12 per cent of the funding of Scotland's local authorities is under their own fiscal control, and even that meagre autonomy, in relation to the council tax, is compromised by the Tory-style rate capping that is imposed not by statute, which would be lawful, but by holding councils to ransom by punishing them if they set council tax rates that do not meet the preferences of Scottish ministers.

As members know, if Scotland's fiscal policy on local government were to be in place in many European countries, it would be illegal, as it would violate the varying constitutional protections that are in place to prevent Government from interfering in the fiscal affairs of the local state.

That is why Greens are proud to have secured at least a commitment to introduce a fiscal framework for local government. Just as a set of rules now exists between London and Edinburgh to govern the financial relationship between the UK and the Scottish Governments, which provides clarity, certainty, transparency and predictability in the financial arrangements between both—although, of course, the arrangements should be improved—so, too, there should be a similar framework in place governing the process by which local government finance is agreed.

I am proud that the Scottish Green Party has, over the past three years, delivered £420 million more for local services than would otherwise have been the case, protecting libraries, schools and other vital services. In contrast, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Tories have postured endlessly while delivering nothing. The budgets since 2016 have not been perfect—they were not green budgets—but they have been vastly improved by our participation in the process.

Labour's motion contains nice words and there is not much in it with which I disagree, but it says nothing substantive about where we go from here.

Neil Findlay: The member claims that the Greens have delivered extra money for local government, but they have not done so. There have been cuts year on year. Not a penny extra has been delivered for local government.

Andy Wightman: The local government settlement has been vastly improved by our participation in the budget. As I have just said, they have not been green budgets—they are not the budgets that a Green Government would have passed. However, if Neil Findlay and his party had better offers to make, if they had a better negotiating stance and if they had a proper offer to make on budgets, they have not provided them over the past three years.

To their credit, at least Murdo Fraser and the Tories are making proposals this year. Although we do not agree with the proposals, we welcome that participation. Labour says that it wants local government to be empowered, yet its motion fails to reflect that, and its response to giving councils the power to introduce workplace parking levies suggests that it is still unable to move away from centralisation.

Our amendment was clear that local government needs both fair funding and fiscal powers. We do not think that Murdo Fraser's amendment has been presented in good faith. If it was, he and his colleagues would have been at the table over the past three years attempting to negotiate a budget deal. The Conservatives have not treated the budget process seriously over this parliamentary session; their proposal this year—

high expenditure and tax cuts—is not credible and they have continued to ignore the climate emergency. Worse than that, they dubbed our proposals for a climate emergency budget as “madcap”; Adam Tomkins at the weekend spoke about sidelining the “ludicrous Greens”; and the Tories are refusing to take part in cross-party talks to replace the hated council tax.

As for the Government’s amendment, we give thanks for the name check but we cannot support it. It gives misleading figures on what constitutes the local government finances over the past few years. If Opposition parties took the budget seriously, they would be attempting to build on what the Greens have achieved and they would have our support in doing so.

15:16

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I thank Labour for bringing this debate to the chamber. In a pre-budget warm-up, it is an important part of the budget process, because local government, as Sarah Boyack said, delivers the services that communities rely on every day of the week. From the early years to school education, roads, public transport, libraries and sports facilities, those services are the things that we really care about in our communities.

It is frustrating that the minister cannot simply be straight about local government finance arrangements. The reality is quite different from what the minister has said, and we see that daily. We see in our local newspapers the impact of the quite dramatic changes in local government finance that the SNP Government has imposed. The local government share of the overall revenue budget was 34.7 per cent in 2013-14 but 33 per cent in 2019-20. That is a reduction, and charges are up and services have been cut during that period.

Aileen Campbell: Will Willie Rennie give way?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

The SNP Government says that, in the past year, the revenue budget went up by £253 million, or by 1 per cent. That is true, but the commitments that the SNP Government has made on local government’s behalf were up by £400 million, which was Murdo Fraser’s point. The result, therefore, was cuts to the core budget of £147 million. If the budget goes up but the commitments go up, there is a cut to the ordinary things that local government does, which I have just listed. Why on earth cannot the Government just be straight with people and with local government?

Kate Forbes: Will Willie Rennie give way?

Willie Rennie: Not just now. I will come to the minister in a second, once I have finished my point.

It is important that the Government is straight with people about the promises that it makes, the funding that it provides and the gap between the two. It cannot take the credit for the extra commitments that it makes on behalf of local government and then blame local government for the cuts that are the result of its budget. That is simply not honest with people and not honest with local government.

Kate Forbes: All those commitments are made in collaboration with local government. In the spirit of being straight, my question to the Lib Dems is this: what is their number 1 ask for this year’s budget and what would it cost?

Willie Rennie: My number 1 ask is that the Government follows through on the promises that it has made to the people of Scotland and provides local government with the money that it promised. Those were not our promises; they were the SNP Government’s promises. Half of COSLA’s £1 billion ask is just to meet the promises that the SNP Government says it has made on behalf of local government.

John Mason: Will Willie Rennie give way?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

Just meeting those promises would be a help, for a start, and would account for half of the COSLA ask. Inflation of 2 per cent does not seem a radical proposal from COSLA—that would be £200 million. To make up for the damage of recent budgets, which I have just pointed out—the reduction in local government’s share of the overall revenue budget from 34.7 per cent to 33 per cent over recent years—and to repair just some, not all, of that damage would cost £308 million. If we added those figures together, that would be £1 billion—which is required just to stand still; it is not about a massive expansion of local government finance.

All that local government is asking is that the SNP Government delivers what it promises—and that it does not just promise, fail to deliver and then expect local government to pick up the tab.

Let us look at some of the good things—

Aileen Campbell: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

There are some good things, such as mental health counselling in schools, which is excellent, and the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. Those are Government promises; it should pay for them. *[Interruption.]* It has certainly not done so. Last year, there were £400 million of commitments and

a £253 million increase in funding, which amounts to £147 million of real cuts. That is the problem.

The teachers' pension: promise it, deliver it. Additional needs support: promise it, deliver it. Teachers' policy intervention: promise it, deliver it. Early years education, which is something that I strongly support: promise it, deliver it. The Government should not expect local government to pick up the tab for the promises that it makes. The Government is happy to take the credit for such things; it should deliver as well.

It would also help if the SNP Government gave a clear indication to local authorities as to what they are expected to do on council tax. There was a clear indication last year about the cap, and there needs to be a clear indication this year, so that local government can plan. Local government needs to know when there will be clarity and whether there will be a cap. Will local government get proper freedom to take decisions to increase or reduce the tax if it wants to? That should be local government's choice, and it should be able to take the political flak that comes from making it, instead of having the decision imposed on it by the SNP Government.

We all aspire to have multiyear budgets, and the SNP Government says that it would love to have them. However, we do not have the certainty of multiyear budgets and the forward look that they provide, which would allow local government to plan for the future. If we expect local government to deliver long-term, sustainable solutions rather than deal with the short-termism that it is forced to adopt now as a result of the SNP Government's approach to local government financing, we need a long-term budget process and the freedom that comes with it. We also need some of the stuff that Andy Wightman talked about, such as a proper fiscal framework for local government, to give it some certainty.

The most important thing that the SNP Government needs to do is follow through on the promises that it has made on behalf of local government rather than expect local government to pick up the tab and make the cuts. Sure enough, we know, from being in the chamber and from listening to the ministers on the front bench, that as soon as cuts are made by any council in any part of the country, it is the council's fault, not the SNP's fault. The Government needs to live up to its responsibilities, follow through on its promises and make sure that those promises are properly funded.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): We move to the open debate and speeches of six minutes. I have a wee bit of time in hand for interventions.

15:23

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): When it comes to investing in our future, there really cannot be any investment more important than the education of our children and grandchildren. Of course, they are the future in and of themselves, but it is to them that we will look to shape the future, so equipping them with the knowledge and skills that they will need to do that to the best of their ability is surely an imperative intergenerational responsibility that we must shoulder. It is not only about the jobs that they will do, although it is partly about those. It is about creating a generation of fully engaged and empowered citizens who learn to respect our planet and who can respond to the climate emergency in a way that past generations have clearly failed to do.

We devolve the delivery of school education to our local authorities, and it thereby becomes the greatest responsibility that they have. School education is the biggest of all locally delivered services, commanding more than £5 billion of local authority resources and serving almost 700,000 pupils. It is right that our schools are organised and funded locally, because local councils are by far the best placed to understand the needs and realities of the communities that our schools serve.

In my constituency, there is one primary school of more than 1,000 pupils and, only a couple of miles away, another that, when I last checked, had 25 pupils. Both are critical to the health, viability and sustainability of the towns and communities that they serve. The idea that someone who is not based in East Lothian would understand exactly what their very different needs are is ridiculous.

As night follows day, if schools command such a significant proportion of councils' expenditure and council budgets are cut, schools will hurt—and they do.

As we have heard, councils have faced budget reductions proportionately several times greater than anything that ministers have faced in their budgets, and the results can readily be seen in schools. The amount that we spend each year on primary pupils has fallen by £427 per head since 2010; in secondary schools, spending per pupil is down by £209. There are 2,853 fewer teachers than we had 13 years ago, and, not surprisingly, the pupil teacher ratio is higher than it was in 2010. The average primary class is now 23.5 pupils—up from 22.8—and, as Alex Rowley said, many primary pupils are in classes of 30 or even more.

Aileen Campbell: For context, it would be interesting to recognise that, although Mr Gray has painted a very gloomy picture of education, school spending per pupil was £6,571 in Scotland compared with £5,994 in England. We have 7,495

teachers for every 100,000 pupils compared with 5,545 in England and 5,038 in Labour-run Wales. Does he not concede that there is a void of context around the issue?

Iain Gray: Frankly, if the best the cabinet secretary can do is say, "It's a bit less bad here than it is in England and Wales," perhaps that is why our councils face the problems that they do.

Teachers have seen not just other teachers vanish; cuts have hit their support staff, too. Let us take science technicians, for example, who are crucial for the teaching of the critical practical subjects in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. There are 333 fewer of them in our schools than there were 10 years ago, which is a cut of almost 30 per cent. Perhaps worst of all, although the proportion of pupils with identified additional support needs has reached an all-time high of 31 per cent, the number of specialist ASN teachers has fallen to the lowest level ever.

Murdo Fraser is correct in saying that one of the loudest complaints we hear from COSLA is about the extensive ring fencing by the Scottish Government of much of the resource that councils receive. It is also correct that, before John Swinney was the SNP minister with responsibility for education, he used to boast that he would not ring fence funds. Now that Mr Swinney is the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, he has presided over many millions of pounds of ring-fenced resources in the shape of attainment challenge funding and the pupil equity fund, to which the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government referred in her opening speech.

We support the objective of that funding, which is to provide additional support for those pupils who face particular barriers to educational achievement, but the keyword is "additional". The deployment of funding to close the attainment gap at exactly the moment when councils' core funding is being slashed could only ever undermine its additionality. In all practical terms, it is clear that much of it is being used to plug gaps.

Indeed, if we look at the nine attainment challenge authorities, which have received the largest share of the funding, we find that, between 2010-11 and 2017-18, there was an average real-terms cut of £406 for every child in primary school and £209 for every pupil in secondary school. The additional funding has not mitigated the effect of the cuts to core funding. There are educational, pedagogic and curricular issues in our schools—falling pass rates, national testing and the narrowing curriculum—and they must be addressed. They are debated, albeit in Opposition time since the Government has refused to bring debates about schools to the chamber.

The truth is that the Government's central failure in schools is the failure to get the financial fundamentals right and ensure that our schools have enough teachers with enough support and enough resources to do the best job that they possibly can for our children and grandchildren. That would be investing in our future, but to do that we must have fair funding for local councils and the critical local services that they provide.

15:29

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): As a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee, I am pleased to speak in this debate, in which we will, no doubt, rehearse many of the arguments that will be made during the progress of the Scottish budget.

We all agree that local government is hugely important when it comes to the delivery of essential public services across Scotland and that those services are under strain, so I thank Labour for bringing the debate to the chamber. However, it is on rocky ground in criticising the SNP Government, given its record in office in Scotland and, currently, in Wales.

Scotland's 2019-20 resource grant is 9 per cent smaller than it was a decade ago, when the last Labour UK Government began austerity with a £500 million cut to Scotland's budget. Who does not recall Labour chancellor Alistair Darling's warning in 2010 that the Labour Government cuts, if Labour was re-elected, would be "deeper and tougher" than Margaret Thatcher's? The Tories continued austerity when they came into power in 2010, supported by Lib Dems who were desperate for office, although the coalition's initial cut of 36 per cent to Scotland's capital allocation was lower than Mr Darling's planned 40 per cent cut.

More recently, if we look at the seven-year period that Sarah Boyack focuses on in her motion, we can see that, excluding health, Scotland's resource budget has fallen by 7.8 per cent. The 7 per cent fall in the local government budget therefore shows how Scottish ministers have tried to protect it, and that budget reductions are not disproportionate in that context.

Some of us recall 2007, when Labour, in Wendy Alexander's infamous hungry caterpillar speech, called for 3 per cent cuts to local government budgets year on year. Ms Boyack was part of the Labour front bench that supported that view, and Ms Alexander was elected Labour leader a year later, unopposed—a clear indication of support for her policies.

Pressures on devolved matters such as health and wellbeing and social care are rising with our ageing population, leading to health spending increasing to more than 43 per cent of Holyrood's

budget, having been around a third at the start of devolution. Meanwhile, health resource consequentials were cut by £55 million in 2019-20. Each year, the Scottish Government has to do progressively more with less.

Despite the aforementioned trend, the SNP Government managed to increase funding for councils by £310 million to £11.2 billion—a 3.1 per cent cash increase on the year before. Meanwhile, over the past seven years, which is the period mentioned in the motion, the Tories cut English council budgets by 22.8 per cent, driving some of their own councils to bankruptcy, such as those in Surrey and Northamptonshire, while Labour cut local authority budgets in Wales by 11.5 per cent. Indeed, Pembrokeshire County Council was also driven to near bankruptcy.

In my area, North Ayrshire, the SNP Government allocated capital and resource totalling 8.3 per cent more in 2019-20 than in the previous year, including attainment funding and pupil equity funding.

Neil Findlay: If all that generosity is coming from the Scottish Government, can Mr Gibson tell us why 100 organisations in Glasgow face closure because of the council's refusal to fund them?

Kenneth Gibson: I am glad that the member has mentioned Glasgow, because I was a councillor there when Labour cut 9 per cent—£167 million—from the city's budget in a single year and put 3,000 workers on the dole. It seems that, for the Labour Party, it is the singer and not the song that matters. It resents cuts only when it is not implementing them. [*Interruption.*] Mr Findlay would do better to listen to the answer to a question that he asked. It is a bit silly of him to heckle the answer, because how is he going to hear what I say?

North Ayrshire Council would have had more to spend on services if it was not for Labour's cynical PFI policy—a financial disaster that landed us with a huge debt by building four schools with a construction cost of £81 million. Repayments total an eye-watering £401 million over the 30 years to 2037, after which the schools will not even be owned by the council. As a result, North Ayrshire Council continues to make progressively higher payments of more than £1 million a month—money that could and should be invested in local services.

To add insult to injury, in 2014, Labour council leaders suggested the allocation of £5.1 million a year less to North Ayrshire Council in favour of Glasgow—a decision that they later hastily rescinded. In 2017, North Ayrshire's minority Labour administration wanted to borrow £72 million not to enhance capital infrastructure, build a new school or fix potholes, but to buy a 47-year-

old shopping centre in Irvine, oblivious to the ongoing decline in retail. In 2018, the administration suggested hiking council tax by 12.5 per cent across every single band in one go. With the reality bearing no resemblance to the rhetoric, it is no wonder that Labour support in North Ayrshire has fallen to less than 14 per cent.

Ring fencing, which was mentioned earlier in the debate, was a favourite policy of the Labour-Lib Dem Scottish Executive from 2007—so much so that when the SNP came to office ring fencing amounted to £2.7 billion a year, in 60 separate local authority budget lines. The now-legendary historic concordat between local government and the SNP Government scrapped ring fencing, but it has now reappeared, to the tune of £900 million. That is a third of what it was under the Lab-Lib Executive, but it is causing consternation among those with short memories.

Of course, the reason for the reintroduction of ring fencing is that when ministers gave additional funding to deliver specific policies, such as maintaining teacher numbers, some councils ignored the policy and spent the money elsewhere; their party colleagues would then attack the SNP Government for not maintaining teacher numbers.

The ring fencing that currently occurs is done to deliver agreed policies through partnership working, such as that to provide 1,140 hours of free childcare from August.

Alex Rowley rose—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Gibson is just closing.

Kenneth Gibson: Are Opposition members seriously suggesting that we end up with a patchwork of early years services in order to allow local authorities to spend elsewhere?

Each year, when witnesses give the committee their evidence on the local government budget, I ask them more or less the same questions. If local government is to receive additional funding, from where should it come—the NHS or other areas of the Scottish budget, or increased taxes, and, if the latter, who should pay and how much?

Occasionally, we are told that local government needs what is described as a basket of additional powers, yet there is real reticence about what those powers should be and who should pay more. As we know, even when Opposition parties suggest new powers—as Labour-run councils have done in Edinburgh and Glasgow in relation to workplace parking charges, for example—they are not above denouncing the Scottish Government if it introduces them.

There is nothing easier in politics than saying that more money is needed for health, justice,

transport or, indeed, local government. To be taken seriously, the advocates for giving more must say how much more, and from where and from whom it should come. Sadly, I have heard nothing about that in the debate. The Government's budget statement is 15 days away, so there is still time for the Opposition parties to present concrete, funded ideas, rather than doing their annual Oliver Twist impression, asking, "Please, sir—can I have some more?"

No Opposition spokesperson has yet suggested how local authorities will benefit from the impact of the Greens' amendment 9 to the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill, which was agreed to at stage 2 and which will cost up to £308 million in reliefs. In North Ayrshire, 3,040 properties will lose out unless at least one Opposition party sees sense, backs the SNP Government and reverses its position when the bill is considered at stage 3. That would ensure that such businesses can survive and thrive in the months and years ahead.

15:37

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):

We are just a couple of weeks away from the latest Scottish Government budget—the latest charade in which the finance secretary moans about his lot. It will be the latest kick in the teeth for local government, with SNP back benchers and front benchers screaming, "Nothing to see here, gov—it's a fair deal." It will also be the latest dance with Patrick Harvie—or maybe not; perhaps it will be a dance with Murdo Fraser this time.

Labour is right to bring the debate to the chamber. We have already heard excellent contributions from Sarah Boyack and Iain Gray. Local government has been the poor relation of the public sector under the SNP. That is a little bizarre, because the finance secretary's local government background is unquestionably solid. He knows better than anyone what councils do, and he should know that they need to be properly funded.

The recent Accounts Commission report, which I mentioned in an intervention on the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, should have made sobering reading for the SNP. Scottish Government revenue funding remains the most significant source of councils' income. It increased by 1.1 per cent in cash terms in 2018-19, which represents a 0.7 per cent decrease in real terms. Since 2013-14, Scottish Government funding to councils has reduced by 7.6 per cent in real terms. The cabinet secretary could not answer that point when I asked her about it earlier.

Increasingly, councils are having to draw on their revenue reserves. In 2018-19, the net draw

on such reserves was £45 million. Over the past three years, 23 councils have reduced their general fund reserves. As we heard much about earlier in the debate, an increasing proportion of council budgets is committed to national policy initiatives. That reduces councils' flexibility to decide how to plan and prioritise the use of funding to respond to local priorities.

There was more worrying news on integration joint boards, for which such difficulty is now an annual event. A majority of IJBs struggled to achieve break-even in 2018-19 and either recorded a deficit or had to rely on additional funding from partners. Around one third of IJBs failed to agree a budget with their partners for the start of the 2019-20 financial year—extraordinary stuff. Medium-term financial planning is improving, but no IJB had a financial plan that extended for more than five years, and more than one third of IJB senior staff changed during 2018-19.

COSLA has said that the wellbeing of our citizens is at risk in this year's budget. COSLA resources spokesperson, my good friend Councillor Gail Macgregor, said—

Aileen Campbell: If, as proposed last year by the Conservatives, £500 million had been taken out of vital services, how would that have impacted on the wellbeing of people and communities across the country?

Graham Simpson: I am talking about this year's budget, of course, but I welcome the cabinet secretary getting together with Mr Fraser to discuss his well-reasoned proposals.

Councillor Macgregor said:

"Wellbeing is about much more than investing in the NHS—it's about investing in the wider public health of this country—the everyday services that enhance the lives of individuals, families and communities.

Dealing with the consequences of not investing in preventative services will cost much, much more than investing now."

Councillor Macgregor's colleague, COSLA president Councillor Alison Evison, said:

"Local Government is the sphere of Government closest to Scotland's citizens. Sadly however, whichever way you want to dress it up, the reality is that in recent budgets the Scottish Government has chosen to overlook the essential services that communities rely on day in day out."

On 6 January, Councillor Evison went further, warning that

"years without fair funding for Scottish Local Government has meant that councils' budgets are at breaking point."

Kate Forbes: If we were to do as the member asks, where would we take the money from to give to local authorities?

Graham Simpson: As Murdo Fraser said, we are going to get far more money—£1.2 billion—

from Barnett consequentials. That is an embarrassment of riches. There really is no need to increase taxes. The Scottish Government has the money to help local government.

Councillor Evison went on to say:

“the cracks are starting to show. In every indicator whether it is economic growth, tackling climate change, wellbeing or child poverty, cuts to council budgets will mean targets are missed.

This goes well beyond money. This goes to the heart of our communities. We now have a situation where communities are losing their sense of pride as social isolation rises due to community projects and initiatives being cut.”

We have an opportunity to get things right this year. Derek Mackay does not have to pirouette with Patrick; he can impress us all and foxtrot with Fraser. [*Laughter.*] Mr Fraser likes the idea.

We have asked for local government’s cash to go up, and we want councils to be given an extra £10 million to help tackle homelessness. Those are reasonable requests—[*Interruption.*] Kate Forbes is still thinking about my dancing ideas.

Our requests can help to cut out the growth deniers in the Greens. The Labour motion, so ably put across by Sarah Boyack, sums things up very well indeed.

If anything, more and more will be put on to local government in the years ahead and, quite simply, they need the resources to do their job.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: All parties have had speakers who have gone over their allocated time. I ask members to be a bit tighter, please.

15:43

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): This is a debate about local government ostensibly, but what is not in the motion is just as important, and what is not in the motion is the NHS. It is impossible to have an honest discussion about local government finance without putting it in the context of overall spending and health spending in particular. Unlike the Labour Party in Scotland, the Scottish Government went to the electorate in 2016 promising above-inflation increases in NHS spending. The local government finance settlement has to be seen in that context. The Scottish Government has kept its promise on the NHS while also facing London-imposed cuts to the rest of its budget.

Sarah Boyack: On preventative care, does Ms McAlpine not accept that, because of the failure to spend on the care that is provided through local government services, people end up having to go into hospital or being unable to leave hospital, which costs the NHS an inordinate amount of

money? That money is really needed by the front-line services that I am sure the member supports.

Joan McAlpine: I think that everybody in the Parliament supports preventative care, which is delivered by the NHS and by local authorities. That is why we integrated health and social care and have provided a generous financial package to support it.

Once the above-inflation increases for the NHS are excluded, the Scottish Government’s budget between 2013-14 and 2019-20 reduced by 7.8 per cent in real terms. Once health is taken out of the equation, the real-terms reduction for local government over the same period is significantly lower than the cut to the Scottish budget as a whole, although, this year, local government received a £310 million real-terms increase.

Local government does a very important job, which is why it continues to receive fair funding, but the only way to substantially further increase the funds that are allocated to it would be to take money away from health. That would be wrong because, in 2016, people in Scotland voted for an SNP manifesto pledge to increase the health revenue budget by £500 million more than inflation by the end of the current session of Parliament, which means that we will increase it by £2 billion in total. It would be completely wrong to break that promise to the NHS, and I am sure that the Opposition parties would be the first to call us out if we did so. That would mean breaking the promises to transform primary care, to increase the number of general practitioners and nurses who work in our communities, to invest £200 million to expand the Golden Jubilee hospital and establish five new elective treatment centres, to transform mental health through the provision of an additional £150 million and to invest £100 million in improving the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

That is what people voted for in 2016. If Labour members want to cut that NHS allocation and instead give the funding to councils, they should say which NHS improvements they would abandon. Should cancer care be cut to provide funding for councils?

Alex Rowley: Joan McAlpine hits the nail on the head in describing one of the problems. Resources might well be going into the acute side of the health service, but they are not being transferred to the community care side. Therefore, the preventative approach that the cabinet secretary talked about has not worked. We need to put resources into primary care as well as the acute side.

Joan McAlpine: I repeat the point that I made in response to Mr Rowley’s colleague Sarah Boyack. We all support preventative care, and we

are investing in it. I have just mentioned the £100 million cancer programme, a large part of which is about preventative care. In addition, we have integrated health and social care, and there is a generous funding package behind that.

At this point, I should say that, although the NHS is the priority, local government is treated far better in Scotland than it is elsewhere in the UK. COSLA's head of resources, Vicky Bibby, told the Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee:

"The situation in England is very different. I do not think that anyone in Scottish local government or the Scottish Government would want to replicate what has happened in a number of councils in England. I am thankful that in Scotland we have taken a quite different approach. We have co-signed the national performance framework and we are prioritising inclusive growth."

At the same meeting, COSLA's spokesperson for resources, Councillor Gail Macgregor, said:

"it is evident that councils are collapsing in England and Wales. We would absolutely not want that level of cuts to Scottish budgets."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 9 January 2019; c 16, 15.]

Of course, Councillor Macgregor was speaking for COSLA, not her political party, but it is surely worth pointing out that she was elected as a Scottish Conservative.

When we look at the comparative figures for Scottish councils and their counterparts in England and Wales, we can see that Ms Bibby and Councillor Macgregor are absolutely correct: the budgets of councils in England are collapsing. In the period from 2013 to 2020, which is used in the Labour motion, Scottish local authorities have enjoyed a cash-terms revenue budget increase of 3.6 per cent, whereas English local authorities have faced a cash-terms revenue budget cut of 14.7 per cent. English council budgets have suffered an agonising real-terms cut of 22.8 per cent, which is almost four times the figure for Scottish council budgets over the same period.

Councillor Macgregor was absolutely right to warn the Local Government and Communities Committee that Tory-run England is not a country that we should seek to emulate. Although it is true that Scotland as a whole, including local government, has suffered as a result of Tory cuts, and that prioritising the NHS, despite the cuts, has led to pressure on other funding streams, last year's settlement for councils in Scotland was extremely encouraging. The funding package of £11.2 billion for local authorities represented a real-terms increase of more than £310 million, as I said. The settlement included a number of very exciting initiatives that make a huge difference to people's lives, such as the extension of free personal care for the under 65s, the £88 million to

maintain the pupil teacher ratio and the new £50 million town centre fund.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Come to a close, please.

Joan McAlpine: Of course, we do not know what the budget will include. This year's budget process has been hamstrung by the UK Government's decision to move its budget date. Perhaps that is what Labour should be attacking.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members to keep to time, please.

15:50

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): We have heard a lot in the debate already about the wide range of statutory and lifeline services that local government delivers. Last week, COSLA warned that the wellbeing of Scotland's citizens will be at risk if the Government again reduces the settlement to local government. With that warning on health and wellbeing in mind, I will use my time to focus on social care and alcohol and drug services.

Last week, I was struck by the words of Dr Donald Macaskill, the chief executive of Scottish Care, who said:

"Nothing else we do as a country matters as much as the degree to which we choose to care for the most vulnerable and those who need support."

Social care is at the heart of communities, and the Scottish Government is rightly committed to supporting people to stay at home or in a homely setting, with maximum independence, for as long as possible. The integration of health and social care has long been supported by Scottish Labour, and we recognise the Government's good intentions.

However, too many people are waiting too long for a care assessment of their needs and are then having a further long wait before a personalised care package is put in place. Last week, Stephen Smellie, who is from Unison's social work issues group, said:

"The stress on staff, services and their service users is at breaking point. We need significant investment in Social Work Services to avoid a breakdown."

That is a grim picture. As Sarah Boyack highlighted, unpaid carers who are doing their best to support family and friends who would otherwise fall through the cracks are under increasing pressure.

Delayed discharge remains a huge challenge for the NHS and is distressing for people and their families. Scottish Labour analysis shows that, since November 2014, more than 2.7 million days have been spent in hospital by people who were

medically fit to leave. About three quarters of delays are linked to social care. Since Nicola Sturgeon became First Minister, that has cost the NHS more than £653 million, so it is a false economy. Despite SNP ministers pledging to abolish delayed discharge, we have ended up with a very expensive broken promise.

Social care should be a priority for this Government and for any Government. Instead, social care has been weakened and the pressure on the wider health service has exacerbated the problem. That is because of the political choice to underfund local government and then to pretend to everyone else that that is fair.

Integrating health and social care is the right thing to do, but we are not seeing the progress or pace of change that we need. Audit Scotland tells us that, and we all know it from seeing what is happening in our communities. Recently, a family in South Lanarkshire told me about the harrowing eight-week wait that they faced for a care package for their loved one. In fact, the family was from the cabinet secretary's constituency.

When people eventually get the care that they need, it should be provided safely, with dignity at its heart, and there should be continuity. However, we hear far too many examples and anecdotes of different carers coming and going every day and of people being put to bed at 6 o'clock at night. That is not dignified or person-centred care.

Social care is a priority for Scottish Labour, which is why we will introduce a Scottish care service. We all agree that integrating health and social care is the right and smart thing to do, but the Government has botched the policy. It has failed to deliver transformation, it has cut corners on investment and it has failed to plan for the longer term.

In my remaining time, I make a plea on behalf of everyone in Scotland whose life has been touched in some way by drug and alcohol misuse and who has struggled to find help for themselves or for their family. Funding pressures have left barely any local service unscathed, but cuts to alcohol and drug services have had tragic consequences. In recent years, those services have had real-terms budget cuts of millions of pounds. That has led to a drastic fall in the number of residential rehab beds and a record number of drugs deaths. Unfortunately, the latest indication is that those deaths are rising. In Glasgow, which has a population of half a million, the number of residential rehab beds has reduced to 14. When I raised that recently with the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing on behalf of Faces & Voices of Recovery UK, which had been campaigning on the issue, he rightly pointed to a degree of local decision making. However, a postcode lottery of budget cuts should not

determine a person's right to access treatment. We are talking about people's right to live.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Monica Lennon: I will make some progress.

Although there is a debate in Government time next week on those issues, we need to get real about the services that people need. I hope that we will soon see safe consumption rooms in Scotland but let us not just blame the UK Government. Getting the service means that we also have to provide the right wraparound support, to ensure that the rooms are as effective as they can be.

Unison's recent survey of social work staff is pertinent for social care and addiction services. Social work departments have been hollowed out. In reports from Unison members, 82 per cent say that their workload has got heavier in the past few years and 90 per cent say that they are considering leaving their jobs. That is serious.

I support the motion, because we must invest in communities and in early intervention to give everyone a fair chance and to avoid storing up problems for the future. We must support those who care and are cared for. We can do that by investing fairly in local government.

15:56

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Before I start my speech, I will make a couple of comments on preventative spend. I agree with Sarah Boyack's argument that we need to invest in preventative spending. In the previous parliamentary session, the Finance Committee looked at that. The challenge was where to disinvest from. Unless we have a lot of extra money, we have to take the money away before we can do the preventative spending. Effectively, we would have to take money away from accident and emergency departments to put more into community care, or we would have to stop building a new prison in order to invest and stop future overcrowding.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

John Mason: No, I do not think so.

Having been a councillor in Glasgow for 10 years, I feel a strong affinity with and commitment to local government. Most of our councillors are extremely hard-working and deserve our appreciation. As we come up to the budget in a few weeks' time, various sectors argue that they need more money. That is not surprising; we expect everyone to do that. However, finances should not be allocated on the basis of who shouts

loudest; nor should allocation be on the basis of those who have the most emotional appeal.

As a Parliament, we have a responsibility to allocate funds primarily according to the level of need. We should assess that need as objectively as possible. However, some of that is a matter of judgment; for example, is the NHS or local government more important? That is an impossible question to answer, and we should not ask it. Those two sectors do different things—sometimes in conjunction with each other. Both do hugely important things. They educate our children and look after them when they are sick; they provide care for our elderly folk in a hospital setting, at home or in a care home setting. We cannot say that one is more important than the other, yet we have to allocate resources between them.

I hope that Labour and the other Opposition parties will accept that allocating resources in a budget is not an easy or simple process.

To stand by and demand more money for local government today, more for the prison service tomorrow, more for transport the next day and more for the police service the day after that, is not logical and does not impress the public.

Most members of the public live within limited budgets and they understand that we also have to live within a limited budget. So, we can and should be more honest with the public that the money is not there to do all that we would like and that, as a country, we have to choose our priorities.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Is it also not important that the Government raises outstanding revenue? The social responsibility levy, which Parliament passed legislation on, could have raised £150 million if the Government had had the gumption to introduce it.

John Mason: There are ways of raising more money, and I have said previously that I am open to increasing taxation. We have to be careful about how big a gap there is between us and the UK, but if our services are better, it would be justified. If there are sensible suggestions, we can be open to them, but we still have to set priorities even if there is more money from taxation or Westminster.

I have no problem with Labour arguing for “fair funding settlements to local government”

as the motion says, but I assume that Labour also wants fair funding settlements for other sectors.

If Labour feels that local government has not had enough money in recent years, perhaps it could tell us which sector has had too much. Is it the NHS, which is facing rising demand but has

seen its funding more protected over a number of years?

The Conservative amendment is even less honest. At least Labour would, in principle, like to raise more tax in order to allow additional expenditure. We also know that the Conservatives want to cut tax, but their amendment also asks for at least inflationary increases. I wonder if they can tell us what the block grant is going to be next year.

Murdo Fraser: If Mr Mason followed the briefings from the Fraser of Allander institute, he would know that it estimates that the block grant will increase by 2 per cent in real terms from this year to next. On that basis, there is no need either for tax increases or cuts in any spending.

John Mason: It would be more helpful if Westminster would tell us what it will give us rather than other people making estimates.

I will move on to talk about Glasgow specifically and the allocation between the councils. Glasgow has traditionally received one of the highest allocations per head of the mainland authorities because of poverty, poor health, addiction, shorter life expectancy, and other similar issues.

Of course everyone wants more for their local area, and that is what we expect people to argue for. At this time of year, we usually hear complaints that some councils are getting less per head than others. Of course that is the case. It has to be the case. We must base the allocation of resources to councils on need, not on giving everyone the same. Parliament, together with COSLA, must look at the overall national picture. It would be a dereliction of duty to give everyone exactly the same. Allocation must be made according to need. I accept that measuring that need is not easy. We have a formula that could be improved, perhaps, but COSLA has to agree to that.

While I am talking about Glasgow, it is worth mentioning that it has had extra pressure on its budget because of the equal pay settlement. Perhaps we should remember why that happened. Labour was in power in Glasgow for many years, and it allowed many women in a range of jobs to be paid less than men for doing equivalent work. Labour fudged and delayed so that the problem multiplied. It took the SNP becoming the Administration less than three years ago to sort it out. *[Interruption.]*

Finally—I will not get applause for this—I want to put in a word for councillors. As I have said, most of them are extremely hard working and they pour themselves into their communities. I do not think that £17,470 is an adequate salary. All parties should agree to look at that, at least after May 2021.

In conclusion, let us absolutely support local government, but let us be realistic about how much money we actually have as we go into the budget process.

16:03

Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): The Labour Party has raised an important topic today, as the issue of funding settlements is particularly salient. There is a certain amount in the motion to agree with. It is the case that council funding has not kept pace with increases in the block grant given to the Scottish Government. In fact, every single council faced unnecessary budget cuts—sometimes well over 3 per cent—in the previous financial year.

I have a fair amount of first-hand experience of this, and I remind colleagues that I am a councillor in Aberdeen. Coming from the north-east, I am extremely disappointed about how our region has been treated by this central-belt-first Government. Our councils have seen their funding cut at a rate equivalent to £100,000 every single day since 2018-19.

The Scottish Government tries to make the case that it is someone else's fault when, in reality, the SNP has, since 2013, cut the local government revenue budget at a far deeper rate than that of the Scottish Government. So, when ministers and their foot soldiers stand up to portray this as Westminster's fault, it is nothing short of an abdication of their responsibility.

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

Tom Mason: No.

Kate Forbes: Okay then.

Tom Mason: Let us be real about the effect of the cuts. I will use the example of Aberdeen. In the previous budget, we were able to safeguard libraries, community learning centres, and school crossing patrols. Some of the alternative suggestions were staggering, and included £1.8 million being cut out of the health and social care partnership, or getting £1.1 million from a blanket 3 per cent increase, across the board, in all existing charges. I should say that both of those suggestions came from the SNP—thankfully, we did not take it up on its offer.

There are structural changes in the local government funding settlement that could help to address some of the issues that we see today. Ring fencing of funding for Scottish Government initiatives has been identified as the root cause of many cuts in other areas. I accept that those are often projects that have to be delivered at a local level, but if the Scottish Government is insisting on

those ideas, it should take greater responsibility for funding them.

Much is made of the protection of education and care budgets, which is fair enough, but when that comes at the expense of 34 per cent of planning spend, 15 per cent of roads spend, and 10 per cent of environment spend, there needs to be a rethink about where the money for headline Government promises comes from. By accepting a fairer share of that responsibility, the Scottish Government could aid the provision of local government services across the country.

Much has been made of the idea of council tax reform. I accept that there is no cross-party consensus on the optimal way to address that, but a bit of effort would not hurt. As far as council tax goes, no one is expecting the SNP to reinvent the wheel or to stick to its original manifesto commitment—chance would be a fine thing, after all. However, from the party that promised to scrap the council tax, I think that something over and above a toothless commission with no achievements to its name might just be a start. Currently, the only options available to struggling councils are cuts, spending reserves, or raising taxes. I do not think that a fair settlement for local government means telling it that it can have more money but it will have to tax everything from people to parking spaces in order to get it. It is equally unacceptable to force councils to raid their reserves to make ends meet.

In the past three years, 23 local authorities have been forced to dip into their savings for day-to-day spending. I am afraid that that is a massive red flag that ministers have either missed or ignored. I hope that the points raised regarding the very real challenges faced by local authorities will not go unheeded. Ministers have the chance to alleviate some of those pressures in the upcoming budget. Councils, and ultimately, the people for whom they provide vital services, need politicians across the board to approach that in a sensible, level-headed way.

It was recently brought to my attention that, in the index of social and economic wellbeing, as published in *The Times*, Scotland has fallen by five places into the bottom half. To me, that reflects just how badly the SNP Government has been handling things.

That is why we in the Conservatives have extended an offer to the SNP in order to pass its budget in a couple of weeks, without the threat of whatever new taxes the Greens have recently dreamed up. Part of that offer includes significant measures to help grow our economy and expand the tax base, enabling more revenue to be collected without raising rates. We also want the overall funding settlement for local authorities to be addressed directly. If the Government

increased core funding by at least inflation, while fully funding all additional commitments, local authorities would be far less reliant on dipping into their reserves or cutting services to make ends meet.

The finance secretary will have a couple of weeks to examine our proposals, and I hope that he does so before he produces his draft budget in early February. Local authorities up and down the country have been consistent in telling us that more of the same from the Scottish Government will not do the trick any more. Councils are struggling to make ends meet, and that comes only at the expense of the vital front-line services that they do their best to provide. It is not good enough to cut council funding to the bone and blame someone else. It is not good enough to leave councils to decide between spending their savings or cutting posts. There is the time, and there is the money. I hope that in the budget, ministers will choose to invest in local government and all the good that it can do.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Would you be minded to provide the 30 seconds necessary for Mr Mason to clarify any further sources of income that he has beyond his parliamentary salary?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you clarify which Mr Mason you are referring to?

Stewart Stevenson: Mr Tom Mason, who has just completed his speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The short answer to that is no, because it is up to individual members what they wish to declare in the chamber, and that is often related to their entry in the register of interests.

16:10

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Just for the record, I say that I have absolutely nothing to declare. I like to think that my speech will be of interest, but I have nothing to declare—I got that in before Neil Findlay said it.

One of the most disappointing aspects of politics in this place is that parties continue to suggest spending without costings. Honestly, those parties will never be seen as a serious alternative Government if they continue in that way. Do not get me wrong—I used to be the leader of the opposition in Glasgow, and I know how easy it is to stand up, demand everything, ignore cost and have great fun doing it. However, I always ensured that we produced a costed alternative budget. Until those other parties play their full part in the budget process, this debate is just about grandstanding or carping from the sidelines, no

matter how eloquent it is, as Sarah Boyack definitely was. We have had no serious proposals and no suggestions about where funding will come from; we have just had a list of wants, which none of us is likely to disagree with—with the possible exception of the Tories, I suppose.

As we have heard, local government plays a vital role in tackling some of the defining challenges that Scottish working people face. Indeed, as the Labour motion references, our councils can be and very often are at the forefront in the fight to address climate change. Scotland is leading the world in tackling the climate emergency, and Glasgow as a city is leading the way in Scotland. Glasgow City Council aims to be the first city in the UK to reach net zero emissions by 2030. Despite what Sarah Boyack suggested, Glasgow has introduced that ambitious plan, led by the city convener for sustainability and carbon reduction, Councillor Anna Richardson, and the city's low-emission zone has now entered its second year. The council has been able to do that while working under what are, according to some other parties, devastating restrictions.

Under the LEZ, at least 40 per cent of bus journeys through the city centre this year will be required to meet tough emissions standards. Bus operators have invested in their fleets to ensure that they meet the target, with FirstBus launching a number of fully electric buses earlier this month. The city's LEZ aims to have 100 per cent of buses meeting the standard by 2022.

As the city gears up for the 26th conference of the parties, or COP26, it is encouraging to see the collaboration between the Government, the city council and transport partners to further incentivise public transport as a convenient and sustainable alternative to the car. That collaboration is crucial if we are to get the best out of every single part of the system, including local government, national Government and other partners.

Local authorities tell us that they want greater responsibility for their finances and to be less dependent on grants from central Government. The Tories and Labour have called for more localism and for reforms to make local government more accountable to its local communities. Those calls are perfectly sensible. At a meeting of the citizens assembly on Saturday, Richard Leonard said that politicians can and should co-operate on the issue of climate change. However, it is utterly hypocritical, and it makes no sense, for Labour to say that our councils can be key players in tackling the climate emergency when, at the first opportunity, Labour refused to support the workplace parking levy.

The parliamentary Scottish Labour Party might not support that levy, but many of Labour's council colleagues across Scotland do. It is a discretionary

power that is now available to our councils, which, along with a series of other measures, will help to reduce congestion, improve air quality and create a healthier environment. While the Labour Party talks a good game about empowering community, the SNP gets on with the job by delivering the most significant empowerment of local authorities since devolution.

As we are talking about local government finance, it would be remiss of me not to mention the equal pay issue, which John Mason talked about in detail. I remind members that Labour spent £2 million on defending its indefensible pay scheme in court and that dealing with the issue will cost the SNP administration in Glasgow £548 million. Last year, the leader of Glasgow City Council said that it is likely to cost the city about £25 million annually for “years to come”.

Let us not be taken in by words about what we must do; let us talk about how to get the finances in place. Every time that other parties want to give more money to local government, let us talk about where they would get that money from. There is nowhere else that they will get it from, except the health service.

We talk about early intervention, which I completely support, but we cannot have preventative spend without taking money from somewhere else, as John Mason said. We need extra money or we have to forget about doing operations so that we can put that money into early intervention and prevention. We will see the results in 10 or 15 years’ time, but, in the meantime, your granny will not get her hip operation and all the other things that need to be done will not get done.

There has to be realism and we have to work together on this. We should not play cheap politics with it. Do not get me wrong—I have been told that I am pretty good at cheap politics at times, but this is too serious an issue to play cheap politics with.

I see that I am coming to the end of my time, but I want to talk a bit about this, because it is important to me. We are facing further difficulties this year because of the delay to the UK budget, which was caused by our friends the Tories, who have completely ignored Scotland and our local authorities’ need to set their budgets for the year ahead.

I return to my opening comments. The onus is on every party to act responsibly with regard to next month’s budget bill. If they have asks, they must identify funding. Perhaps, in the future, Labour will work with the Scottish Government instead of holding to the principle that it will not work with us unless it absolutely has to. Let us remember who really caused the austerity that led to the cuts to Scotland’s budget: the Tories.

16:16

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): COSLA’s recent report on the upcoming budget, “Invest in Essential Services”, needs to act as a wake-up call to the Government. The report lays bare the financial crisis that councils around Scotland are facing as they have had to make £2.1 billion-worth of cash cuts and savings since 2012.

The report clearly shows that the debates in council chambers are about not just which services to trim but which services to scrap altogether. It highlights the remarkable job that our council staff do to keep as many services going as possible at a time when their resources and morale are being ground down day in, day out by the tsunami of cuts that are being inflicted on them by the Government.

It is an insult to those hard-working staff who serve our communities every day that the SNP and the Greens keep claiming that local government has received a fair settlement, yet 40,000 jobs have been axed by our councils since 2007.

Just as the Tories’ political choice of austerity has been devastating for our communities, so, too, have the political choices of the SNP Government in its budgets. It is an undeniable fact that Tory austerity has meant a 2 per cent cut in funding to the Scottish Government between 2013-14 and 2019-20, but the SNP’s budgets have turbocharged that austerity by imposing a 7 per cent cut on our councils.

Kate Forbes: Does Colin Smyth think that we were right to pass on health consequential in full to the health service?

Colin Smyth: The Government was right to do that, but it was wrong when it ensured that people on £140,000 a year received a tax cut in the budget last year; it was wrong when it set up a private finance initiative contract costing £1.4 million a month for the Royal hospital for children and young people in Edinburgh, which is not even open; and it will be wrong if it spends hundreds of millions of pounds in this budget on an independence referendum that nobody in this country wants.

Every day in our communities, we see the impact of the choices that Kate Forbes and others have made. I see that impact in Dumfries and Galloway. Since 2010, the council’s budget has been cut by 12.6 per cent compared with a 3.8 per cent reduction in the Scottish Government’s budget in that time. As a result, the council has been forced to make £106 million-worth of savings. Every year, it becomes more difficult to protect key services.

At the end of last year, the council began consulting on the latest unpalatable options from officers for cuts—cuts that were caused by this Government. The options included reducing subject choices in secondary schools, cutting road maintenance and transport budgets, a further fall in library budgets, new restrictions on access to music tuition, changes to social work staffing—the council's report described that as “high risk”—and a 30 per cent cut in support for the region's iconic festivals and events strategy.

If, as the SNP Government claims in its motion, there is a real-terms increase in funding for councils, why are SNP councillors being forced to consult on cuts such as that? Those councillors have had to reduce teaching posts at a time when a third of Scottish children are leaving primary school without attaining the expected levels of literacy and numeracy, and they have reduced the amount of leisure facilities when a third of Scotland's schoolchildren are obese.

Despite that stark reality, the SNP Government claims in its amendment to have delivered a real-terms increase in funding for councils, knowing full well that that funding does not scratch the surface of the additional burdens that it has imposed on our councils. As the COSLA report clearly shows, the proportion of council budgets that is ring fenced for specific Government projects has almost doubled since 2013-14. Coupled with growing demand, that has limited councils' freedom to invest where they believe investment is needed, and it has created a perfect storm when it comes to unprotected areas.

One such area is transport. Under the SNP, council transport spend has fallen by a quarter, with both revenue and capital spending in decline. Although council funding fell by 7.5 per cent in real terms over the past five years, the cut in council spending on local roads fell by 26 per cent. Last year alone, local government spending on transport was almost £300 million lower than in 2007-08. That means that £300 million less is being spent on maintaining our roads and pavements and on supporting vital public transport links. It is no wonder that there is a £1.8 billion repairs backlog for our local roads and that bus passenger numbers have collapsed by over 100 million since 2007.

If we are serious about climate change, we need to get serious about supporting public transport and, in particular, our bus services. That support is key to reducing emissions from transport, which continues to be Scotland's most polluting sector, but it is key to more than that. Supporting bus services is about supporting communities and our economy, connecting people to work, education and healthcare and allowing them to socialise. Instead of consulting on whether to remove

Labour's successful older people's bus pass for anyone aged between 60 and 65, the Government should have been consulting on how to extend that scheme to more and younger people.

James Dornan: Was it not the Government that extended the bus pass scheme?

Colin Smyth: If the member wants to make an intervention, I am happy to take one.

James Dornan: The Government extended the bus pass scheme.

Colin Smyth: The Government should be further extending it to young people, starting with modern apprentices, as it promised. So far, it has failed to do so. It has also cut the yearly income per journey for our bus companies, which is one of the reasons why, right across Scotland, under this Government, the bus network is being dismantled route by route.

Thanks to Labour's amendments, the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 gives our councils a range of new powers relating to bus services, including, crucially, the ability to run services directly or by setting up municipal bus companies. That new power has the potential to transform local bus services by ensuring they are run for the communities that they serve and allowing councils to get the best possible value for money by returning profits back to the public purse and not to the shareholders of the big bus companies.

However, as Sarah Boyack highlighted, that power is meaningless without the resources to meet the up-front costs of setting up those bus services. To reverse plummeting passenger numbers, we need our local councils to have not only the power to run bus services but the funding to rebuild our fragile bus network.

The forthcoming budget needs to give local authorities those resources. It needs to put an end to cuts to our councils and give them fair funding. The SNP and the Greens are good at rhetoric when it comes to ending austerity, but, as the debate has shown and as the facts have exposed, they are all talk. It is our lifeline council services and those who rely on them that are paying the price.

16:23

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Once again, Labour has lodged a motion that, in essence, it is very difficult to argue with. The bulk of the text outlines the important objectives that local authorities deliver: preparing our young people for life through local authority-run schools and looking after our elderly population with dignity at heart. The motion also rightly mentions the importance of local government in helping us to tackle climate change.

Not a single member here will disagree on the importance of the role that our local authorities play in many aspects of our constituents' lives and in delivering on the national priorities that we decide in this Parliament. Then, however, the motion replays the standard Labour tune that we hear week after week in the Parliament: the constant call for the Scottish Government to give more money to whichever public sector organisation is being discussed. It is a line that plays well: "We need more money for our schools, our hospitals and our councils".

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Gillian Martin: I am not sure that Mr Findlay's interventions have added much to the debate, so I will decline.

Taken individually, those asks are hard for anyone to disagree with and they generate good press headlines along the lines of "Labour calls on Sturgeon to do more for—" fill in the gap. We will probably see that sort of thing in the papers tomorrow.

What never happens—certainly not in the time that I have been in the Parliament—is that one Labour member stands up and tells us where that money should come from. Year after year, Labour fails to put its budget proposals to the chamber and the Labour leadership declines a meeting to argue its case with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work ahead of the Scottish budget proposals.

There was the notable exception of Alex Rowley, who broke ranks last year and put his asks to Derek Mackay, only to be hauled back by Richard Leonard, who, I believe, has never put together an alternative Scottish budget in all his time as Scottish Labour leader.

It is easy to call for more money and to say that local councils need a bigger settlement. What is hard is making sure that our local authorities get an increased settlement from a limited block grant that is dictated to us by another Government, and protecting Scotland's public services against the backdrop of the austerity policies of a Tory Government that have undoubtedly impacted on poverty levels and the wellbeing of our people, which puts extra strain on those public services. Further, when we mitigate those policies, often on a moral basis, that money needs to come from somewhere. So, what do we cut to give local authorities more funding? Money for early years care expansion? Money for free personal care for the elderly? Do we not go ahead with Frank's law? Do we bring in tuition fees for our students?

The hardest thing of all for a devolved Government is not having the full suite of powers that would enable us to protect ourselves fully

from the impact of pernicious Tory policies, such as powers over employment law, which, I believe, Richard Leonard still has not agreed to join the First Minister in asking for, despite the fact that he gets to his feet practically every week to complaining about some aspect of it. Labour members like to call for things, but when it comes to actually doing something about it, they are silent.

Of course, there are Labour group members who are former Government ministers and who have had to manage budgets in the past, so they know the score. However, to my recollection, when Labour was in power, it underinvested in our public services. Sometimes, money from the block grant was unspent and it could not be rolled over into the next year.

Sarah Boyack: Things such as the free bus travel scheme and free personal care for the elderly were introduced under Scottish Labour. When Gordon Brown was Chancellor of the Exchequer, we hugely increased the amount of money that was available to the Scottish Parliament and it was spent wisely.

I agree that tough decisions must be made but, earlier, David Stewart mentioned a way of raising money that the Scottish Government could act on now and, in my summing up, I specified where we would support more revenue coming to the Scottish Government, using the existing powers.

Gillian Martin: I am delighted to hear that, in summing up, Sarah Boyack will reverse the trend and I look forward to hearing where the money will come from to fund all her asks. However, I remember that there has been underspend in the past, and it is no wonder that, when the SNP came to power, we had to embark on a school-building programme, make investments in the health estate, build affordable houses and improve our transport infrastructure—which was particularly woeful in my area and is only now getting the attention that it badly needs.

When we are talking about policy and plans, it is entirely reasonable to look at Labour policy in the devolved nation where it holds power. When we do that, we see that, in Labour-controlled Wales, there has been an 11.5 per cent real-terms cut to local authorities.

We have a budget coming up. Will Labour leaders—including the one sitting behind Sarah Boyack—meet Derek Mackay to present their spending asks and, crucially, will they publish a detailed alternative budget that sets out Labour's financial policy and plans for the citizens of Scotland to scrutinise, rather than going for the one-note, empty headlines that we have come to expect?

16:28

Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome the chance to speak in the debate and thank the Labour Party for securing a debate on the issue, because the SNP is squeezing councils dry and expecting them to do more with less.

I will speak about North East Scotland, which is my region. In recent years, it has had successful investment opportunities, such as V&A Dundee. However, there are also many issues across the region that stem from a lack of local funding due to SNP budget cuts, which have left Scotland's local authorities facing immense pressure. As with many SNP policies, North East Scotland has been hit hard. The general revenue grant for councils in the north-east, including Angus Council, which Tom Mason mentioned, has been cut at a rate that is equivalent to £100,000 a day between 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Local government is at the centre of our communities. For sustainable and positive change, local authorities must receive a fair funding settlement. However, the Fraser of Allander institute predicts a total reduction of £1 billion in local government revenue funding between 2016-17 and 2020-21.

There have been positive investment opportunities in Dundee and North East Scotland. As I mentioned, V&A Dundee has had a very positive effect on the city. Its economic impact was more than twice that first anticipated, bringing an extra £21 million to Dundee's economy and more than £50 million further afield across Scotland during the 12 months since the museum's opening in September 2018. The extra cash has supported the equivalent of 696 jobs in Dundee and 2,143 across Scotland.

Although praise is obviously due for the £80 million museum, criticism has been levelled at a perceived lack of momentum in the wider waterfront regeneration project in Dundee. Against a backdrop of a spate of closures in the city, some local business owners have asked for clarity on the future of the regeneration plans. It is apparent that Dundee still has many funding issues and needs investment outwith the V&A and the waterfront.

According to Dundee City Council's SNP leader, the council will face 10 years of catastrophic cuts. He claimed in August 2019 that

"All services will face cuts of some kind"

because the council needs to come up with £80 million over the next 10 years. He warned that people in all walks of life in Dundee would feel the effects of the cuts that the council would be forced to make in the years to come. Bigger class sizes, the closure of leisure centres and libraries and a

reduction in road and property maintenance are some of the drastic plans that Dundee City Council chiefs are considering in a bid to balance the books. They need investment funds.

There are also important issues in Dundee regarding cuts to funding for alcohol and drug partnerships in Tayside. Across Scotland, there are 31 ADPs, which bring together local partners including health boards, local authorities, police and voluntary agencies. They are responsible for commissioning and developing local strategies for tackling problem alcohol and drug abuse and promoting recovery. Scotland now has a higher rate of drug-related deaths than the USA and every other European Union nation.

However, in July 2019, it emerged that funding for alcohol and drug partnerships in Tayside has been cut by more than 22 per cent since 2015, despite ministers acknowledging that the region now faces a "drug deaths ... emergency". That prompted the Scottish Affairs Committee to accuse the Scottish Government of adding to the crisis in Dundee by cutting the funding. Services in Tayside have had their allocation cut from £5.4 million in 2014-15 to £4.2 million in 2018-19. Across Scotland, the allocation was reduced from a high of £69 million in 2015 to £54 million last year, prompting fears over the provision of vital services. The reduction has coincided with a 94 per cent rise in drug-induced deaths, with 1,187 lives lost in 2018 alone; 66 deaths in Dundee were attributed to that.

On top of that, it is shameful that Dundee is now ranked as the worst city in Scotland for females to grow up in. A study by Plan International UK shows the levels of regional inequality that still exist. The report's analysis measured female rights and quality of life, using indicators such as child poverty, life expectancy and NEET status—that is, not in education, employment or training. Rose Caldwell, the chief executive of Plan International UK, said that policies at a national and local level are not going far enough to tackle inequality; however, that is not possible without adequate funding.

Aileen Campbell: With regard to inequality, would Mr Bowman not concede that, when the UK Government wants to reduce social security spending by up to £3.7 billion in Scotland, that has a direct impact on inequality in this country? Will he demand of his party's ministers in Westminster that they reverse some of those cuts?

Bill Bowman: I think that the Scottish Government has had long enough to deal with that issue here. I could go back and repeat what I said about Dundee being the worst place in the UK for young females to grow up in. I think that that is very embarrassing for the cabinet secretary, and I hope that she finds it so, too.

The Scottish Conservatives have set out our demands for the upcoming budget. Our primary asks include an inflation-linked increase in the core revenue budget, more hospital beds for drug addicts and a tax freeze. We do not want to see hard-working Scots footing the bill for the SNP's inability to fund and invest in local government properly. That is why we are rejecting council tax rises, the car park tax and tourist taxes that will see the SNP palm off to hard-working Scots the responsibility to raise the level of funding that councils receive. An investment in local government is an investment to better the lives of the people of Scotland. It seems that that is too much to ask of the Scottish Government.

16:34

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate and I appreciate the Labour Party bringing it to the chamber.

We all know that our local authorities are at the front line of providing the day-to-day services on which everyone relies and that they are a lifeline to our communities. Their hard-working elected members and officers are at the front line of dealing with complaints, which are often channelled through MSPs, as members in the chamber will be aware.

Year on year, councils face significant challenges—of that, there is no doubt. It is important to recognise that those challenges are a direct result of austerity and the policies that are being pursued by the Tory Government in Westminster. As some other members have said, despite on-going cuts from Westminster—7.8 per cent between 2013-14 and 2019-20—the Scottish Government has sought to deliver a fair funding package to local authorities.

My authority, East Dunbartonshire Council, received a total of £209 million in revenue and capital. Yes, like every other council, it has had to make savings—it has made savings of around £6 million—but there is no getting away from the fact that that is the result of austerity. Nevertheless, since I was elected at the start of the current parliamentary session in 2016, local government has received a cash increase in its overall budget settlement of £862 million, which is a real-terms increase of 2.4 per cent, as a result of the budget agreements between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party. That seems like a reasonable deal to me, delivered against all odds. However, I am aware that, when some services are cut and savings have to be made, those numbers are just statistics—figures that would appear to have no meaning. The reality is that there is no pot of gold and we have no choice but to play with the cards that we have been dealt.

More money for councils would mean a cut to the health budget, as outlined by Joan McAlpine and others, the education budget, or the budgets for other services that we desperately need and the Government has rightly protected and enhanced. Of course, it is up to each authority how it makes the required savings, and that often comes down to priorities, for which all too often the Opposition tries to blame our Government, although such decisions are completely devolved to individual local authorities.

Like my colleague Gillian Martin, I agree with the premise of most of Labour's motion. I agree that

"the Parliament commits to supporting people and communities"

and that

"local government has a crucial role in doing that".

Everything that is expressed in Labour's motion is correct except for the statistics and the underlying reason for the challenges that local authorities face.

I would be surprised if people did not recognise that the Scottish Government is getting on with the job of empowering communities in a variety of ways; in fact, our 32 local authorities have received the most significant empowerment since devolution. One example is our consultation through which we are seeking views on a discretionary local levy on visitors who stay overnight, or a tourist tax, and the responses will inform legislation that will be introduced in 2020.

We have also enabled councils to introduce a workplace parking levy, should they wish to do so. Last week, we announced new powers for local authorities to regulate short-term lets if they decide that doing so is in the interests of local communities. We will devolve non-domestic rates empty property relief to local authorities in time for the next revaluation in April 2022.

If there is agreement on a replacement for the present council tax, we will publish legislation by the end of this parliamentary session, and the legislation will be taken forward in the following session.

Our local governance review is considering how power and resources are shared across the public sector and with our communities. We have also agreed to develop a rules-based framework for local government funding in partnership with COSLA, which would be introduced in the next parliamentary session. Decisions on all future budgets are subject to negotiation with COSLA, so working with local authorities is very much at the top of our agenda.

Under this Government, ring fencing of local authority funding has been decreased, thereby giving local authorities complete autonomy to allocate over 92 per cent of the funding that the Scottish Government provides. Under the Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration, ring fencing stood at £2.7 billion in 2007, compared with only £0.9 billion under the SNP Scottish Government. The ring fencing that exists relates to policies that were supported by parties across the chamber, such as the expansion of early learning and childcare and free personal care, which are two of the most transformative policy initiatives that this nation has ever experienced.

Let me emphasise that there is an additional £210 million in revenue and £25 million in capital to support the expansion of early learning and childcare to 1,140 hours by 2020. In addition, a further £120 million is to be transferred from health to local government to support health and social care. Indeed, COSLA representatives have described ring-fenced policies such as early learning as “excellent” priorities “which we support”.

Of course, we know that this year’s budget process has been hampered by the UK Government’s decision to move the budget date, which is another example of its complete disrespect and disregard for this Parliament. Labour should join the SNP in calling that out, rather than engaging in public speculation on the budget. We know that a massive £125 million was spent on mitigating Westminster Government austerity measures and benefit cuts in 2018-19. That is outrageous. That money could have alleviated many of the problems that councils face in maintaining services.

The Scottish Government will continue to support and value local government, despite the stranglehold of Westminster austerity.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): That brings us to closing speeches.

16:40

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to close the debate on funding our local authorities on behalf of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party. As someone who served in local government for 18 years as a councillor, I am acutely aware of how important it is that councils balance their budgets and ensure that they have good finances.

Over the past 13 years, the Scottish Government has seen fit to cut local government funding to the bone and then has asked it to do more with less. That is simply no longer a sustainable position for councils. In order for our local authorities to continue providing the services

on which we rely, it is vital that they receive a fair funding settlement in the coming year’s budget. Last year, the SNP Government cut every single council’s budget. Despite the fact that the block grant increased, most local authorities faced a cut of around 3 per cent.

The SNP’s savage and unnecessary cuts to local government are not a new phenomenon. Although the Scottish Government’s budget decreased by only 0.8 per cent between 2013-14 and 2018-19, the SNP chose to reduce council funding at a far steeper rate of 7.1 per cent over the same period.

Kate Forbes: When the 2019-20 local government finance settlement is set—excluding health, because there was agreement that we should pass on health consequentials in full—the Scottish Government’s resource budget will be 7.8 per cent lower in real terms in 2019-20 than in 2013-14. That is a higher figure than the one that the member shared.

Alexander Stewart: Not at all. The Barnett consequentials are coming up and the Scottish Government will receive hundreds of millions of pounds extra. That is a fact.

The Fraser of Allander institute has predicted that, over the course of those five years alone, there will have been a loss of £1 billion to local government funding in Scotland.

Despite all that, the SNP continues to refuse—as we have just seen—to say that it has created any problems. Ministers have even rejected reports by the Accounts Commission that showed real-terms cuts to council budgets, as they have tried to argue that funding has continued to rise. That point was very well made by my colleague Graham Simpson. That position is wholly unacceptable and ignores the fact that if, for example, a council has its budget increased by £5 million but is asked to fund £10 million of additional priorities, that council is £5 million worse off when it comes to delivering core services.

Between 2018-19 and 2019-20 alone, the percentage of revenue funding that was committed to supporting specific Scottish Government policies almost doubled, from 6.6 to 12.1 per cent. That is putting a strain on spending in areas that are outside the Scottish Government’s priorities, such as culture and leisure, roads maintenance and environmental services. The cuts in those areas are disproportionate, and that cannot be allowed to continue.

Councils are being forced to look at every possible way of addressing the funding situation. More than two thirds of councils have been forced to draw down their reserves in the past three years to help fund day-to-day spending. Moray Council has said that it will have only about five years of

reserves left if it continues to fund from it as it has been doing. Authorities such as Clackmannanshire Council are looking to substantially cut public services, others are looking to introduce compulsory redundancy policies and Highland Council has had to cut class time for its youngest pupils to save money.

That is despite the fact that each and every council has imposed at least a 3 per cent rise in council tax, with some even going to the maximum of 4.79 per cent. Others are actively considering introducing car park and tourism taxes, which they are now allowed to do because of the dodgy deal that was done last year with the Greens for them to support the budget.

Despite there being an appetite in the Parliament for some form of council tax reform, there has been no meaningful progress. The SNP has criticised the current system since it came into power in 2007, and it set up a commission on the subject, but it does not like facing the music.

We heard some good speeches in the debate, and I pay tribute to Sarah Boyack for bringing it to the chamber. She said that local government is at the heart of communities, and she talked about the true cost of services and the need for a fair settlement. She gave the example of access to music tuition, which is a real issue across many of our councils because they are being hit hard.

The cabinet secretary said that local government plays a massive part in our communities, but I say to her that it can do that only if the Government funds it.

Murdo Fraser said that all councils' budgets have been cut because of committed funding and ring fencing. That is having a detrimental effect on our councils.

Willie Rennie said that, with the £400 million of commitments by the Scottish Government, there are still massive gaps. As he said, COSLA has made some proposals on support for councils, but the SNP Government does not support them.

Graham Simpson said that councils are having to use their reserves just to pay the bills and ensure that they can keep going, and that integration joint boards are having issues with the lack of finance, the lack of planning and the loss of all their staff.

With the increases from the UK Government, Barnett consequential will come to Scotland in droves, but the SNP Government will no doubt squander them, as it has done in the past. We need to see a budget that properly funds local government without forcing hard-working Scots to end up paying the bills. Councils' capital and revenue budgets must increase by at least the rate of inflation, and additional commitments that are

required of councils must be funded. The costs must not be put on others. Only by taking that approach will we ensure that councils can deliver as they want to deliver.

I am more than happy to support the motion with the inclusion of the amendment in the name of my colleague Murdo Fraser, which seeks to provide greater clarity on what we will do. It is time for councils to get a fair deal.

The Presiding Officer: I call Kate Forbes to wind up for the Government.

16:47

The Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy (Kate Forbes): The debate has been a good rehearsal for the budget. At least we are discussing a budget, which is more than can be said for the UK Government, which has delayed its budget to such an extent that it is still not discussing anything. The debate has also been a good opportunity for some parties to rehearse their asks, although most parties have demonstrated that they have still not figured out what they want in this year's budget, never mind costed it. Willie Rennie asked me to be straight, but he cannot be straight with the Parliament and the electorate about what he wants to see in the budget. If he wants to give £1 billion more to local authorities, I ask him where he would cut £1 billion.

To be fair to the Greens, I note that, to date, theirs is the only party to have delivered genuine asks on local authority spend. The nature of compromise and of minority government is that we have to come to agreement to get a budget through.

I do not want to pick on the Lib Dems, but I note that Willie Rennie also—and rightly—mentioned the need for clarity. He asked for clarity on council tax, on multiyear budgets and on funding. I agree that local government needs clarity, and that is why the Scottish Government has brought our budget forward to 6 February. We have done that in order to give that clarity, despite not having clarity ourselves because the UK Government will not publish its budget until the very day on which local authorities have to set their council tax.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): We heard in committee this morning about the £100 million of wasted taxpayers' money that the Scottish Government has focused on the Ferguson's fiasco, but that is not the only wasted money. If the minister cares to discuss it later, I can tell her where we could save £200 million now.

Kate Forbes: I thank Mr Rumbles for identifying the Lib Dems' main ask, which is that we ensure that the workforce at Ferguson's does not have a

future and that the ferries that I need for my constituency are not built. Additional clarity is invaluable for local authorities—we all agree on that. However, the Lib Dems know full well that a deal is needed between the Scottish Government and another party in order to get the budget through. Anybody who calls for clarity in the chamber but then fails to participate in the budget process will have failed local government.

That need for clarity is very relevant to the Tories, who have finally woken up to the fact that there is a budget process going on. Murdo Fraser made some intriguing requests. For example, he asked us to match the income tax rates south of the border. What will those be? We will not know until 11 March. He also promised that, next year, the ever-generous UK Government will give us more money to spend. Alexander Stewart said that that money will come to the Scottish Government “in droves”. How much will it be? We will not know for sure until 11 March. He also asked us to make changes to non-domestic rates, but his party has supported amendments to the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill that would remove the powers enabling us to do so.

Sarah Boyack started her speech by highlighting the need to work with local government, which we do because we think it is important. In fact, we are currently in discussions with COSLA as part of the budget process. Of course, it would have been nice if we could also have had discussions with the Scottish Labour Party about its priorities for this year’s budget—what its main ask might be and how it might be funded. I look forward to hearing Labour’s closing speech, because I am waiting with bated breath to find out what its proposals might be.

Ms Boyack rightly mentioned the importance of preventative spend. That is all about outcomes that are captured in the national performance framework, of which we and COSLA are co-signatories. However, Joan McAlpine is quite right: Labour might talk about shifting resource from health to local government but, when it came to it, all parties in the chamber would complain about cuts to other parts of the budget. Labour needs to identify where such cuts would fall. Gillian Martin’s speech was brilliant in laying bare that party’s hypocrisy in calling for increased spend in one area but being unable to say which other area it would cut.

Joan McAlpine also mentioned other parts of the UK, which are relevant to the debate because the ultimate source of the majority of our funding is the UK Government. In the period from 2013 to 2020, English local authorities have seen a real-terms reduction of 22.8 per cent, and Welsh local authorities one of 11.5 per cent. That is precisely why COSLA’s finance spokesperson said that

councils in England and Wales are collapsing. In Scotland, we are taking quite a different approach.

However, the key point in all of this is very simple. This year, as part of the budget process, every party that is currently complaining in the chamber will have the opportunity to present fully costed proposals to the finance secretary. Every party that fails to do so will have achieved nothing but the party posturing that James Dornan rightly identified.

Despite the obstacles that the Scottish Government faces, we remain firmly focused on producing, on 6 February, a budget that will deliver on the objectives that we share with our local government partners—improved wellbeing, support for inclusive growth, responses to the global climate emergency and the tackling of child poverty—all of which are firmly anchored in the jointly agreed national performance framework.

Our negotiations with local government continue ahead of the budget announcement on 6 February, and I assure all members that the Government stands ready to work with any Opposition party that is willing to act responsibly by making constructive proposals for the Scottish budget. I look forward to seeing them.

The Presiding Officer: I call Rhoda Grant to close the debate on behalf of the Labour Party.

16:53

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Scottish Labour brought the debate to the chamber to urge the Government to invest in local services and in our future and to build a caring society.

After more than a decade of austerity, the services on which our constituents depend are broken. There are waiting lists for free personal care, and in some cases it is simply not available. Young people with additional support needs are not receiving the education to which they are entitled. Local roads are crumbling and full of potholes, and bus services are being cut.

COSLA’s invest in essential services campaign highlights the fact that local government is at breaking point and cannot take continued cuts to its budgets. That is why we are calling on the Scottish Government to invest in local government and give it a fair funding settlement. We need to draw a line. Judging by the tone of the interventions in the debate, most of which were thoughtful, all members will know from their mailboxes that that is true.

In her opening remarks, Sarah Boyack spoke of dignity, which is a theme that has run through the debate. Monica Lennon pointed out that, since November 2014, Information Services Division

figures have costed the delayed discharge policy at £653 million, which means that it has been a false economy. More than 2.5 million days of people's lives have been needlessly spent in hospital. Such an approach has an impact on real people.

I have a constituent who faced spending Christmas in hospital. She was fit to go home but she needed additional support in the short term. She had done nothing wrong, yet she was about to be held in hospital against her will. We were able to intervene and get support for her, but how many other people spent this Christmas in hospital when they should have been at home with their loved ones? Looking after people at home costs a fraction of what it costs to hold them in hospital against their will. We have to invest in home care, value those who provide the service and allow people to remain at home in comfort.

I have another constituent who has been told that he faces spending the rest of his life in a care home because community care cannot be provided. That is simply cruel. His partner will have to give up work to look after him at home for as long as possible. That is a fundamental breach of the promises that the Government made to carers in the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. It will cost much more to look after that constituent in a care home than it would have cost if he were at home—where he wants to be—with his family.

Monica Lennon spoke about the pressure that is being put on social workers—90 per cent of them are contemplating leaving their job.

Graham Simpson talked about IJBs operating in deficit because the costs are falling to them and then, in turn, to NHS boards and councils.

Monica Lennon and Bill Bowman spoke about drug and alcohol services, cuts to which are leading to deaths. There has been an increase in the number of drug-related deaths, which is simply unacceptable in a caring society.

Iain Gray talked about investing in our children and grandchildren. Young people with ASN are not getting the education that they are entitled to, and there is no support for their parents. There are pupils in my region who have to share ASN teachers with other pupils who are not even in the same class. That means that one child goes without support while the ASN teacher is in another class. There are parents who cannot get to work because the school continually calls them in to look after those children. Not only are we failing those children, we are failing their classmates and their families.

Falling teacher numbers and growing class sizes are failures for all of us. Cuts in music tuition mean that only those who can afford to pay for it

are able to learn to play a musical instrument, and after-school clubs are disappearing.

Colin Smyth talked about transport and bus services. We all know that Lothian Buses is an exemplar, and we want that kind of bus service to be rolled out in all of our communities. We need to invest in bus services, but, instead, council cuts mean that bus services are being taken away because councils cannot afford to subsidise them. Mr Smyth was perfectly correct in saying that, instead of questioning the older person's bus pass, the Government should have been consulting on how to keep it and extend it to younger people, because our bus services need to be rebuilt. That has a cost to our local economies.

The Presiding Officer: Can members keep the noise down, please?

Rhoda Grant: There would have been an outcry and partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—would have been involved if one in seven workers had left their work or if 40,000 jobs had been lost in any other employment. People would have dealt with those job cuts, whereas they disappear under the radar when it comes to local government.

Andy Wightman spoke about devolution and the transfer of powers. Devolution means transferring powers from London to Edinburgh, but, surely, it also means transferring them from Edinburgh to our communities. He was right to quote COSLA, which declared that Scotland is one of the most centralised countries in Europe. We must ensure that powers are entrusted to our local councils and that they have powers over their own taxation and the services that they provide to their own communities.

The voluntary sector is also facing cuts because of the cuts to local government. We have heard about the situation in Glasgow, but that situation has been replicated throughout the country.

We know that tough funding decisions have had to be made, but letting councils bear the brunt of those has led to increased pressures and costs elsewhere. Cuts to community care have increased disproportionately, which has put stress on acute care services. People are ending up in hospital and are remaining there because there is no support in their community. The cost of that to the public purse is much more than the cost of their remaining at home, and the personal cost to those involved is immeasurable.

Failing to provide our young people with an adequate education has a lifelong cost, not just for them but for all of us, because we lose the contribution that they would have made if they had achieved their full potential. That must change.

I believe that nobody in this chamber entered politics to preside over such a situation. We need to look after our people, and we need to provide fair funding to our councils to enable them to do that.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of two business motions, the first of which is motion S5M-20546, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I ask Graeme Dey to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 28 January 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Queen Elizabeth University Hospital Oversight Board Update

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Holocaust Memorial Day 2020 – 75th Anniversary

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 29 January 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Health and Sport;
Communities and Local Government

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scotland's Future

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 30 January 2020

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Security and Older People

followed by Ministerial Statement: EU Exit

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Drugs and Alcohol – Preventing and Reducing

Harms

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 4 February 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 5 February 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Finance, Economy and Fair Work;
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 6 February 2020

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Rural Economy

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Budget for 2020-21

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 27 January 2020, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second business motion for consideration is motion S5M-20545, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the extension of the stage 1 timetable for a bill. I ask Graeme Dey to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 13 March 2020.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-20528.2, in the name of Aileen Campbell, which seeks to amend motion S5M-20528, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on investing in our future, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)

Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 61, Against 61, Abstentions 0.

As is usual in such cases, as Parliament has not made up its mind, I will not make up its mind for it and will vote against the amendment.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-20528.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S5M-20528, in the name of Sarah Boyack, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)

Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 55, Against 61, Abstentions 6.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-20528, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on investing in our future, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

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

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

Abstentions

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 55, Against 61, Abstentions 6.

Motion disagreed to.

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (350th Anniversary)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-20401, in the name of Jeremy Balfour, on the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh's 350th anniversary. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges the 350th anniversary of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and the announcement of a year-long programme of events; understands that many events will focus on the climate crisis and global loss of biodiversity; notes that highlights include an expedition to Papua New Guinea, a Big Botanic Birthday Party, a gala concert, and the opening of a Garden of Tranquillity, which will provide a safe, peaceful and sensory space for visitors with dementia and their carers; further notes that the Botanic Garden will also exhibit in the RHS Chelsea Flower Show Discovery Zone in May 2020, showing how its work will help secure the future of the world's plants, and understands that, in the last of its events, scientists will discuss the biodiversity crisis from a botanical perspective at a Halting Plant Extinction debate in November.

17:06

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): It is an honour for me to hold today's debate to mark the 350th anniversary of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. I am delighted that Paula Bushell and Suzie Huggins, from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, have been able to join us in the visitors gallery.

Over the past 10 days, MSPs have sponsored and supported special events that have taken place in the Scottish Parliament to mark this very special anniversary. Guests who attended last week's reception in the garden lobby, which was sponsored by Christine Grahame, enjoyed a fashion show by second year students of Edinburgh College of Art, who revealed a magnificent array of fashions that were inspired by the treasures of the Edinburgh garden collections. There was also an opportunity to meet teams from across all the organisation's divisions at the reception and at the exhibition stand that was sponsored by Ben Macpherson.

Tonight's members' business debate is a chance for MSPs to discuss the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh's achievements and to acknowledge its efforts to highlight the growing need to protect the world's plants, and the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

My memories of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh go back to my childhood. At the age of six or seven, my brother and I used to run

manically around the garden and pretend to be Tarzan in the jungle when we entered the glasshouses. Whatever the weather is like outside—I have visited the garden in the snow and, sometimes, in the sunshine—it is always warm in the glasshouses. There is something unique and interesting to see in each of the 10 public glasshouses, which are home to more than 8,000 exotic plants from around the world.

A visit to the garden always provides me with a sense of wonder. Never more was that the case than when I visited the garden in December with my family for “Christmas at the Botanic”. The illuminated trail through the gardens, followed by toasted marshmallows round the fire pit, was magical. In addition to being a life-enhancing experience, such events introduce new visitors to the gardens. If members have the opportunity, I encourage them to attend one of the many events that are taking place to mark the 350th anniversary. Some events, such as the big botanics birthday party in June, are free, and I know that people will not be disappointed.

Many people who visit the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh for the first time might not know about the pioneering research that takes place there. Today, it ranks as one of the top four botanic gardens in the world, working in partnership with more than 35 countries on research projects. Every week, its scientists discover and describe an average of one plant species that is new to science. Each year, its four gardens in Scotland attract more than 1 million visitors and its education programmes reach 12,000 students around the globe. In 2019, visitors from 42 countries visited the botanics and, to the people of Edinburgh and Scotland, there is no doubt that the botanics is a national treasure.

People visit the gardens for a number of reasons. Increasingly, people in Edinburgh seek a peaceful haven in the centre of the capital—a calming green space that provides a sense of wellbeing. Twelve per cent of visitors to the garden say that they have a long-standing health problem or disability; two thirds of those people have a mobility issue and one fifth have a mental health issue. As part of the 350th celebrations, a garden of tranquillity is being created for people who live with dementia and their friends, families and carers, to provide a safe, peaceful and sensory space.

Last year, I had the privilege of visiting the garden in Edinburgh, in order to discuss the plans to introduce a changing places toilet as part of the Edinburgh biomes project. I have been working on that subject. The plan is to have a specialist toilet that will allow people with multiple learning or physical disabilities and their carers and families to

access activities and resources in the garden, which the rest of us take for granted.

The Royal Botanic Garden’s origins are grounded in health and wellbeing. Founded in 1670 by doctors Andrew Balfour—no relation—and Robert Sibbald, the Royal Botanic Garden started as a small garden near the Palace of Holyroodhouse, with the purpose of supplying fresh plants for medical prescriptions and to teach botany to students at Edinburgh university. It quickly outgrew its limited plot at Holyroodhouse, so, in 1675, the garden moved to its second site at Trinity hospital, where Waverley station now stands. In 1699, the garden received a royal warrant. In 1763, it relocated again to what is now Leith Walk, then outward in 1820 to Inverleith, where it is located today.

Today, the garden’s collections include its internationally important living collection of 13,500 plant species, its world-renowned herbarium, which contains 3 million preserved plant specimens, and a highly acclaimed library and archive.

As we read and watch the reports of the devastating fires in Australia, we recognise that never has the work of the garden been more important. We live in unprecedented times. We face the challenges of climate emergency, increasing biodiversity loss and the need for sustainability.

The global climate emergency poses a threat to people and our planet. At this crucial time, people must stand up and give us evidence of the impact, take action to change things and enhance biodiversity through the rescue and translocation of rare species. Importantly, the work at the botanics also gives a positive message that things can change and that people are acting.

Looking ahead to the next 350 years, I have no doubt that the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh will continue to be a national treasure—providing enjoyment not only to those in Edinburgh but to millions of visitors from further afield, as well as hope and optimism that, as we face the global challenges of the climate crisis, we can find solutions to protect the world’s plants. Those challenges will provide the focus of the organisation’s efforts, not only for our city, country and continent but for the world. For its 350th anniversary, I am sure that everyone in the chamber will wish the botanics a happy birthday.

17:14

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate Jeremy Balfour on securing the debate. As he said, last week, I had the pleasure of hosting an event in the garden lobby to

celebrate 350 years of the botanic garden. At my side is the constituency member, Ben Macpherson, who was also at that event.

During my lifetime, I have seen us all become more aware of the importance of plant science for nutrition and medical purposes, and, notwithstanding what Donald Trump says, for dealing with climate change. It is in the nature of some plants to survive extremes of weather, for example—I know that the botanic garden's scientists are engaged with that issue.

Also important are the preservation of the diversity of plants and trees, and the discovery and safekeeping of new species. One has only to see the tragic loss of forests in the Australian bush fires—the destruction of habitats as well as wildlife—to know that there is a huge role for the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in assisting with regeneration. Perhaps out of the horrors of the droughts, the flash floods, the bush fires and our own warming climate in Scotland come an increased awareness and a duty to protect and preserve this planet for generations to come, and we must start with our flora.

That brings me to Dawyck botanic garden in my constituency. It is one of three outreach gardens of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh—the others are Benmore and Logan—and I have visited them all. As you would expect, Presiding Officer, I will focus on Dawyck.

To get to Dawyck, simply aim for Peebles, then Stobo, and you cannot miss it. This 65-acre, 5-star garden is renowned for its seasonal displays, on which we can feast our eyes and senses as we walk the many woodland paths. The year starts with the snowdrops—*galanthus*—which are just coming into bloom now, and moves on to carpeting bluebells. Then come the stunning varieties of rhododendrons and azaleas in May and June, which, with the space to grow unimpeded by garden secateurs, are breathtaking. All is kept shipshape by a small army of gardeners, including 13 registered volunteers. Dawyck is also famed for its blue poppies, or *meconopsis*, and—perhaps the *pièce de résistance*, at least for me—its stunning autumn colour.

Whether it is spring, summer, autumn or winter, come rain, cloud or shine, any time someone is feeling down in the dumps or up to high doh—and we all sometimes do—they should take a walk along Dawyck's meandering paths. Even in the rain, the trees are awesome. If they take detours and then have a bit of cake and coffee in the tea-room, it will do them a power of good. That is my promise. Indeed, 37,000 visitors a year cannot be wrong.

A garden, whether small but perfectly formed, such as my urban garden, or magnificent, such as Dawyck, is also a place where we can regenerate and reflect—as Jeremy Balfour mentioned—and put behind us life's stresses and troubles. To that end, the four botanic gardens have signed up to Silent Space's green calming places project as an antidote. I cannot commend Dawyck enough. Indeed, it is time I took my own counsel and went back there to enjoy those trees and the quiet, and then have that coffee and cake.

Dawyck is, of course, famous for its arboretum, which has one of the largest range of trees of any in Britain. I have been lyrical about its seasonal beauty, but there is a scientific side to the garden. It has one of the finest tree collections in Scotland, including some of Britain's oldest trees, with some dating back to 1680. Just think of that: in 1680, Rob Roy MacGregor was nine. It was the age of the covenants and then the Jacobites. In 1682, the Presbyterians became a movement, and Scotland was in religious and regal war. In 1685, Charles II died, embracing Catholicism on his death bed. William of Orange eventually became king and although Bonnie Dundee—John Graham of Claverhouse, who was a very distant relation of mine—won the battle of Killiecrankie, he died on the field. If only trees could talk. What would the giant Sierra redwoods and the skyscraping stately Douglas firs have to say of that past, and of today? Perhaps they would lament our casual and damaging contempt for the planet.

So diary Dawyck: you will not regret it.

17:19

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank my friend and colleague Jeremy Balfour for bringing this member's business debate to Parliament. I also thank Christine Grahame for sponsoring such a successful parliamentary reception last week. It was one of the best-attended receptions that I have seen in the Parliament for some years, and it was a real pleasure to meet many Edinburgh residents who told me about their love of the botanic garden.

That love is often a lifelong one. Many people talked to me about their childhood memories of the garden, which they now enjoy with their children and grandchildren. I must admit to being slightly concerned when, during her speech at the reception, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform started to recount her memories of rolling around in the grass—childhood memories that she qualified. It was fascinating to hear so many stories about people's love for the garden. We have just heard about that from Christine Grahame, too.

As has been said, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh is one of the world's leading botanic gardens. It contains 100,000 plants over 70 acres and 10 wonderful glasshouses that, together, make up one of Scotland's national collections, and it is a collection that ranks among the best of its kind anywhere in the world. The garden provides a diverse range of formal and informal education programmes for people of all ages and all levels, from primary school to PhD, and from amateur to professional. The Edinburgh biomes project, which I believe is the most significant project in the garden's history, will protect the unique and globally important plant collection for the future, for Scotland and for the world. I welcome the City of Edinburgh Council's positive support for that project.

I also believe that the spectacular new experience—the leaf-shaped greenhouse that many people will have seen—has the potential to become an iconic design building for the capital in the future.

I will touch briefly on the human importance of the garden and the positive impact that it has on the health and wellbeing of citizens, both in the capital and beyond. Members will be aware that I campaign on dementia, so I want to highlight two very important projects in the garden for people living with dementia. The first is the dementia socials project, which offers regular social sessions for people affected by dementia, their carers and families. The sessions are free, with refreshments and activities, and usually take place in the garden room.

The second project, which has attracted significant interest, is the garden of tranquillity. As Jeremy Balfour outlined, the garden offers a safe, tranquil and sensory space that is designed specifically as a respite for people living with dementia and their friends, families and carers. With natural boundaries for privacy, fragrant plants, comfortable seating, a water rill and art, this social inclusion project is quickly becoming a vital one for many people living with dementia across the capital.

Conceived by Judy Good, while studying for her diploma in garden design, the idea started as a piece of coursework with very personal resonance. Judy was inspired by a good friend, Gillian Lindsay, whose mum had early onset dementia. Gillian was always looking for a space to take her mum, where they could get out of the house and spend time together, but where her mum would also feel safe and relaxed. That can be difficult—as many people know, there are not many spaces in Edinburgh or the surrounding area where that need can be met. The garden of tranquillity was created with that idea in mind: it is a place where people can spend time together, to reminisce and

be peaceful and happy in the moment. Such a huge part of the 350-year history of the botanic garden has been about therapeutic and restorative work, and I see the immense value that the garden of tranquillity brings to many of those living with dementia and their families.

Recent visitor and membership surveys highlighted the impact the botanic garden has on the personal health and wellbeing of citizens from across the city and beyond.

The debate has presented us with a wonderful opportunity to celebrate 350 years of the botanic garden, but, perhaps most important, we need to look to the future, as the botanic garden is doing. That is best summed up by what the new chair of the board of trustees, Dominic Fry, said at last week's parliamentary reception. In words that have been with me all week, he said:

"All life depends on plants—and today, 1 in 5 plant species are under threat."

That should concern all of us. We should all rededicate ourselves to supporting the vital work of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh now and in the future.

17:24

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I am grateful to Jeremy Balfour for this opportunity to speak about the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, which has brought such joy, inspiration and wonder to the people of Edinburgh and many others. Given the growing concerns about urban creep and the loss of green space to development, we should celebrate the fact that we have such a marvellous space in our capital city that is dedicated to nature and plant life. I, too, extend my sincere congratulations to all those who are involved with the garden, and I wish it another 350 years of success, at the very least.

Jeremy Balfour did a good job of outlining the ways in which Parliament is rightly marking and celebrating the contribution of the botanics, as they are known to those of us who are fortunate enough to live in Edinburgh. The botanics are consistently listed as one of the top tourist destinations in Edinburgh, but their value is not limited to entertainment. They are an important educational and conservation site that engages in vital work on tackling climate change and the loss of biodiversity.

From hosting events and lectures and delivering courses to teaching children and young people about the natural environment, the botanics engage people with nature and foster a real connection and sense of ownership in people with regard to Scotland's fauna and flora. There is much to be learned at the botanics. The programmes focus on topics ranging from the

expressive arts to health and wellbeing—a subject that is gaining the recognition that it deserves—and even to mathematics. More important, the botanics instil in people an appreciation for nature and all that it has to offer.

We should not underestimate the importance of early education for future generations who will have to deal with even more serious consequences of climate change than we in this chamber will ever face. The garden offers learning programmes to which the science of plants' structure and function and the importance of biodiversity and conservation are core, and I have no doubt that arming our young people with that information will help them to prepare for the challenging and difficult road ahead.

Alongside the education programmes, as we have heard, the garden takes part in groundbreaking research. It has published world-leading research since the 17th century and has established collections of plants from around the globe that serve as essential resources for conservation. In the past 12 months alone, botanists have been cultivating specimens in specialist research facilities in Scotland and have formally recognised 65 new species of plants. Recent research conducted by the RBGE in conjunction with China's Kunming Institute of Botany and the Columbus State University in the United States revealed that several species of iconic Himalayan poppies could soon be threatened as climate change restricts them to ever smaller mountain sanctuaries. Such discoveries are crucial in the fight to limit the impact of climate change on ecosystems, and the work of the botanics is ensuring that Scotland is at the forefront of that endeavour.

We benefit from that work in Scotland, too. RBGE has been collaborating with Scottish Natural Heritage to save the rare and endangered alpine blue sow thistle, which members may have seen on the news recently. It is thought that the plant's distribution in Scotland was wider in the past, but it has been reduced by grazing and the species is identified in the Scottish Government publication, "Scotland's biodiversity: a route map to 2020" as a target for conservation action. That is a key example of how the garden is crucial to our efforts to improve Scotland's biodiversity and preserve its natural landscapes.

The garden also contributes to work on food sustainability. The edible garden project, which is based at RBGE, aims to give people the skills and knowledge that they need to grow their own food. It is targeted at those who may be interested but who do not know where to start. Getting people more involved in how their food is grown is a great way of raising awareness of the damage that food production is inflicting on the environment while

emphasising the benefits of locally grown produce. It can empower people to make informed choices about not only what food they eat but where it comes from. Those issues are of great interest to all our constituents. Members will be aware from their mailbags of the value that people place on trees and parks. Whenever those are threatened, we can be sure that we in Parliament will be called on to act and intervene.

The botanic garden is a beautiful attraction that is loved and cherished by residents and visitors alike, but it is also a vital resource in the fight against climate change and the loss of biodiversity. That should be commended, and I warmly welcome the opportunity to do so today.

17:29

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I thank Jeremy Balfour for the opportunity to recognise the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh's 350th anniversary and to talk about the work that it has done to protect biodiversity and provide solutions in a changing world.

Jeremy Balfour referred to the founders of the RBGE, Balfour and Sibbald, who wanted to study plants for medicinal purposes. Particularly in earlier centuries, Edinburgh was the centre of medical research in Europe.

Three hundred and fifty years after its foundation, the botanics continue to be a national and international treasure, attracting over 1 million visitors annually. Over the weekend, my intern, Airin Wu, who has helpfully provided my speaking notes, chose to visit the botanics. It was only her second week in Edinburgh, so it was high on her agenda. She told me that she was astonished by the greenery and the diverse plant life that she saw. I imagine that it is very different to the arid climate of California to which she is more accustomed.

The beauty of the gardens is well deserving of appreciation, but more to the point is its mission in relation to science, conservation and education, to which other members have referred. The RBGE should be highly praised for having that as a large part of its work, as well as for its focus on accelerating species discovery. Jeremy Balfour and Alison Johnstone referred to the new plants that are discovered—they gave slightly different numbers and I have a third, but we all acknowledge that a lot of plants are being found.

This year, the botanics are hosting a wide range of events—from an expedition to Papua New Guinea to the big botanics birthday party—which will bring attention to the climate crisis, loss of biodiversity and the role of the RBGE in all that. Who is the culprit in the climate and biodiversity crises? We are—the human race. Our activity has

been the biggest driver of climate change. We pressure wildlife to make room for us as we mismanage aspects of agriculture, continue with urbanisation and pollute too many environments that many species call their home. We know that around 1 million species face extinction globally because of us.

In the past 22 years, numbers have decreased in 49 per cent of Scottish species. Numbers have gone down in 54 per cent of vascular plant species, 44 per cent of bird species and 39 per cent of butterfly species. Almost one in 10 Scottish species are at risk of extinction. Species that are at risk include the world-renowned Atlantic salmon, which do not find the warmer oceans to their liking, and the Arctic char, which is a cold-water species that might not survive in our waters.

Our iconic habitats—peatlands, uplands and oak woodlands—are all vulnerable to the hands of climate change. As humans, we need biodiversity, as it sustains the very ecosystems that keep us alive. In Scotland, biodiversity is also an important part of our economy, as it supports our tourism, farming, forestry, aquaculture and fishing industries. It improves our quality of life, too.

The Scottish Government is doing its bit to support the mission of the RBGE through its biodiversity strategy and 2020 challenge, which are in response to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the European Union's biodiversity strategy. It is clear that the Scottish Government's funding is a crucial part of our support of ecosystems and the environment as a whole. They depend on it.

I am confident that the botanics will continue to support our environment and to entertain and engage us all. Like other members, I wish the RBGE another successful 350 years from here onwards.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The last speaker in the open debate is Claudia Beamish.

17:33

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I, too, am delighted to have the chance to join in the celebration of 350 years of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. I heartily thank Jeremy Balfour for his interesting and informative speech and for the motion that has enabled tonight's debate. I add my voice to the respectful comments that will flood in throughout the year from around the world.

Jeremy Balfour's motion recognises the wide range of events that will be held this year, which he encourages people to attend. I, too, encourage people to attend the events. Like him, I am particularly drawn to

"the opening of a Garden of Tranquillity, which will provide a safe, peaceful and sensory space for visitors with dementia and their carers".

For many years and until recently, I was co-convenor of the cross-party group on carers in the Scottish Parliament, and I am keenly aware of the need for safe tranquillity for the cared for and carer alike. Miles Briggs's explanation of this therapeutic and restorative work was very interesting. What better way is there to enable that than through such a haven of the senses—from fragrance to texture, from flavour to harmonies of sound and from colour to shapes. The experiences and wellbeing opportunities created by this garden will be a delight for all.

Jeremy Balfour's efforts to ensure that the botanics has an accessible toilet have also been important. It is vital for those who would not otherwise be able to go to the garden.

The motion of course emphasises the fact that

"many events will focus on the climate crisis and global loss of biodiversity".

The long tradition of respect for and research into plants and their habitats places the botanics at the forefront of challenging those crises globally and in Scotland. Does it need to be stated that the climate emergency and nature crises are inextricably linked?

Last week, at the RBGE event in the Scottish Parliament, one of the posters in its exhibition highlighted the climate emergency, stating that the botanics is

"Scotland's plant biodiversity institute and a major centre of public engagement with the natural world, leading the way to achieving net zero for Scotland by 2045."

The poster explained that one of the ways that it does that is by providing

"evidence of the impact of climate change on species and habitats around the world."

The meticulous investigations of the botanics over 350 years and the cataloguing and protecting of species put it at the forefront of helping our planet, nature and humanity now.

The RBGE covers so much. I want to focus on one species, the rhododendron, which is a great favourite of mine. Rhododendrons are natives of the Himalayas, south-east Asia and New Guinea, though not exclusively. The RBGE's rhododendron collection is internationally renowned, and last year's rhododendron festival was a sight to behold.

I pay respect to everyone who has collected and catalogued our flora, from those who do so today, back to the early intrepid plant hunters such as Scot Dr Francis Hamilton, who, in the early 1800s

was sending consignments of seeds back to the RBGE, of which he became regius keeper.

I also want to recognise the other gardens that come under the auspices of the RBGE. In my region of South Scotland, I visited Logan botanic garden with my family when the children were small. We went round the luscious garden in the morning and had delicious lunch in the cafe. The sun then came out and we went round the garden again, and I thought that we had been teleported to Tenerife.

Since becoming an MSP, I have tried to support Logan, and I have also visited Dawyck botanic garden, the magic of which was highlighted by Christine Graham. It has a hydroelectric scheme that is powered by the Scrape burn. I was inspired by its hard-hitting outside photographic exhibition, based on Bob Dylan's song "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall."

Today's regius keeper, Simon Milne, said at the event in the Parliament last week:

"All known life depends on plants, yet one in five species is threatened with extinction."

In this year of celebration, I wish the botanics a positive future that will build on its fine history. I hope that it will take the anniversary year theme of climate change and biodiversity loss into the future. We wish it a hearty happy birthday.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to members, but I had missed out Graham Simpson, who is, in fact, the last speaker in the open debate. He was obviously hiding his light behind a rhododendron bush or something.

17:39

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I could, indeed, do that, as we have a large rhododendron in our garden. You are welcome to visit any time to see it, Presiding Officer.

I was not planning on speaking in the debate, but I could not help myself, because I just wanted to say how I feel about the botanic gardens in Edinburgh and the other botanic gardens in Scotland, all of which I have visited.

When I was five years old, my family lived in Edinburgh, and we were regularly taken to the botanics. I do not recall rolling around anywhere at the time, but we certainly enjoyed our visits. Coming back here as an adult, I have a renewed appreciation for all that is offered by the garden and, indeed, everything that is offered by all gardens—they do not need to be botanic gardens; all gardens offer something special. They give us an appreciation of nature and a sense of wellbeing. Walking around a garden aids your physical and mental health. People have mentioned the garden of tranquillity in the

Edinburgh botanics. I have not seen that bit, but I will definitely check it out, because it sounds impressive.

I went to the reception last week and I heard Christine Grahame speaking powerfully. My wife had asked me to get some free samples. I did not get any, but I got to make some hand cream. I took it home and she loved it. She told me that I need to go into business but, sadly for Mrs Simpson, I have forgotten the recipe. It is very good stuff. That highlights the fact that people can take various classes at the botanics that cover all kinds of topics and are open to all ages and levels of ability. It is a great place.

I noticed a mention of Papua New Guinea in Jeremy Balfour's motion. I do not know whether he is angling for a trip there—perhaps he is.

I was pleased to note that the botanics will be exhibiting at the Chelsea flower show in May. When I go there with my wife, we will definitely check out that display. I look forward to that very much.

17:41

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): I echo what has been said around the chamber tonight, and I thank Jeremy Balfour for highlighting the subject and for bringing to the chamber a debate that has been enjoyable to listen to and be a part of. I also thank Christine Grahame for sponsoring the event last week to celebrate the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh's anniversary. As Miles Briggs said, it has been fantastic to hear everyone's stories and to hear about the love that everyone has for the botanic garden, which is a haven and a hub for health and wellbeing. It is great to see the strength of feeling that inspired Graham Simpson to take part in tonight's debate. His contribution emphasised the appreciation of nature in the gardens and the restorative power that they seem to have, which others have mentioned.

I am absolutely delighted to be part of this debate, which, as we have heard, highlights a year-long programme of organised events. Obviously, 350 years is quite the milestone. It makes the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh one of the oldest public bodies in Scotland. This year's celebrations come at a time of rapidly increasing understanding of the need to take urgent action to tackle the global climate emergency and the biodiversity emergency. I am sure that the garden's planned programme of events will play an important role in highlighting that priority even further.

We have heard a lot about the history of the gardens tonight. They were founded in 1670 by two doctors, who established a garden near the

palace of Holyrood house to study and supply plants for medicinal purposes. It is only fitting that, last week, the start of the 350th anniversary was marked at a parliamentary reception close to the site of the original garden.

As we have heard, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh now encompasses four gardens around Scotland: Edinburgh, Benmore, Dawyck, which was mentioned by Christine Grahame, and Logan, which, as we have discovered tonight, is the Tenerife of South Scotland. I have not visited all of them, and I am desperately keen to see them all.

Christine Grahame: I take this opportunity to invite the minister to Dawyck, whether she is down in the dumps or up to high doh, neither of which I have seen her being. I hope that she will accept that invitation.

Mairi Gougeon: I would be absolutely delighted to accept that invitation, because I am keen to get out and see them all, since I have visited only the botanic garden in Edinburgh.

As we have heard, the garden attracts over 1 million visitors a year and its expertise and knowledge reaches over 35 countries around the world. Global challenges require global solutions, and the botanic garden's worldwide reach places Scotland at the vanguard of international efforts to address the issues that we face.

We mentioned earlier that 350 years is a big milestone, but it is even more apt that the 350th anniversary falls in 2020, which is a critical year for our environment. It is the year of coasts and waters and also, importantly, it is the international year of plant health. Christine Grahame stressed the importance of plant science in her speech, and I made a statement on plant health towards the end of last year, because it is only right that, given the challenges that we face, we focus on what is essential for our planet's survival. Plants and plant science are absolutely key to that survival.

Global progress is required to tackle the interlinked challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. Claudia Beamish highlighted that vital point. The crises that we face are not separate from one another; they are intrinsically linked.

World leaders will come together to discuss how to tackle climate change when we host COP26 in Glasgow, which will follow hot on the heels of the biodiversity COP15 in Kunming in China, where the botanics already has fruitful partnerships. We will also host our own international thematic workshop on biodiversity at the botanic gardens, and will invite delegates from around the world to help to influence the post-2020 international framework for biodiversity.

Stewart Stevenson and other members spoke about the importance of the botanic garden's work on biodiversity. He put it really well when he said that biodiversity sustains the ecosystem that keeps us alive. Scotland was one of the first countries to acknowledge that the world faces a climate emergency and we are leading by example with the most stringent climate legislation of any country in the world.

Through innovative plant science and conservation, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh places Scotland at the forefront of international efforts to respond to the climate change crisis and to increasing biodiversity loss. Its national botanical collection is used as a conservation, scientific and cultural heritage resource, here in Scotland and abroad, to directly respond to both challenges. Its plant health programme is one of the most rigorous in the world, playing a growing role in protecting Scotland's natural environment and the horticulture and agriculture sectors from the growing climate-related threat of emerging pests and pathogens. That is particularly relevant for the year of plant health and will celebrate the benefits of healthy plants.

As we have heard tonight, the garden means different things to different people. Many people visit the beautiful collections to enjoy the peace and tranquillity. As we have heard, some visit even for the sheer fun, such as Jeremy "Tarzan" Balfour. I too had that fun in my most recent experience of the gardens, because I had the chance to escape Parliament one day to visit the botanic gardens and see the titan arum—I am sure that I will be corrected if I have pronounced it wrongly. If members do not know what that is, I urge them to google it—they will not believe that this plant is real and exists on earth. It is from west Sumatra and looks like a plant that has survived the time of the dinosaurs. It is also called the corpse flower because of the delightful odour that it emits when it flowers. That only happens once every few years, just for several days. One day when I was in Parliament, an emergency phone call came to say that I should go over to see it, and I am so glad that I had the opportunity—it really was incredible.

Others who go to the garden benefit from the scientific expertise and the diverse range of educational programmes and research resources that are on offer, from primary school to PhD, amateur or professional. Those resources are vital because, as Alison Johnstone highlighted, they engage people with nature. The garden's work and impact go well beyond the traditional aspect of plant research and engagement, to include the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities from Scotland to Nepal, contributing directly to sustainable economic development,

food security, upskilling and doing an enormous amount to enhance Scotland's place and influence in the world.

I will follow up on Jeremy Balfour's contribution by putting a focus on the garden of tranquillity, which is an important initiative and further strengthens the botanic garden's wellbeing, social inclusion and community engagement work. The project builds on the garden's existing community support work including its programme of community gardening, cooking and other initiatives. Last year, around 2,500 people took part. We all know about the health benefits of using outdoor spaces, so such initiatives have a massive impact, which was highlighted by Miles Briggs.

The programme that is planned across 2020 includes a diverse range of events, including celebrations, exhibitions, concerts, debates and lectures, each one designed to be accessible and appealing to as wide an audience as possible. The events will stretch across each of the botanic garden's four locations, so I encourage everyone here and outwith the building to take a closer look at what is on offer, as there will be something for everyone.

I am grateful for having the chance to focus on the sheer depth and breadth of work of the botanic garden. There are so many facets to that work: conservation, education, biodiversity, science, tourism and health and wellbeing. The garden represents 350 years' worth of experience, one of the richest plant collections on earth and a world-class scientific institute— attributes that well deserve celebration and of which we should be hugely proud.

Meeting closed at 17:50.

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