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Thursday 17 May 2012

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 17 May 2012

[The Presiding Officer *opened the meeting at 09:15*]

Civilian Police Staff

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The first item of business is a debate on motion S4M-02906, in name of Lewis Macdonald, on justice. Members who wish to take part in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons now. I will wait until Mr Macdonald puts his card in the slot.

09:15

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): It is a week since we debated the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill and it completed stage 1 of its passage through Parliament. We in the Labour Party supported the general principles of the bill, but the debate was disappointing in some respects. Labour members and others expressed concerns about the on-going process of reducing police staff numbers that would result from the bill, and it was disappointing that those concerns were not shared by members of the Government back benches. Humza Yousaf claimed that:

“the myth that ... police officers will be taken away from patrolling the streets to fill out paperwork all day in a back office was firmly knocked on its head.”—[*Official Report*, 10 May 2012; c 8799.]

Roderick Campbell noted that Strathclyde Police has a lower proportion of civilian staff and appeared to imply that the problem is that other forces have too many civilian staff in the first place.

Even more concerning, however, was the ministers' approach, which is reflected in their amendment to my motion. Last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice applauded a decision by Lothian and Borders Police to get rid of civilian custody support officers by putting police constables back into stations to look after custody suites, on the basis that a junior police officer costs less and offers flexibility. In responding to the debate, the minister did not address the concerns that had been raised about the impact of reducing civilian posts in the police service. It might be that Ms Cunningham meant to respond to that, but ran out of time to do so; I acknowledge that it is not always possible to respond to every point that is made during a debate.

However, we in the Labour Party made it very clear that our concern about civilian posts and

about police officers being diverted to do civilian jobs was critical to our view of the bill as a whole. Labour entered the last election with a manifesto commitment to support a single force, but we also had a manifesto commitment to oppose diversion of police officers to civilian jobs. It is not, for us, just one more non-bill issue that was raised while debating the bill; it is fundamental to how we get the most effective police service, just as much with a single service in the future as with the existing forces and agencies of the recent past.

I want to say why I think that it is wrong to suggest that the problem is that there are too many civilian staff in some forces. The process of civilianisation of police roles was carried out over a period of years with broad political support. The ratio of staff to officers varies from force to force, as was pointed out during last week's debate, but for most of its first term in office, the Scottish National Party seemed to share the general view that there being more, rather than fewer, civilian posts tends to provide a better service to communities and better value for money for the taxpayer. Civilianisation was seen as being better for policing, better for communities and better for the police service itself. For example, the policy was lauded for increasing diversity by improving recruitment and retention from among groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in the police service, including women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The process was piloted by forces in England and Wales, and in Scotland, with reports of savings in money and in police time for forces ranging from the Metropolitan Police in London to Dyfed-Powys Police in rural Wales. As recently as April 2008, Kenny MacAskill was providing Central Scotland Police with extra funding to deploy civilian staff to help with routine enquiries in Falkirk in the expectation that doing so would free up 10 per cent of front-line police officers to go and do things that only a police officer could do.

Of course, not every initiative to civilianise police posts was an unqualified success. Besides tasks that require the power of arrest, other police tasks are so closely related to the work of an officer that it makes most sense for them to be done by police officers. However, until relatively recently, the direction of travel was to see what more and what else could be done by civilian staff; it was not to find plausible explanations for taking police officers away from policing duties to get them to look after suspects who are already in custody.

Last week, the cabinet secretary conceded that, ultimately, his support for a single police force is down to financial pressures and the need to mitigate the impact of budget cuts, so that must be what lies behind his U-turn on civilian staff in the

police service, who were once a desirable commodity but are now an expendable luxury.

The savings that have undoubtedly been made from extending the roles of civilian staff have been trumped by the £100 million of costs that ministers have promised will be cut as a result of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill. The desirable objective of modernised mixed teams of officers and staff has disappeared in the face of the political imperative of delivering very large savings in a very short time without cutting police officer numbers, and without any effective steps being taken to avoid handing over an additional £22 million in the form of unrecoverable VAT.

We know that job cuts are already under way. Full-time equivalent police staff numbers passed the 7,000 mark on the way up in 2005, peaked at 7,862 in 2010 and passed the 7,000 mark again on the way down in the final quarter of last year. The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland currently estimates that a total of 1,000 posts have been lost since the change in direction of Government policy, which agrees with the results of Unison's survey of its members who are employed by Scottish police forces in February of this year.

The risk is that things will only get worse under the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill. ACPOS reckons that the only way to meet the savings in the outline business case for a single Scottish police force is to shed civilian jobs. At least 2,054 will have to go by the time of the next Scottish Parliament election, and most of the rest of the civilian staff will have reduced terms and conditions. If they were to resist reductions in terms and conditions, ACPOS believes that some 2,400 posts would be lost and, if ministers make no progress on the VAT issue, it estimates that some 3,200 jobs would have to go.

Those are not small numbers and they will not be accounted for by the reduction in the number of posts that directly support the eight chief constables, as Mr MacAskill appeared to imply would be the case last week. This is not simply about ending unnecessary duplication or trimming at the edges; it represents a fundamental recasting of how the police service is delivered. As Unison has said, it takes us back to the policing model that existed before civilianisation began. Other staff unions are also concerned.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Is Lewis Macdonald implying that this should not be an operational matter for the chief constable, who is accountable to the board? Is he really suggesting that the Government should direct how many police officers and how many civilian staff there should be in any force?

Lewis Macdonald: It is not a question of whether or not I think ministers should direct chief constables; the cabinet secretary has said that he will direct the chief constable of the new force on how many police officers he should have. He cannot do that without, by implication, directing the chief constable on how much of his budget should be spent on civilian staff. In other words, the cabinet secretary has made a political decision to tell the police force, when it becomes a single service, what the balance between police officers and police staff should be. For him to suggest that we are departing from the principle that the police should have operational independence simply beggars belief and is not credible, given the decisions that he has made.

In my part of Scotland, Unite the Union represents traffic wardens in Moray, in Aberdeenshire and at Aberdeen airport who are employed by Grampian Police and who work with other service providers. They have raised their concerns with me directly because they, too, fear that they are about to lose their jobs.

It is not only trade unions that have concerns. In its submission to the Justice Committee, the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland said:

"The scale and phasing of police staff voluntary redundancies, if it can be achieved, carries a risk that police officers will be drawn into non police roles."

The Scottish Police Services Authority said that the service has achieved

"a healthy and efficient balance of police officer and staff roles"

over recent years, but that there is

"a significant danger that this balance and inherent efficiency will be degraded under current constraints."

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): For the sake of balance, I point out that, in evidence, Chief Constable Kevin Smith said:

"There is a notion that for every member of support staff that goes out, we put a cop in, but we have not done that. In the past two or three years, we have reduced our support staff by about 1,000 people, and that has not been followed by cops simply migrating in."—[*Official Report, Justice Committee, 28 February 2012; c 983.*]

The Presiding Officer: I will give you a few more minutes, Mr Macdonald.

Lewis Macdonald: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

That is certainly ACPOS's intention in its approach to the process, but it would not have told the Justice Committee that there is a risk of failure to achieve that unless it believed that the risk exists. We have heard the same from the SPSA and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities,

which represents the local authority employers. They warn that cops will have to take up the slack. That is the risk.

Such a prospect does not seem sensible at all; indeed, it is not sensible, but it is not too late for the Government to think again, which is why we have brought the motion before Parliament to ask ministers to examine properly what is happening in individual forces and to report back to members.

Unison has collected, through its members, plenty of evidence not only of the loss of posts, but of police officers doing civilian jobs. Members will hear from my colleagues on that this morning. If all sides are to understand and recognise the seriousness of the threat, Government should take on the responsibility for auditing and assessing the impact at the front line. A proper audit of cuts that have already been made or that are planned would sit well with the Justice Committee's call for local councils to be given details of current police expenditure in their areas so that they can track changes in resources and funding after the creation of the single police force.

Ministers are asking that a good deal of power over the police service be concentrated in their hands. If they want to keep public trust in the creation of a single police service, they must deliver transparency in return. That is what we are asking them to do today. If ministers want to retain trust and confidence in the process, they should accept our proposal and allow Parliament to know the full facts about the process that is under way.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the key role played by civilian staff in Scotland's police forces in helping to protect communities; believes that the role they play is essential to ensuring that police officers can perform their main role of keeping Scotland's communities safe; shares the growing concern that cuts to civilian posts are taking police officers off the front line to perform tasks better suited to civilian staff; notes that the number of civilian staff is now at its lowest level across Scotland since 2005 and believes that such cuts are detrimental to the ability of the police service to protect the public, and in the interests of the future of policing in Scotland, calls on the Scottish Government to undertake an independent audit of cuts implemented or planned to civilian posts and report the outcome to the Parliament.

09:26

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): I welcome the debate and the opportunity that it offers to consider an important issue. I say at the outset that the Government recognises and values the enormous contribution that support staff make every day in the police service. We are building a safer and stronger Scotland, with crime figures at a 35-year low. I welcome the opportunity to acknowledge the important contribution that police support staff

have made, and will continue to make, to reducing crime across Scotland and helping to protect communities.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): Would the cabinet secretary be good enough to acknowledge that crime rates have fallen across Europe and that, in America, they are approaching a 50-year low? Does he agree that, therefore, to claim that the situation in Scotland is entirely down to the additional 1,000 officers is less than candid?

Kenny MacAskill: The situation is down to splendid work by the wider police family. I have commented that other factors are involved, but I believe that there is, particularly in Scotland, a clear correlation between the figures and the visible police presence, along with the outstanding work of constables—from the newest constable to the most senior chief constable—and support staff in a variety of tasks. That is fundamental and it contrasts with matters south of the border. Scotland would not have the world-class police service that it has without the dedication and commitment from everyone in the police family, whether they are support staff or police officers. I am sure that I speak for all members when I say how proud I am of everyone who works in the police service.

I agree with Lewis Macdonald on the key role of civilian staff, but I reject other elements of his motion. I make no apologies for delivering more than 1,000 extra officers since 2007, and I am happy to reaffirm that we will continue to honour that pledge. Compare that to the situation in England and Wales, where the latest figures show a decrease of 4.2 per cent—more than 6,000 officers—in just a year. A report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary predicts that officer numbers in England and Wales will have decreased by 16,200 by the end of the United Kingdom Government's comprehensive spending review period.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the cabinet secretary nonetheless acknowledge that his current approach to civilian staff taking on roles that were formerly done by police officers is different from the approach that he took when he first took office?

Kenny MacAskill: That takes me back to the point that that is an operational matter for the chief constable. It is not appropriate for me to intervene in Lothian and Borders or in any other area. Those are matters of balance on which the chief constable decides and, ultimately, is held to account by the police board.

That, of course, contrasts with Scottish Labour's position and, certainly, with the Labour position south of the border. Earlier this week, Yvette Cooper reiterated in her address to the Police

Federation of England and Wales annual conference that the Labour Party would have implemented 12 per cent cuts to police budgets in England and Wales—cuts that could have resulted in a reduction by as many as 10,000 officers. That is some gross hypocrisy, when Labour comes to the chamber to complain about redundancies in civilian staff but goes to the Police Federation in England and Wales and says that it would make 10,000 officer posts redundant. This Government will not let that happen in Scotland.

Police reform and the work that we are undertaking to deliver a single service will ensure that Scotland continues to enjoy world-class policing. Reform is needed to protect against Westminster budget cuts the local policing that communities value and depend on. As I said last week, we are making a virtue out of necessity. Yes—the reform is driven by finance, but at the same time it is about ensuring that we get the best possible police service. That is what we are doing.

Lewis Macdonald: What percentage cut will be made to the police budget as a result of the plans?

Kenny MacAskill: We are protecting police budgets and police numbers. That contrasts with Yvette Cooper's position, which is why I got a standing ovation at the Scottish Police Federation, while Ms Cooper was met with stony silence and cheers of derision because her position is simply opportunistic and oppositionist.

Reform is not about doing what we do now—which is to do things eight times over—but about doing things differently. Reform will ensure that policing responds to 21st century challenges, and will create equal access to specialist and national services such as murder investigation and firearms teams, while strengthening the connections between the service and the communities that are served. All Scotland needs to have access to, and to be protected by, those specialist services.

I appreciate that the transition from the current eight-force structure to a single police service of Scotland brings uncertainty for police officers and civilian support staff alike. I fully understand that, but I assure Parliament that we are working closely with the service to ensure the smoothest possible transition, including the early appointment of the chief constable and the chair of the police authority, so that key decisions about the new service can be taken.

We will continue to work closely with trade unions, staff associations, local authorities and the service on the workforce issues. Ministers will create the broad framework and provide the finance in which the new service will operate, but it will be for the chief constable to decide what the balance of officers and staff should be.

We currently have eight chief constables: the new single service will need only one. We will no longer need the administrative support staff that are required for eight chiefs. Just as we will no longer need eight chiefs, we will no longer need eight heads of human resources or eight heads of finance. The people of Scotland expect us to employ no more people than are required to deliver effective policing.

Just as some jobs will change, many jobs will stay the same: support staff will continue to play a vital role in the new service; we will still need forensics staff at scenes of crime; we will still need experienced staff in communications centres to ensure that vital 999 calls are answered and dealt with; and we will still need specialist information and communications technology staff to keep systems up and running. All of them are fundamental. Support staff will remain central to the success of the new service, but yes—fewer support staff than we have at present will be needed at the end of the reform journey, just as fewer chief constables will be required.

This Government will act responsibly to protect front-line services. Lewis Macdonald's motion advocates an irresponsible policy of protecting duplicated functions and services that will not be required in the new single service. Reform offers a unique opportunity to do things better and to reshape policing to reflect the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Ultimately, it will be more effective and efficient, and better for all communities.

I reiterate my recognition of the vital role that civilian support staff play and I commit to involving them and the trade unions fully as we move forward.

I move amendment S4M-02906.2, to leave out from first "believes" to end and insert:

"recognises and values the dedication and hard work of police staff and police officers in Scotland, which have resulted in a 35-year low in recorded crime; agrees that reform is essential to protect policing from UK Government budget cuts and that police reform will protect local services, create more equal access to specialist support and national services and strengthen the connection between services and communities while removing costly duplication; notes the strong progress being made to deliver a single police service of Scotland; recognises that civilian support staff will continue to play an important role in the new police service of Scotland, and supports the Scottish Government's commitment to continue to work closely with staff associations and unions to ensure a smooth transition to the new police service of Scotland."

09:34

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): In the context of the current events—the largest reform of Scotland's policing for more than a generation—this morning's debate is important

and I thank the Labour Party for bringing it to the chamber.

The role that civilian staff play in supporting our police forces is vital but frequently overlooked. It is all too easy to think of civilian staff as sitting in a back office doing paperwork when the fact is that they carry out a myriad of vital roles as intelligence analysts, custody officers and community wardens, to name but a few. The Government frequently mentions the success of its pledge on 1,000 extra police officers. The Scottish Liberal Democrats welcome there being more police officers working to keep Scotland's communities safe, but the fact is that without civilian staff supporting them, any benefit from those extra officers is negated as they are inevitably forced to spend more and more time away from their primary roles.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): How many civilian staff have lost their jobs through compulsory redundancy as a result of the Liberal Democrat-Conservative Government at Westminster?

Alison McInnes: Mr FitzPatrick would do well to focus on what we are here to focus on, which is the running of the service in this country, for which responsibility sits with the Scottish Government.

The motive behind the Government's plans for a single national police force appears to be the cost savings that it believes can be made. However, as has been pointed out in the chamber and by expert witnesses in committee, the push for efficiency savings in our police forces has already begun. I am concerned that the majority of the additional savings seem to be destined to be made by further cutting the number of civilian staff who are employed by the police. I say "further cutting" because—as we heard from Lewis Macdonald—the number of civilian staff has already fallen dramatically in recent years. It is not for me or for any of us to quantify how many civilian staff our police need to employ, but the fact is that shedding more than 1,000 staff in just a couple of years cannot fail to have an impact on how our forces operate.

ACPOS has estimated that, in order to meet the Government's pie-in-the-sky savings targets for the new single force, a further 2,000 civilian staff will have to be cut. Some of that number might be accounted for through rationalisation of certain functions, but with potential redundancies on such a massive scale it is inevitable that in order to fill the gaps police officers will have to be taken off front-line duties to fill other roles. I have many concerns about the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill that are, by now, fairly well documented, but it is this headlong rush—the need to hurry through the changes with little

regard for the consequences—that I find really objectionable.

Chief Constable Kevin Smith—the man at ACPOS who is responsible for overseeing implementation of the new force—explained to the Finance Committee the situation in which he finds himself. I will quote him at length, because it is important to put this on the record.

"The Government's outline business case does not quantify job cuts. However ... If we are to make the savings that have been set out in our budget for the next three years—and into the next spending review, in fact—the main focus will be on police staff."

He continued:

"Although there will not be an automatic assumption that we will have to put ... a police officer"

into support roles,

"if we are to get to the numbers on which the savings are based, it is a distinct possibility that that will happen. That will not be a good thing professionally or politically, and I do not think that the public will think it a good thing, either. It is a real risk."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee, 22 February 2012; c 670-671.*]

He also said:

"The danger now is that we will be so focused on making cuts in financial budgets for next year and the following one that we do not get into what the exercise should be about, which is developing the best model of policing for the benefit of the people of Scotland."—[*Official Report, Finance Committee, 22 February 2012; c 669.*]

Although Chief Constable Smith was talking about the hypothetical situation when the new force comes in, his comments are equally relevant in considering the situation that already exists. Staff are being lost to make savings, but the jobs that they performed still need to be done. In the year to July 2011, Grampian Police reduced its civilian staff by 14 per cent. They lost, among others, a camera enforcement officer, two community wardens, an early intervention worker, an intelligence manager, a welfare officer, a wildlife crime education officer and three road safety advisors. Those jobs still need to be done; the only difference is that they will now have to be done by officers who might otherwise be out on the beat. The more civilian staff who are lost, the more officers will be taken off front-line duties to cover their responsibilities.

There can only be one result, as another chief constable told me last year:

"De-civilianisation, which will occur if whole scale civilian job losses take place, will result in the current community focus model of policing reverting to a crime fighting/call response model of policing where officers run around answering calls for crimes that have occurred because they are no longer able to prevent them."

That is the danger of losing civilian staff, and it is the danger of the Government's ill-advised police reform bill.

I move amendment S4M-02906.1, after “public” to insert:

“; is concerned that the Scottish Government’s rushed timetable for the implementation of a national police force, along with unrealistic savings targets, will serve to exacerbate the problem and lead to significant further redundancies among civilian staff”.

09:39

David McLetchie (Lothian) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to debate the future of civilian staff in Scotland’s police forces, which touches on topics that we discussed last week during the stage 1 debate on the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill. During the Justice Committee’s consideration of that bill, it was made clear that there is concern about the projected losses of civilian staff.

I start with a comment on the terminology that has been used in this debate. We must be careful not to take as black and white the distinction between front-line and back-office staff. A bobby on the beat can easily be seen as front line, whereas a member of the human resources staff is clearly back office, but in between, the distinction is much less clear cut. Much valuable investigative work can be done while sitting at a desk. I am sure that most of us would not consider people with roles such as forensic scientist, information technology expert or money laundering specialist to be back-office staff. The conclusion that we must draw is that it is dangerous to label all non police officers as carrying out administrative functions and to treat them all in the same way.

Let us not forget that the reason why we are having this debate is that the Scottish Government is looking at how the public sector can be reformed to enable it to deliver better value for money. When public finances are under such extreme pressure, it is appropriate that we look to cut duplication and unnecessary costs across Scotland’s police forces. Nevertheless, the Government has set a target of £88 million of savings as part of its plans for a single police force and it plans to save £50.3 million in staff costs. Those cuts are certainly challenging, and it remains to be seen whether they can be delivered without adversely affecting front-line services.

The priority of the Scottish Conservatives is to provide an effective, visible and local police service and to do so by sustaining in service the extra 1,000 police officers whom we have secured over the past five years. As I have mentioned before, civilian staff can and do play a key role in Scotland’s forces and, in many instances, civilian staff find themselves with a direct role in policing. There is a need for a balanced workforce, and

both police officers and police staff have a role to play in that. The

“right people with the right skills must be doing the right jobs.”—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 28 February 2012; c 972.]

It would be madness if we were to get into a situation in which police officers did not do their jobs but instead fulfilled back-office functions.

During the Justice Committee’s consideration of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill, Calum Steele, who is secretary of the Scottish Police Federation, asserted that there has historically been a considerable rise in civilian posts in Scotland. He said:

“That is undoubtedly a consequence in some ways of how the police service has evolved, but it would be beyond the pale to suggest that those levels of growth were a consequence of essential civilianisation where it took place. I am sure that many roles were undertaken and created not because they were essential, but because they were desirable or nice to have.”—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 28 February 2012; c 1009.]

The historical statistics show that, since 1997, police staff levels have risen by 51 per cent compared with a rise in the number of police officers that amounts to 14 per cent. Civilianisation peaked in 2007, when 32 per cent of those who were employed by the police were civilian staff. That has now fallen to 28 per cent, which is the 2004 level. Arguably, therefore, recent reductions in civilian staff represent a sensible decrease in staff levels, which had become bloated since 2007. Mr Steele cited a number of existing civilian positions, including change manager, business manager and performance manager, and said that he was unclear whether they are essential to the delivery of policing.

If we have to choose between such postholders and front-line police officers, I know which I would prefer, but let us not forget that there is an irreducible minimum below which we must not fall. That is the issue that is before us today. That is why we accept the basic proposition in the amendment that the Government has lodged, but we believe that we must keep the overall staff reduction picture under review.

The Presiding Officer: We will now move to the open debate. Members have a strict four minutes. I regret that, if you take interventions, I will be not be able to give you additional time to compensate.

09:44

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Obviously, we have to say that these are not times of plenty. Let us begin at the beginning. I repeat the cabinet secretary’s words:

“we are making a virtue out of necessity.”

Repeating certain facts can be wearisome, but they have to be drummed into not only members, but the public at large. Some £1,300 million was cut from the Scottish budget last year. It is, of course, a fixed budget, because we have no borrowing powers. Under the plans that the United Kingdom Government has announced, by 2014-15, the Scottish Government’s budget will have been cut by 9.2 per cent and capital will have been cut by 36.7 per cent. On 25 April this year, the UK went back into recession—into a double-dip recession. The UK economy contracted by 0.2 per cent, and goodness knows what will happen to it with the current activities in Greece, Italy and, indeed, France on the euro. We are in very difficult times.

Most significant of all is that the construction industry is in very difficult times. If we could advance construction projects, we would help the UK and Scottish economies at least to stand still, if not to go forward. They would not go backwards. I think that members of other parties—although not the Conservatives and Liberals—share our views on that. Why is that relevant? First, I return to making a virtue out of necessity. Policing and its structure in Scotland needed to be reviewed. I think that it is generally accepted that that is long overdue. It has simply been put to the top of the agenda.

Secondly, the Government has pledged that, where budgets are within its control, there will be no compulsory redundancies. That is important to give security to those who are in work and might not even be under consideration for redundancy, but are concerned that they might be. Unison has accepted that position. Of course, some jobs will be redundant; replacing eight constabularies with one means that some jobs will not exist any more. The cabinet secretary referred to support staff jobs—clerical, human resources, equal opportunities and procurement jobs across eight constabularies—that will not exist. That is partly a good idea for its own sake and partly a necessity because of where we are now financially.

Lewis Macdonald: Will the member give way?

Christine Grahame: I am sorry, but I have only four minutes, and I have things that I want to say.

Thirdly, it is of course appropriate for two reasons that Opposition parties and back benchers highlight concerns that civilian jobs will, or may be, undertaken by police officers. Obviously, those officers would not then be available for front-line duty, and civilian jobs involve a different skills set. David McLetchie referred to that and made the considered point that whether something is front line or back room is not black and white or obvious.

I note that the chief constable together with the divisional commanders will determine the new staffing requirements. The chief constable will not just be accountable to the Scottish police authority, and the divisional commander will not just be accountable to local boards. Ultimately, there will be accountability for the quality of policing across civilian provision and the front line to the Parliament, whether under the scrutiny of the Justice Committee or—if Graeme Pearson has his way and convinces us—a commission that will watch the delivery of policing and the activities of the chief constable.

The Presiding Officer: The member has 30 seconds.

Christine Grahame: I say to Alison McInnes that crime figures and the fear of crime are falling notwithstanding civilian jobs going.

In England, Theresa May was told by the Police Federation of England and Wales that she is

“on the precipice of destroying”

the police service. Paul McKeever said of the Scottish Government:

“they have no Winsor, they have no professional body and no loss in police officers—”

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry to cut you off, Ms Grahame, but I need to call Graeme Pearson.

09:49

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): The effective delivery of policing requires, among other things, the Government to provide confidence to police and police staff about their future in respect of employment and support, and it needs the Government to acknowledge that the principles of public service, integrity, team ethos and vocation are vital ingredients in ensuring that staff act in the spirit of public service. It also needs the recognition that value for money means paying the going rate for the jobs that are undertaken, and it needs efficiencies to ensure that the person with the required skills is engaged on the appropriate duties. Underlying those concepts is the additional responsibility on Government to respond to staff by showing exemplary fairness and loyalty to those who are currently employed across the police service, to leave all staff in no doubt that decisions about their future will be made on the basis of what is best for the future of policing across Scotland and not on the basis of a one-sided political commitment to maintaining police numbers while eliminating less visible support jobs.

Had the Government candidly admitted that 1,000 additional constables would result in at least 1,000 back-office jobs going—according to the unions, the figure is up to 3,000—I think that

MSPs would have been less gushing in their support. No one would argue that the maintenance of police numbers is not a good result, but the fairytale that lies behind that fact is the loss of many more jobs behind the scene.

The sleight of hand involved would play well as merely a confidence trick if it were not for the fact that so many valuable staff are being let go and others demotivated by the very processes that should be enthusing staff as they move towards a single police force. Members should be in no doubt that these are staff cuts—and cuts they are, no matter what variation of the English language people try to use. They are directly linked to the savings targeted by this Government; they are not demanded by the creation of a single police force.

We have heard members quote eminent witnesses who provided the Justice Committee with evidence.

The most accurate staff numbers that I can uncover are for the period up to December 2011—unfortunately, the most recent figures will not be released until next month. The figures reveal that we have lost 905 posts. In Central Scotland, the area policed by Kevin Smith, a third of staff have been lost. The complement has fallen to 299 people.

Surely we cannot continue with the delusion that the work done by 905 people can be done by the remaining back-office staff. Surely the claims of efficiency made by this Government in relation to the management of staff over the years mean something—surely they mean that, across policing, current staff were and are fully utilised in their own work and are not available to soak up new duties.

The evidence gained from staff across the forces indicates that they are losing staff involved in warrants, intelligence analysis, football monitoring duties, custody, HR support, media services duties and firearms certification. We need to show support and to have a balanced police service. The service needs effective staff to support police officers, who should be out on the street fighting crime, not fighting paperwork and answering phones.

09:52

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

There is a strong sense of déjà vu about the debate. Last week, during the stage 1 debate on the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill, I reminded the chamber of Calum Steele's comments to the Justice Committee. He said:

"We must look at the jobs that we do and ask ourselves not who does them, but whether they need doing in the first place."

That must be the first port of call in any review of staffing. We must then, of course, look at issues of duplication. If we have a national service, do we need quite as many staff in IT, HR or finance—or as many chief constables, for that matter?

Calum Steele also said that

"we should never get into a situation in which we talk about the value of a police officer versus the value of a support member of staff."—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 28 February 2012; c 1009 and 1008.]

This is about balance—balance in the context of a commitment to an additional 1,000 police officers, which was given in 2007; in the context of a substantial growth in the number of support staff between 1997 and 2000; and in the light of the budget that is now available. Of course, the figures for support staff have been reduced, but if we take as an example not 2005 but quarter 3 in 2003, there were more support staff back then than at quarter 4 in 2011. Therefore, we can be selective about the dates or periods that we choose.

The Labour motion refers to concerns that

"cuts to civilian posts are taking police officers off the front line to perform tasks better suited to civilian staff".

However, we know that police support staff numbers vary enormously between Strathclyde and Lothian as a proportion of total staff, and that, in Fife, there is a tradition of a significant number of police officers being office based for at least 75 per cent of the working week. We know that resolving a crime might involve officers in front-line tasks and in what others might think of as backroom staff tasks—and certainly in tasks that take officers off the streets for a while.

Traditions and cultures vary, and the new service must take all such issues into account operationally, within the budgetary constraints under which we operate. Why would an independent audit help? Can a uniform standard be established for a support staff role? I doubt it. Do we want to become embroiled in what Andrea Quinn of the Scottish Police Services Authority described as the "disingenuous" distinction between front-line and back-office tasks?

Would we prefer police numbers to drop, as in England and Wales—the number of police will drop by 700 in Devon and Cornwall alone—and to have a Government that loses its police force's confidence? Unison argues that large numbers of police officers in one force do what are essentially civilian roles in other forces but, contrary to what some politicians suggest, there is no agreed optimum balance between civilian staff and police officers.

Chief Constable Smith made it clear in relation to the approximately 1,000 staff who have gone to date that, as a matter of policy, police officers

have never been put in support staff roles. I say in the interests of balance that he conceded that some police officers are still in roles that it would be more appropriate for support staff to do.

In some parts of Scotland, it will be difficult to reduce the number of support staff through people leaving naturally and through voluntary severance. However, we should remember that ACPOS's figures for redundancies are cumulative over the period until 2015-16.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer: The member has no time to take an intervention.

Roderick Campbell: As the cabinet secretary acknowledged, support staff have made and will continue to make an important contribution to reducing crime and making Scotland safer. We need to ensure a proper framework for the operation of the new police force.

Labour's motion says that cuts to support staff

"are detrimental to the ability of the police service to protect the public",

but we have not heard much about that—perhaps the closing Labour speaker will refer to it. Is it not the case that cutting police numbers instead would be far more damaging to the police service's ability to protect the public?

09:56

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, and to Mr Macdonald for not being present for his opening speech.

The motion refers to recognising

"the key role played by civilian staff in Scotland's police forces in helping to protect communities".

I have first-hand knowledge of that through my police service and I have a great number of friends who are support staff. No one takes issue with the statement in the motion, but the debate should not be about police officers versus support staff. There is not some bizarre numeric equation that can be worked out; the debate is about what constitutes an effective and efficient police force that will build on and enhance the 35-year low in crime.

Jenny Marra: If we are talking about an effective and efficient police force, does John Finnie agree that it is not effective or efficient in this time of financial savings to replace civilian staff in Tayside Police control room with police officers, who are paid at a much higher grade?

John Finnie: I will come on to that point.

Improvements will not come about through unnecessary duplication, which we must stop and prevent from recurring in the new structure. Chief Superintendent David O'Connor advised the Justice Committee that staff costs form 84 per cent of the police budget and, as was quoted by Mr McLetchie, Chief Superintendent O'Connor said:

"the right people with the right skills must be doing the right jobs."—[*Official Report, Justice Committee, 28 February 2012; c 972.*]

The motion talks about an independent audit. I argue that such an audit is already done by Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary, who is obliged to certify whether each constabulary and all other component parts of the police service are effective and efficient, which we know is the case.

Graeme Pearson talked about a "political commitment". The commitment to 17,234 officers is non-negotiable and is welcomed by the public. It has made a noticeable difference, not least in the visible police presence.

Graeme Pearson: I am obliged to the member for giving way, as I know that time is tight for him. Would he be more comfortable with his position if he had confidence and knew that the Government and ACPOS were focusing on saving the kind of money that has been spent on projects such as the performance management platform, on which *The Scotsman* reported this week almost £7 million has been spent but which has not been delivered?

John Finnie: Indeed. The member is well aware that I have concerns about a greater sum of money that relates to an IT project. All resources should be directed to the front line.

The public will not be reassured by the presence of several procurement departments. It could be argued that, if those departments were effective, they would procure a single procurement department.

The debate is about not personalities or geography but what is effective and efficient, so there is no suggestion of taking "vital roles" out of the equation, as Alison McInnes said.

I mentioned the Christie commission's work in last week's debate. There are functions that are undertaken centrally, which might—in small measure, I acknowledge—go some way towards explaining the reduced figures. For example, there is centralisation of recruitment and the ever-present training.

The issue must be seen against the background of the Westminster cuts.

Unison said in its e-mail that

“Taking trained operational police officers off the streets to perform administrative or specialist tasks, at greater cost, makes no ... sense.”

What are those tasks? Who are those trained police officers who can go in at a higher rate of pay? It makes no sense at all—who would disagree with that? In any case, Kevin Smith told us that it does not happen.

The Presiding Officer: You have 30 seconds.

John Finnie: Calum Steele, the secretary of the Scottish Police Federation, told us that the point of some roles is not immediately obvious to him.

Another weak point in Labour’s argument is the reference to England, where the loss of police officers compared with support staff obviously tilts the equation—if we want to make bizarre numeric equations.

The cabinet secretary has given an assurance that there will be no compulsory redundancy and that there will be transfer to the new service on the same terms and conditions—

The Presiding Officer: You must finish now.

10:01

Michael McMahon (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab): I am sure that the cabinet secretary would prefer it if we all had short memories, but I clearly recall that in 2007 one of the first promises—among many—that the Government tried to ditch was its commitment to deliver 1,000 extra police officers, and that only pressure from the Tories, who were using the issue as a bargaining chip in relation to their support for the Government’s budget, forced the justice secretary to find money, which he knew was not there, to pay for the 1,000 officers that he had promised.

The Government subsequently had to force local authorities to commit to deliver on the policy, under threat of financial penalties if they did not agree to do so. As with most of this Government’s political choices, a snappy headline is the prize for which some other area of public spending has had to pay the price. As ever, what the headline giveth, the small print taketh away. We have 1,000 more police officers, but as Unison told us and as ACPOS recently confirmed in evidence to the Finance Committee, we have lost 1,000 full-time-equivalent civilian staff. Police staff are being sacrificed on the altar of SNP populism.

It is unfortunate that the carnage is due to continue unabated, because the Government stubbornly refuses to listen to the legitimate concerns of people who have identified flaws in the financial provisions in the outline business case for the new single police force. Given the

significant financial implications of potential VAT liability for the new police and fire services, the police and public would be better served if Mr MacAskill spent more time pursuing the issue instead of praising himself for delivering 1,000 new police officers during the past five years.

ACPOS predicts that more than 2,000 police staff posts will be lost in the next three to four years, on a best-case scenario, and that more than 3,000 jobs might be lost if pay and conditions are not further reduced and the exemption from VAT is not attained. That is not a good policy to pursue.

Unison is right to point out that the Government’s

“aim should be to ensure the maximum number of police officers ‘on the street’,”—

in operational roles—

“not substituting for police staff roles.”

However, that truth cannot be fitted into a smart headline, which is what always matters most to the populist Scottish Government. The Government can deny all it wants that decivilianisation is taking place, but the people who have been affected and—this is important—the trade union that represents them know where the truth lies.

I say to Mr Finnie and other members who made the same point that the fact that someone does not ask for the evidence does not mean that the evidence does not exist. Mr Finnie made clear that he had read the e-mail from Unison. He must therefore know about the survey that the union conducted and he must have seen the examples that it gave of jobs that have been transferred and are now being done by higher-paid police officers, who are no longer on the front line delivering policing services. That cannot be the way forward.

John Finnie: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The member is in his final minute.

John Finnie: Does the member accept that the Unison representative who gave evidence acknowledged that rehabilitative and protective duties all explain the filling of some of those roles?

Michael McMahon: I accept that there is an explanation for the filling of some of those roles. However, the fact is that jobs are being lost and are being filled by police officers who are no longer doing policing.

When budgets are tight—as I concede they are—we cannot pay police officers, at a higher cost to the public, to do jobs that they were not recruited to do. The police service does not need headline-grabbing policies; it needs a properly

funded, realistically assessed and balanced workforce.

10:05

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I welcome today's debate. I understand that police support staff play an important role in ensuring an effective police force. The cabinet secretary clearly set out his admiration for their work.

The debate is set against the backdrop of a direction of travel in policing in Scotland that is clearly different from that south of the border. The Scottish Government is ensuring that the front line is protected. As of the end of last year, there are 17,343 full-time-equivalent officers in Scotland—an increase of 1,109 from the position that we inherited in March 2007.

It has been interesting to hear, as members have just heard, Michael McMahon suggest that that is populism, and Graeme Pearson question whether it is a good thing. The question that Labour members have to answer is whether they want to cut police numbers. The inference to be taken from their suggestions is that they do. I look forward to hearing Mr Macdonald or Ms Marra respond to that later.

Lewis Macdonald *rose*—

Jamie Hepburn: Mr Macdonald can respond now.

Lewis Macdonald: Of course we are not, by any means, calling for any change in police numbers. We simply ask that when the Government is presiding over a reduction in police staff, it tells us which posts are going and which roles are no longer being done by civilian staff.

Jamie Hepburn: So it is populism when the SNP increases police numbers, but it is sound policy when the Labour Party wants to protect those numbers. That is an interesting perspective.

Let us face it: the 1,000 additional police officers have directly contributed to a 35-year low in recorded crime. I accept that Graeme Pearson has long experience in policing matters, but it was a little mean-spirited of him to suggest, just because there has been a recorded drop in levels of crime in other countries, that the police here have somehow not contributed to the reduced rate of crime in this country. I wonder how his former colleagues would respond to that.

Graeme Pearson: There is no mean spirit intended. I ask Jamie Hepburn to deal with the reality outside the chamber and not to make a soundbite out of it. To connect those two statistics is just wrong. We need to deal with reality as it is.

Jamie Hepburn: That was a restatement of the position: a mean-spirited approach that suggests there is no recognition that the police have played a role—as indeed those who support them have played a role—in the reduction in the level of crime.

I do not have the time to compare front-line police numbers in England and Wales with the situation in Scotland, but there is clearly a different direction of travel south of the border.

It is important to place in context the specific matter of the number of police support staff employed in Scotland. In the first instance, the numbers are reducing mainly because people are retiring and there have been voluntary severance schemes. That is clearly different from what is happening in England. Alison McInnes was reticent about wanting to discuss what her party is doing in government with compulsory redundancies. Of course, such issues are operational matters for the chief constables of the various police forces. If the Government sought to intervene directly we would probably be having a debate about the political direction of police forces—

Jenny Marra *rose*—

Jamie Hepburn: I doubt that I have time, Ms Marra. I apologise.

I wonder if that is the debate that we would be having—although perhaps that is mean-spirited of me.

It is clear that the number of police support staff has gone down a little. There are, as at the end of 2011, 6,957 police support staff. However, that figure is higher than it was in nine of the 16 quarters from 2003 to 2007, so if it is a problem now, it must have been a problem then. I do not remember Lewis Macdonald saying so at the time, though.

10:09

Alison McInnes: Rather unsurprisingly—this is increasingly the case—the debate has been a case of fingers in the ears from members on the Government benches. Lewis Macdonald's motion is entirely reasonable and certainly worthy of serious debate. The fact that civilian staff play a vital role in allowing our police forces to operate at their most effective is not in question; neither is the fact that over the past few years there has been a dramatic and alarming reduction in the number of support staff.

This is a major reform, heavy with risk. Currently, we have an efficient, effective and trusted police force across Scotland. The Government is determined to proceed with a single police force, so its responsibility is clear. It

must ensure that reform does not irretrievably damage our police service.

Opposition speakers this morning have rightly pointed out the dangers that are inherent in one strand of the reform. Sadly, we have not heard the same from SNP back benchers. Instead, we have had the usual cheerleading for the Government rather than any sticking up for communities.

In my opening speech, I mentioned the thought that was floated by a senior officer that the Government's reforms risk losing the community focus that is the cornerstone of our current police service—a point that I think is well worth repeating. Continuing with large-scale reductions in the number of civilian staff will mean that the way that our police service works will change, and not for the better. It will inevitably return to being less about preventing crime and more about reacting to crime. Sadly, the Government seems determined to ignore that concern.

The Government may trot out its rhetoric on protecting services and creating better ties with communities, but the clear fact is that the reforms are simply not concerned with developing the best model for policing in Scotland. Rather, they are all about justifying unsubstantiated savings claims in an unachievable timeframe.

Throughout the Justice Committee's consideration of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill, we heard numerous concerns about the questionable practice of using the outline business case as a blueprint for the actual savings that are demanded of the new force. What is worse, the Government is now demanding that those dubious savings targets be reached in double-quick time.

John Finnie said that the matter is not an equation. Indeed it is not. However, in that case, the cabinet secretary should not define one half of the equation, which is the number of police officers that we have.

Our civilian police staff are an absolutely vital part of Scotland's community policing. They are the people who have helped us to reach the current 35-year low in recorded crime. The Government is quick to laud that figure but is all too slow to recognise the role that police support staff have played in achieving it.

As I said earlier, our intelligence analysts, custody officers and community wardens let our officers spend the maximum time possible out on the beat in the community, keeping our towns safe. With their numbers already on the decline, we can ill afford to lose the 2,000 or more staff who, it seems, are about to be among the first casualties of the Government's damaging reforms.

10:12

David McLetchie: This morning's debate has highlighted the challenges that face us in light of the current pressures on the public finances.

Making the necessary savings will involve difficult decisions and, with 86 per cent of the policing budget going on staffing costs, posts will have to be lost. However, we must ensure that the police service that emerges is effective, is focused on tackling crime and is made up of the correct skill set.

The Scottish Government asserts that a single police force could achieve savings of £130 million within a year, with a total saving over 15 years of £1.7 billion. However, alongside that assertion is the Government's commitment to maintain the 1,000 extra police officers that were secured during the previous session of Parliament, and the protection of those police officer numbers means ring fencing a large proportion of total police spending and preventing its use to make savings.

The Scottish Government has already set savings targets of £88 million by 2014-15, of which more than £50 million must be saved through police staff reductions. That has been calculated to represent more than 2,000 full-time posts. It will clearly be a challenge to achieve that reduction in staff numbers through voluntary redundancy alone. The ACPOS president, Chief Constable Smith, has questioned whether those savings can be achieved in that manner. He said that, in his personal and professional view, he was clear that

"the savings that have been set out in the bill will not be achieved".—[*Official Report, Justice Committee, 28 February 2012; c 972.*]

One also has to question whether 2,000 posts can be lost without a detrimental loss of skills. Chief Superintendent O'Connor from the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents warned the Justice Committee that the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill risked throwing the baby out with the bath water. He explained:

"We have a lot of very loyal, competent and experienced police staff with a lot of corporate knowledge, skills and expertise. I fear that at some point down the line it may dawn on us that we still need those skills and, indeed, that we may have to buy them back."—[*Official Report, Justice Committee, 28 February 2012; c 977.*]

Clearly, therefore, a balance must be struck between protecting posts that contribute to policing in Scotland and addressing any duplication and inefficiencies in our police service.

One thing is clear: the Scottish Government must present Parliament with the necessary information surrounding its proposal for a single police force. The current savings that a single force might bring are based on an outline business

case produced in July 2011—a document that Chief Constable Smith said was

“never intended by the police officers who were party to it, or by the consultants, to be a document that contained sufficient detail on which to base significant decisions about investment and savings.”—[*Official Report, Justice Committee*, 28 February 2012; c 971-2.]

Lewis Macdonald: Does the member therefore agree that in order to achieve that clarity and certainty about the impact of the changes, it would make a major contribution if ministers were to do an audit and report on it to Parliament, as Labour has called for today?

David McLetchie: It would certainly make a contribution, but I would prefer the full business case to be submitted.

No one in the chamber is clear about how much money will be saved by a move to a single police force. Accordingly, and because police officer numbers are to be protected, we can only guess how many civilian posts will have to be shed in the years to come. The Scottish Government’s position is that a full business case will not be produced until a single police service is established. That is too little, too late. This morning’s debate further highlights the need for those figures.

10:16

Kenny MacAskill: Yet again, I put on record how proud we are as a Government that crime is at a 35-year low, and I reiterate our praise for those who have contributed to that. Whether they are civilian staff or police constables of whatever rank, we pay tribute to them for their service, given the dangers that they often face. Those who denigrate that do a disservice to those whom they should be praising, and they should think again.

I have listened with some amusement to Mr Macdonald. As in most debates, Labour has come to the chamber making claims, but offering no increase in budget or suggestions about where money should come from. The Labour position seems to be that there should be a single service—that has always been its position. However, there is to be no loss in support staff or police numbers. I look forward to Mr Macdonald going along to the ACPOS conference that is coming up shortly and saying, “There’ll be no loss in chief constables. Hang on to your pips and braid—Labour’s going to look after you.”

Lewis Macdonald: I, too, am amused, but by the cabinet secretary’s interpretation of the debate. If he read the motion, he would see that we are not asking for a major increase in budget. We are simply asking the Government to assess which posts have been and are about to be lost and to report on that to Parliament. That will not

require much additional resource; it requires only some political will.

Kenny MacAskill: I was at a dinner yesterday in the company of a chief constable. That chief constable may apply to become, and may become, the chief constable of the new force. If he does, I will be delighted to congratulate him. If he does not, I will pay tribute to him for his service. I noticed that there was a vehicle and driver waiting to collect him. If the chief constable is unsuccessful, his driver may also be out of a job. Sadly, that is a fact of life. We have no compulsory redundancies—that remains the case. However, we cannot make jobs up. If we go from eight chief constables to one, we cannot have drivers for eight chief constables. That remains the position.

Labour’s position is totally hypocritical and fraudulent. There are to be no cuts in back-office staff, no cuts in police numbers, doubtless no cuts in the senior staff ranks, and no variation in the budget available.

Yvette Cooper has indicated that Labour south of the border would cut police numbers by 12 per cent.

Jenny Marra: Does the cabinet secretary accept that we are saying that when civilian staff retire early or are made voluntarily redundant, they are being replaced not by civilian staff but by police officers on much higher salaries?

Kenny MacAskill: I do not normally agree with Mr McLetchie in these debates—which can be quite rumbustious—but he made a valid point that such things are about balance.

Jenny Marra intervened on John Finnie with regard to Tayside. I am not aware of the on-going situation there, as it is a matter for the chief constable. However, I attended—along with Jenny Marra and Lewis Macdonald—the reception that the Scottish Police Federation hosted last week, at which I spoke to Inspector Hamilton from the Police Federation ranks in Tayside, and he raised no issues of concern with me.

Jenny Marra raised the subject of civilianisation and police officers going into control rooms, which seems to be an issue in Tayside. I recall—as might Mr McLetchie—being lobbied by the Police Federation in Lothian and Borders a few years back. The issue was that police officers were being taken out, and civilians were going in, when the force control centre in Bilston opened. Such issues are a matter of balance: Mr McLetchie was right to say that it is ultimately for the police to decide whether a post should be filled by an officer. We will give the police our full support in that regard.

I say to Alison McInnes that I would have some sympathy with her if the coalition Government was

adopting the same position. However, I remind her once again of the debates that we have had in the chamber not only in the current session of Parliament but in previous sessions about the situation that is playing out south of the border with regard to civilian staff. The coalition Government is privatising the forensic medicine department south of the border: lock, stock and laboratory. That is not about making redundancies where there is duplication, but about wholesale privatisation, which this Government will never countenance.

I appreciate that my time is almost up. This Government is delighted by our track record, and I can only remind Labour colleagues of the stony reception accorded to the Labour shadow home secretary. This Government is doing the right thing for the police service, which is why it is supported by the Scottish Police Federation. We welcome the contribution that is made by all those who serve in the police family, and the record to which they have contributed should not be denigrated by anyone or by any political party.

10:22

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I pay tribute to the men and women of Scotland's eight police forces, who, through their skill and dedication, work tirelessly to keep Scotland's streets safe.

When Scottish Labour first outlined its commitment to a single police force, we envisaged a single force that championed the diversity of functions and skills that we know it takes to police effectively and to keep our communities safe.

Joe FitzPatrick: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenny Marra: No thank you—not just now.

We recognised that, to do the best that we can for communities throughout Scotland, we had to build a force that was entrenched in the areas that it served, with the right people doing the right jobs at the right time. We did that by committing to a force in which police officers would not be taken off the beat to cover the jobs of police staff.

However, we are here today because the SNP thinks otherwise. Instead of maintaining police officers within our communities, we have the lowest number of civilian police staff in Scotland since 2005. Almost 1,000 posts have gone in the past two years alone, and 3,000 are projected to go in the future.

As we move through a period of transition, it is likely that those figures will only get worse. That is because the SNP has based its business case for a single force on the imperative to save money—as the cabinet secretary admitted last week—and

not to create the world-class police force that Scotland deserves.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member give way?

Jenny Marra: No, thank you.

Our motion does not demand that every existing post is retained, as the cabinet secretary interpreted it in his opening remarks, but simply asks the Government to undertake an audit of planned cuts.

The debate is not about civilian staff versus police officers, as the SNP back benchers characterise it, but about finding the most cost-efficient and operationally efficient balance. That is why we have called for an audit.

Mr MacAskill tells us that numbers of police officers and police staff are an “operational matter”. If that is an operational matter in which the cabinet secretary does not interfere, why does he demand that the arbitrary number of 17,234 police officers remains in Scotland? Is that not, by his own definition, an operational matter?

John Finnie told us that the cabinet secretary has given a commitment to 1,000 extra officers, a static 17,234 police officers and no compulsory redundancies. However, 20 minutes earlier, the cabinet secretary told us that such numbers are “operational matters”. Can the SNP make up its mind?

Kenny MacAskill: Does the member not recognise that political parties have the right—as the Conservatives had—to seek election on a number of platforms, one of which might be to increase police visibility by 1,000 officers, and that, if the electorate supports that, the party in question has the mandate and authority to introduce such measures? However, it is then up to the chief constable to decide how those officers are deployed and the balance between police and civilian staff. Is Ms Marra now going down the Yvette Cooper route?

Jenny Marra: The cabinet secretary is being slightly disingenuous. If Labour had made a commitment to provide 1,000 extra police officers, we would have ensured that they were on the streets of our communities, not backfilling civilian posts in control rooms across the country.

Tayside Police's deputy chief constable has been running a roadshow for police staff to explain the reform and allay fears. The following extract has been taken from an official police document:

“We have been successful in previous civilianisation programmes where police staff have been employed in posts previously occupied inappropriately by police officers. Due to the requirement on us to make savings and maintain police officer numbers it is inevitable that we have had to take a temporary step back in this regard and some police officers are having to temporarily cover some

aspects of police staff posts in order to maintain service delivery.”

I want to take the cabinet secretary through some examples of how that has been happening in Tayside. With regard to firearms inquiry officers, three civilian staff went under voluntary redundancy and police officers have had to divvy up their 110 working hours at higher cost. In media services, one civilian member of staff went through the early retirement and voluntary redundancy scheme and was replaced by another civilian and an additional constable. I will let the cabinet secretary add up how much more that costs. Moreover, four police constables transferred into Tayside’s force control room to backfill a civilian dispatcher. More civilian dispatchers will go in the next month or so and the force executive has already agreed to transfer more cops into that room for cover.

Let us not pretend that that is not happening or disrespect the civilian workers in the police force by saying, as some SNP members said last week, that backfilling is simply an assumption that Labour is making. It is not an assumption—it is a reality in police forces up and down Scotland.

The SNP Government made a political commitment to put 1,000 extra police officers on our streets—

Kenny MacAskill: If this was such an issue for police officers, why was it not raised last week by Inspector Hamilton of the Tayside police federation or, indeed, by Calum Steele of the Scottish Police Federation in the evidence to the Justice Committee that Mr McLetchie quoted?

Jenny Marra: The Justice Committee took very strong evidence from Unison on behalf of its members that this was happening.

The SNP Government made a political commitment to put 1,000 extra police officers on our streets. However, over the past two years, 1,000 civilians have left the police through either early retirement or voluntary redundancy, and their jobs are being done by police officers.

The fact is that the SNP has not put 1,000 extra police officers on our streets; instead, at a time when the Government is making cuts and saying that it is trying to save money by creating a new single police force, it has given us 1,000 backroom bobbies who are being paid significantly more money to do the backroom jobs that civilian staff were doing just as efficiently. If the new single police force is a cost-saving exercise, why are police officers being paid more to do jobs that civilians were doing very well at a lower pay grade?

The reality is that the SNP is prepared to pay inflated police salaries for civilian jobs just to save

face on its promise to provide 1,000 extra police officers. However, it is being disingenuous, and the Government should face up to the situation and admit that 1,000 extra police officers on the beat is a fallacy. Instead, it has given us 1,000 backroom bobbies.

Waiting Times

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-02905, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on health.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I wonder whether you can help me and other concerned members.

Two weeks ago tomorrow, the appalling report into the management culture at NHS Lothian was passed to the cabinet secretary. She sat on the report for a week before releasing it last Friday morning, when MSPs were safely out of the way back in their constituencies. Since then, there has been no statement from the Government, and no opportunity for constituency and regional members to raise points. Yesterday in the Parliament, members had to endure a non-debate on a parenting strategy that does not exist. Why did the Government not use that time to allow questions or a debate on the dreadful situation at NHS Lothian? Why has it taken Opposition time and an Opposition motion to drag the cabinet secretary to the chamber to break her uncharacteristic silence? Presiding Officer, members are supposed to hold ministers to account on behalf of our constituents. Can you please help us to carry out our duties?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. The business that is brought to Parliament is a matter for the Parliamentary Bureau, as you are aware. Government business is brought to the chamber by the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Chief Whip. That is not a point of order, but there will be an opportunity during this debate should the cabinet secretary wish to refer to your point.

I now call Jackie Baillie to speak to and move her motion. I trust that members have pressed their buttons if they wish to speak.

10:31

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to debate waiting times. We all know that if someone is ill, it can be an extremely worrying time. Getting a diagnosis and then getting treatment are, of course, essential to their recovery and wellbeing. We all appreciate that. We have family and friends who have waited anxiously for treatment, and we have constituents who are coping with that stress right now.

Anything that reduces waiting times is very welcome indeed and, like many other members, I am sure, I commend national health service staff for their unstinting efforts and hard work to minimise waiting times and provide the best possible treatment for patients. Progress has been made.

Members will be aware of the scandal of hidden waiting lists that has been exposed at NHS Lothian in recent weeks. Patients appear to have been offered treatment in England rather than in NHS Lothian as a means of removing them entirely from the waiting time guarantee. If the offer of treatment in England was refused, the patient was deemed to be unavailable and therefore exempt from the guarantee. Those patients were simply removed from the waiting list.

Not content with that sleight of hand, which denied people their rights, NHS Lothian went further. It adjusted the data retrospectively to make it appear that it was meeting waiting time targets. As many as 1,417 patients were wiped off the list in that way. If anyone is in any doubt about whether that was deliberate, they need only look at the situation now. In the space of just a couple of months, NHS Lothian has gone from no people breaching the waiting time guarantee to 3,500 people breaching the waiting time guarantee. That is simply extraordinary.

Just last week, we saw the publication of a damning report exposing the bullying and intimidation of staff in NHS Lothian with regard to achieving waiting time targets. I do not believe, unfortunately, that the deliberate distortion of waiting times or the culture of bullying and intimidation is confined to NHS Lothian.

If we take even the most cursory look at the numbers of those patients who were deemed to be unavailable for social reasons and were therefore dropped from the waiting time guarantee, there is a dramatic and unexplained rise since 2008 across Scotland. In 2008, the number of patients in that category was 4,967. As of last December, it was 15,824. The high point was in June 2011, when 20,662 patients were removed from the waiting time guarantee. That represents a fourfold increase in just a few years.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: In a minute.

I welcome the fact that the figures are now going down, but if we are honest, that has happened only since the problem at NHS Lothian was exposed.

The same is true across the country, not just in Lothian. We need only look at the local pictures to see the truth of that. In NHS Ayrshire and Arran, the number of people who were removed from the waiting time guarantee was up threefold. In NHS Fife, the figure was also up threefold. NHS Grampian's figure was up fivefold, and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NHS Lanarkshire's figures saw a fourfold increase.

Nicola Sturgeon: I have a genuine and very simple point, which I make in the interests of accuracy. Jackie Baillie just said something that I am sure she will concede was inaccurate. Would she care to correct what she said and concede that patients who have a period of social unavailability do not have their waiting time guarantee removed?

Jackie Baillie: I think that the cabinet secretary is dancing on the head of a pin. Patients in those circumstances do not have a waiting time guarantee. This is far too important a matter for us to divide on issues of semantics; it is incredibly important. People outside the Parliament will not understand the cabinet secretary's intervention.

The cabinet secretary's amendment, which I studied closely, recognises that waiting times need to be monitored—and so say all of us—but the practice in question has been going on for the past four years. Was the situation monitored at any time over that period? Was the cabinet secretary told about the increases? Has she been let down by her civil servants, or did she know? Why has no action been taken before now?

There were warning signs. ISD Scotland—the people in Government who are responsible for collecting the waiting time statistics—takes great pains to ensure the validity of its data. It is quoted in *The Sunday Times* as saying that

“several health boards over the last few years”

had been warned about the

“high levels of social unavailability”.

Again, I must ask whether the cabinet secretary knew and, if she did, what she did about it. Did her officials simply not tell her?

In 2010, Audit Scotland produced and published a report that highlighted concerns about the way in which patients and their waiting times were recorded. At the time, Audit Scotland said:

“NHS boards vary in how they deal with patients who do not or cannot attend appointments and this may not always be appropriate.”

It went on to say:

“The report also finds that the NHS is not accurately recording all relevant information about patient waits which makes it difficult to demonstrate that it is managing all patients correctly in line with the new guidance.”

That is too true. Here is an early warning sign, if ever I saw one. It was a matter of public record.

What did the cabinet secretary do to address those concerns? My fear is that the early warning signs were not heeded. After all, just days before the publication of the Audit Scotland report in 2010, the cabinet secretary addressed the annual Scottish National Party conference. On waiting times, she promised that

“All patients are now covered by the guarantee and no one—no one—is on a hidden waiting list.”

We know now that that is simply not true. What we have with the unavailable for social reasons category is nothing short of the SNP's hidden waiting list. More than 20,000 people have no waiting time guarantee because they have been removed from the list to massage the figures.

It would be bad enough if that were the culture in just one health board, but there is mounting evidence that the use of the social unavailability category is much wider. Frankly, it is not good enough for health boards to inspect themselves, which is the option that the cabinet secretary favours. I believe that the people of Scotland deserve much greater openness and transparency, so I was delighted that Audit Scotland responded positively to our request for a Scotland-wide independent review. In its letter to me, it said:

“We share the widespread concern that there is evidence pointing to an inappropriate use of this code (describing patients as unavailable for ‘social reasons’ so they are removed from waiting lists)”.

Despite that, the cabinet secretary continues to deny that there is a problem, other than in NHS Lothian.

I turn to the culture of bullying and intimidation. It is shameful that any member of staff in the NHS should be treated in the way that was described in the NHS Lothian report. When shouting at clinicians and nurses in general surgery to move people on before it is clinically appropriate to do so becomes routine, we should all rightly be concerned. Such behaviour is unacceptable, but such was the pressure on achieving targets, both internally and externally, that a perverse incentive was created to distort waiting time figures.

The report makes for uncomfortable reading. Staff were afraid to report their concerns for fear of reprisal. In a recent freedom of information request by my colleague Richard Simpson, we asked all health boards how many cases there had been of whistleblowing or of concern. The response from NHS Lothian was that there had been none—there was not one recorded case of any concern having been raised about anything at all. If ever something underlined the case for a whistleblowing hotline, that response alone does.

There is a hotline in England and Wales, but the cabinet secretary resists having one in Scotland. One would be forgiven for thinking that she has something to fear from such an approach, given the level of resistance. However, whatever the reason, there can be no excuse for delaying any longer. I hope that the cabinet secretary heeds that call.

The cabinet secretary believes that the issue is just about NHS Lothian and that there is no problem anywhere else in the NHS. Again, I say that she is in denial. The British Medical Association has said that feedback from its members—the very doctors who deliver for patients on a daily basis—shows that the culture is not isolated to NHS Lothian and is more widespread.

I do not have a problem with the principle of setting targets, as they help people to focus minds and concentrate on what matters, but there must always be a balance between speed and clinical priorities. I fear that we are distorting clinical priorities in a way that is unhelpful to patients.

The SNP amendment is revealing. The approach is to deny that there is a problem and, if that does not work, to blame somebody else. If that, too, fails, the approach is to adopt the view that attack is the best form of defence. The amendment attacks the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration. I regret the approach that health boards adopted that resulted in too many people being placed on availability status codes, thereby removing their waiting time guarantee. That was well over seven years ago. It was not acceptable then and it is certainly not acceptable now. There were fundamental differences, but I am running out of time, so I will not be able to explore them all.

We should compare that previous situation with the cynical manipulation of figures by the SNP, involving the use of social unavailability codes and offering patients operations that they could not possibly attend. There is no excuse for that sleight of hand and distortion of statistics, or for the wholesale removal of 20,000 people from their waiting time guarantee. The cabinet secretary must act now to stop the figures being fiddled.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the progress on waiting times since 1999 underpinned by the hard work of NHS staff, however notes that recent progress has been in a context of declining staff numbers; also welcomes the principle of the New Ways waiting times system initiated by the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat administration and implemented by the current SNP administration; however believes that, for waiting times guarantees to be meaningful, the public must have confidence that published statistics are a true reflection of actual waiting times; therefore expresses concern at reports identifying the misuse of social unavailability codes in NHS Lothian as well as allegations of a culture of bullying and intimidation in relation to meeting targets, particularly given that an internal investigation failed to fully uncover such problems; also notes that the NHS Information Services Division (ISD) figures show that the number of patients across Scotland being removed from normal waiting time guarantees for so-called social reasons increased from below 5,000 to as many as 20,662 for inpatient or day-case admissions between 2008 and 2011; is alarmed by newspaper reports that the ISD has raised concerns about high levels of social

unavailability with a number of NHS boards in recent years; also notes the comments of Audit Scotland that it shares widespread concern that there is evidence pointing to the inappropriate use of this code and therefore welcomes the decision by the Auditor General for Scotland to carry out an independent examination of the use of social unavailability codes by NHS boards across Scotland, and believes that this is a necessary step if confidence is to begin to be restored in the integrity of published waiting times statistics and to properly establish that there are no hidden waiting lists.

10:42

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): I welcome the debate. I know how important waiting times are to the public and I am proud of the Government's record on waiting times. I pay an unequivocal tribute to NHS staff. I know how challenging their jobs are, particularly in the current climate. They do a fantastic job and they deserve our thanks—not thanks with a “but” at the end, but our unqualified thanks, which is what they get from SNP members.

Before I turn to the staff's progress on waiting times, I take the opportunity to thank staff for another extremely important achievement. Yesterday's annual report from Health Protection Scotland confirmed the dramatic reduction in healthcare associated infection in recent years. There will always be more to do on that agenda, but we should not underestimate the amount of work that has been involved in reducing *Clostridium difficile* by 35 per cent and MRSA by 40 per cent in the past year alone. I am grateful to everyone who has been involved in that and I put on record my thanks to them.

Neil Findlay: That is all very well, but the staff do not want the cabinet secretary's thanks; they want a safe working environment in which they are respected and in which they can perform the caring role that they engage in every day. They do not want the cabinet secretary's thanks; they want action.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is what they will get for as long as this Government is in charge.

If anything, progress on waiting times is even more impressive than progress on healthcare associated infection. Waiting times for in-patients and out-patients, and now for the whole patient journey, are at record lows. On cancer, the 62-day guarantee, which was set by the previous Labour Government but never even nearly delivered during its entire term of office, is now being consistently met, as is the newer 31-day target. As of October this year, we will for the first time have enshrined in statute a new 12-week treatment time guarantee.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Nicola Sturgeon: I will make some progress and give way shortly.

All that progress is the result of the hard work and the commitment of tens of thousands of NHS staff, whose hard work is delivering better, quicker treatment for hundreds of thousands of patients. What happened in NHS Lothian was completely unacceptable, and it is of paramount importance that there is trust in, and transparency around, waiting times. I will return to both points in a few moments.

To imply, without evidence, that the massive achievement of staff, under this and previous Administrations, is somehow not real, is to do a massive disservice not to me or the Government but to every member of NHS staff whose hard work has delivered record low waiting times.

I say, genuinely and sincerely, to Labour, or indeed to anyone else, that if anyone has evidence that waiting time rules are not being applied properly in any board, bring it forward and it will be thoroughly investigated. If the evidence is found to have any substance whatsoever, the matter will be dealt with immediately and appropriately. Let me make clear again that I will not tolerate the manipulation of waiting times. However, suggestion and insinuation should not be used to undermine the efforts of staff, because, frankly, they deserve much better than that.

Dr Simpson: Let me be quite clear: the cabinet secretary is saying that she will not ask questions when she sees variation. The NHS Lothian figures were in the public domain, and there are many more figures in which there is substantial variation. However, the cabinet secretary says that she will not bother asking questions.

Nicola Sturgeon: That is not what I am saying, and Dr Simpson knows that. I will come on in a second to exactly the questions that I am asking.

As I said, what happened in NHS Lothian was completely unacceptable. It is beyond the pale that any patient was made to wait longer than they should have done as a result of manipulation of waiting time figures. The culture that resulted in those malpractices—described in the report that I received last Thursday and that was published on Friday—is equally unacceptable.

The fact is that as soon as the practices came to light, they were investigated, exposed and dealt with. That is as it should be, and that is how it will always be under this Government. Let us remember that it was this Government that finally implemented the new ways waiting time system, and that it was this Government that abolished the

hidden waiting lists officially known as availability status codes.

Let us remind ourselves of exactly how Labour's ASCs worked. Patients who were given a code lost their waiting time guarantee altogether and were dumped on a list and forgotten about—Labour ministers used to deny their very existence. That list of Labour's forgotten patients had peaked at 35,000 by the time that we took office. I take waiting times very seriously, but I will take no lessons from Labour on the transparency of our waiting time statistics.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Nicola Sturgeon: No. I want to make progress.

The social unavailability aspect of the new system is nothing like the old, discredited system of Labour. The new system gives patients more choice in their treatment times to accommodate personal circumstances or deal with other underlying medical conditions. The fact is that that becomes all the more important the shorter that waiting times get. Unlike the situation with Labour's system and contrary to what Jackie Baillie has told members in the chamber today, patients who have a period of social unavailability do not lose their waiting time guarantee.

Dr Simpson: Some do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Nicola Sturgeon: Their waiting time clock stops for the time that they are unavailable and, for 75 per cent of patients who have a period of social unavailability, it is a period of less than three weeks—those are the facts.

We have a transparent system, but we must always ensure that it operates as it should and that the public have confidence in it. That is why I have asked all boards to conduct a detailed internal review into their waiting time management. Audit Scotland has approved the remit. Its objectives are to ensure that individual patient records are accurate; that systems are in place to ensure that patient management systems cannot be inappropriately changed; that reporting on waiting times is accurate and consistent; and that local guidance is consistent with national guidance.

Sarah Boyack: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is in her last minute.

Nicola Sturgeon: We will ensure that the findings of those investigations are made available not just to the Government, but to Audit Scotland. I welcome Audit Scotland's announcement that it is carrying out a separate, further audit.

This Government will never ever shirk its responsibilities to patients: it will immediately expose any issues that arise and move swiftly to resolve them. However, we will also stand up for the record and achievements of staff who deliver so well for patients and who, thanks to the support and investment of this Government, are delivering record low waiting times for the benefit of patients all over Scotland

I move amendment S4M-02905.1, to leave out from first “welcomes” to end and insert:

“recognises the substantial progress made in reducing waiting times under both this and previous administrations; recognises that this is due to the hard work of all NHS staff in delivering shorter waiting times for patients across Scotland and in particular commends staff for continuing to achieve the 62-day cancer time target that was missed during the last Labour-led administration; welcomes the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 and the introduction of the treatment time guarantee later this year, which will help ensure that there is no return to the hidden waiting lists of the last Labour-led administration under which over 35,000 patients were denied their treatment guarantee; recognises that waiting times targets need to be properly monitored and therefore welcomes the forthcoming NHS boards’ reviews of their waiting times practices; further welcomes the fact that Audit Scotland will conduct a separate review of waiting times to build on its 2010 review, and believes that, taken together, these reviews will provide assurance about the transparency of waiting times across Scotland.”

10:50

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): Dear, dear. It is difficult not to be depressed by the two opening speeches—not that there were not things within them that were of interest or true. The next election is in 2016 and we are having the debate only days after the publication of one of the most serious and damning reports that I have seen. If Jackie Baillie and Nicola Sturgeon want to go toe to toe, we will set up a boxing ring in the garden lobby and they can do so. Frankly, the public outside do not want to know what the previous Labour Government did or did not do, and they do not particularly want to know whether Nicola Sturgeon has done this, that or the next thing.

The failure that is identified in the report lies with Lothian NHS Board, and the report is one of the most damning indictments that I have seen. The concern of everybody in the chamber and beyond is about not only what was going on in Lothian NHS Board, but whether there is any suggestion that the practice could be more widespread and whether we should have concerns elsewhere. I accept that both sides believe that to be the case, but that should be the point around which the debate is centred and on which we are united. We are not having a hustings contest for last year’s election.

The one bright spot in all this is the clear evidence that staff at every level of Lothian NHS

Board have a sincere appreciation of the job that they are doing and a profound commitment to it. Tribute has been paid to those staff, and anybody who has been involved in investigating any of this has given them nothing but credit for their effort and for the job that they have done.

The question is whether the practice is isolated or whether there are signs of concern elsewhere, beyond the scope of the report. I therefore welcome what the cabinet secretary has done in giving Audit Scotland a remit to look at other boards. Are there signs that, over time, such concerns have arisen? There are ways in which we could look at that to see whether signs have been emerging. The compensation that boards have paid has gone up from £2.7 million in 1999 to £26 million in 2009. When we have talked about compensation in the past, I have asked whether there has been a chain of accountability from that compensation back to the problem that was at its source or whether it has been used as a convenient way simply to park the issue and move on. That issue arose during the recent scandal in Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board, when it was clear that the effort all the time was to present, on behalf of the management, the best possible case without necessarily learning any lessons.

Dr Simpson: Would the member be surprised to learn that NHS Ayrshire and Arran failed to record 26 per cent of its referral-to-treatment notifications? Twenty-six per cent of episodes were not recorded by NHS Ayrshire and Arran—the same health board that he has just referred to.

Jackson Carlaw: Naively, I am surprised. I would have thought that anybody should be surprised. Not only am I surprised, I am appalled. The situation needs to be investigated more widely.

The Bowles report paints a familiar picture of the present system of accountability sometimes giving people objectives and accountability without authority and of concern about how levels of detail often result in paralysis. I am concerned that that is what may be happening in local government, given the way in which we keep pushing things down to councils without giving them the correct level of authority. Given the issues of accountability, management practice and blame culture that the report identifies, if we are to take any lesson from the report it should be that we must stop blaming each other and focus on resolving the situation.

I am sure that, in the course of the debate, we will hear from Lothian members who have their own specific examples. I will return to them and to the report’s recommendations in my summing up.

The Government meets all the health boards annually in public session, but there is a lack of

opportunity for members of the public to intervene in those proceedings. Many have complained about the small window for them to contribute, and it does need to be much greater.

I will comment on whistleblowing when I sum up. My final point at this stage is about work ethic. There is a concern that chief executives of health boards sometimes think that their role is to work less than the people who work for them. In fact, they should be working harder than the people who work for them. It is clear that, in the case that is covered by the report, the commitment was from the people who were doing the job at the coalface and not from the people who were responsible for ensuring that what they did was properly reported, that it was effective and that it put patient care first.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): We come to the open debate. We are tight for time so, unfortunately, I will not be able to give time back for interventions. Speeches should be of four minutes.

10:55

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): I do not think that it is helpful to cast around aspersions and innuendo as to the motivations that lie behind decisions that are taken at NHS level, of which more later.

I was interested in Neil Findlay's point of order. Although I am by no means an anorak on standing orders, I understand that there is an opportunity for any member to speak against the business motion. However, I do not recall that Neil Findlay or indeed anybody else chose to speak against the motion that set out the chamber business for this week, which included yesterday's constructive and interesting—for the most part—debate on the national parenting strategy. However, what is a little political posturing between friends?

I have no constituency locus in the NHS Lothian situation and I would not seek to interfere given that I do not have an acute interest in it. I know that my colleagues who represent the area will undoubtedly have things to say on the situation. Needless to say, however, I think that the cabinet secretary's response to it has given no lie to the fact that the Government views it in the most serious of terms. Some people could seek to fault the way in which she has chosen to intervene, as Mr Findlay has done, but they would do so for entirely the wrong reasons. We believe, and I am sure that most reasonably minded members would agree, that the cabinet secretary has responded in the most appropriate fashion.

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: I am sorry, but I have only four minutes. I am sure that the intervention would have been interesting. Some other time.

As a member who represents North East Scotland, I was interested to read a press release on Jackie Baillie's website—yes, I am the one person who visits it—that states:

“NHS Tayside was ... dragged into the scandal.”

As a regional member for North East Scotland, I received the letter that Sandy Watson, the chairman of NHS Tayside, sent to Jackie Baillie seeking to correct her. He wrote:

“I am writing to you in response to the concerns that the Scottish Labour Party has raised about the management of waiting times lists in NHS Tayside ... The figures reported in The Sunday Times related to numbers of patients waiting for a new outpatient appointment. The example highlighted was that in November 2011 ISD said there were 21,032 patients waiting for a new outpatient appointment and this was subsequently revised to 18,815 patients. This was reported as ‘patients being removed from the waiting list’.

The reason for this revision, which we gave to both ISD and The Sunday Times prior to The Sunday Times publication, is transparent, straightforward and is entirely consistent with normal and acceptable routine working practice. It is not in any way related to the removal of patients from waiting lists ... I am sure you will agree with me when I say that in the talk of all these statistics patients are the most important thing and we will never forget that.”

Neither will the Government. I am sure that Ms Baillie did not mean to omit this matter from her opening speech—

Dr Simpson: Will the member give way?

Mark McDonald: I am in my final 40 seconds, so I cannot.

I am sure that Ms Baillie merely ran out of time before using the opportunity to apologise to the hard-working and dedicated staff of NHS Tayside for the innuendo that she cast on them in the press in that manner.

For the benefit of other members, I will be happy to place a copy of the letter that I received in the Scottish Parliament information centre, as I am sure Jackie Baillie would have done, as she was the main recipient of it. It ill behoves any member to cast around innuendo and aspersions that do nothing to affect positively the morale of NHS staff. It would be far better if members paid attention to the matter at hand rather than seeking to score petty political points at the expense of our NHS staff.

11:00

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I want to focus on the NHS Lothian report, because the revelations that emerged are deeply disturbing. From an individual report that highlighted the unacceptable offer of treatment for NHS Lothian

patients in England, a systematic approach to manipulating waiting time figures and a culture of bullying were exposed.

The investigation of the management culture in NHS Lothian has provided evidence of suppression of information and an oppressive management style that contributed to a situation in which information on poor performance was not passed up the management structure, there was a no-bad-news culture, and staff were pressured to find solutions without support. That culture is clearly at odds with the stated values of the health board, which place patients first and foremost but put a premium on staff motivation and organisational reputation. Therefore, the report highlights tough questions that need to be answered. I am disappointed that the cabinet secretary commented only that what the report says went on was beyond the pale.

We all agree that waiting times matter—patients value them and staff work hard to deliver them—and we all want people to have confidence in NHS Lothian and the NHS in every other part of Scotland, but the report identifies that there is clearly still a problem with hidden waiting lists. Richard Simpson's intervention highlighted that. The management culture in NHS Lothian, which allowed the situation to persist, existed for some time and the behaviour became viewed as normal by staff. That is unacceptable.

Neil Findlay was absolutely right to say that it is not enough to acknowledge the dedication of staff. We have to look at the background of the report and the issues that were identified, and put together action. It is unacceptable for patients to be cared for by staff who are already under pressure without the additional stress of an oppressive management style. The unwillingness of staff to use whistleblowing policies due to a lack of confidence must concern every single member. Despite the clear evidence of bullying behaviour that the report identifies, the situation did not come to light for years rather than months. There are strong unions in NHS Lothian, but the staff did not go to them or whistleblow. There is a clear issue to do with staff being afraid.

The report is shocking and, having read it, I still have questions for the cabinet secretary. Did the Scottish Government allow the former chief executive to leave during the inquiry? Was that passed up to the cabinet secretary or her officials by NHS Lothian?

There is a clear governance and accountability issue in the report. As I said, I still have questions that I cannot answer even from reading such a detailed report. There is a paradox in it. NHS Lothian has won Investors in People accreditation, so it is clear that there is very good practice in it, but there is an oppressive management culture

overall, and the report does not really pin that down.

We cannot just brush over matters and look to the future. We must ask what the interrelationship is between reductions in staff numbers, pressures on funding and oppressive management cultures. It is not enough to have some good workshops in the future; we must ask whether those issues are related.

It troubles me that it was patients who blew the whistle on waiting times. We would always expect staff to do that, but the staff in NHS Lothian were too afraid. Dr Richard Simpson's proposal to establish a whistleblowers hotline is therefore crucial. There is evidence in England and Wales that that needs to be looked at. It is a clear issue on which we need to seek action.

We have the report on NHS Lothian, but there are huge pressures and significant population increases. Delivering excellence with tight funding is acknowledged to be a challenge, but there are still unanswered questions, and I would like the minister to reflect on them in summing up.

11:04

Jim Eadie (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP): I welcome this important and timely debate on waiting times in NHS Lothian following the publication of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report in March and the subsequent investigation into its management culture, which was published last Friday. There can be no doubt but that trust and public confidence in NHS Lothian have been severely undermined since it came to light that managers at the health board deliberately doctored medical records to falsely record patients as being unavailable for treatment in order to meet waiting time targets. That behaviour, which the cabinet secretary has rightly referred to as a "betrayal" of patients, is totally unacceptable, has been roundly condemned and has no place in any part of our national health service.

It is the duty of Government to take swift action wherever and whenever such behaviour comes to light. That is exactly what the cabinet secretary has done in relation to NHS Lothian. She has acted swiftly and decisively following the investigation by requiring that all territorial health boards undertake a detailed audit of local waiting times management, with Audit Scotland agreeing the remit of the audit. In March 2010, Audit Scotland stated:

"The NHS in Scotland has made big changes in how it manages waiting lists since 2008 and these have made the system fairer for patients."

Dr Simpson: I am slightly concerned about the fact that the published record of the spike in retrospective use of the exceptional way of dealing

with social unavailability occurred in June and July 2011, yet it is only after having received the report nine months later that we are discussing the issue. Nothing was done on the basis of the published figures for months, until I raised the matter in Parliament last autumn.

Jim Eadie: I accept that the member has a track record on the issue and I give him credit for that. However, the idea that the SNP Government has anything to be ashamed of is ludicrous. It is the SNP Government that has overseen the implementation of new ways of managing waiting lists.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Jim Eadie: I have just taken an intervention, so I would like to make some progress.

I agree with other members that the public need to be assured that waiting times practices throughout Scotland are completely transparent and that the experience in NHS Lothian is isolated to that board and is not typical of the wider management culture in the NHS.

As we have heard again during the debate, the PricewaterhouseCoopers report found unacceptable levels of manipulation of waiting times figures. As a result, a separate critical incident investigation is under way.

At the beginning of March, the cabinet secretary took charge by insisting that PWC report to her and not to NHS Lothian as the health board would have wished. That ensured the appropriate corporate governance and we can now see that that robust approach was the right one, despite the very public protestations from Lothian NHS Board and the chair of the board at that time.

I agree with the comments made by Sarah Boyack who, in a powerful speech, sought to address some of the serious issues in the management culture at NHS Lothian. Members have rightly been concerned to ensure the independence of the investigation, and I acknowledge David McLetchie's contribution in that regard. I believe that the process of investigation has been independent and that the recommendations offer a clear way forward. The report suggested that there should be a change in leadership style to a more co-operative approach; that values should be embedded in the organisation that make clear the difference between bullying and firm management; that trust and confidence should be re-established through a zero tolerance bullying and harassment policy; that there should be an external helpline; and that exit interviews should be carried out when staff leave the organisation.

Along with all my parliamentary colleagues, I have been appalled at what has happened. In

implementing the recommendations, we need to see swift and decisive action by NHS Lothian to match that already taken by the cabinet secretary.

11:08

Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): Although I agree that the situation that developed in NHS Lothian was unacceptable, I note that the cabinet secretary took swift and direct action to remedy the situation. I also note the announcement on 3 May that Audit Scotland has agreed the remit for health boards to review their waiting times practice. Those measures have been introduced to provide assurance that waiting times practices throughout Scotland are completely transparent.

Further to that, all health boards will embark on a detailed audit of local waiting times management and process as indicated in their internal audit programme for 2012-13.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Lyle: No. I will do a Jenny.

Those audits will give the public unprecedented confidence in the waiting times system, which is currently delivering the shortest waiting times on record. In particular, in NHS Lothian, 76.5 per cent of in-patients and day cases were waiting less than the nine-week national standard.

As for the claim that NHS boards are manipulating waiting time figures to meet targets, was it not the SNP Government that abolished Labour's hidden waiting lists, on which up to 35,000 patients were left with no waiting time guarantee? Scottish Labour hid the figures then, so it is rich that Scottish Labour raises the issue today. Meanwhile, the SNP Government has followed through with an 18-week waiting time. In December 2011, 92 per cent of patients were seen and treated within their target period.

In the relatively short time for which the Government has been in power, the NHS has met the 62-day cancer waiting time target, which I believe Labour failed to meet for the entire time that it was in government. In addition, targets have been met ahead of schedule.

I acknowledge that the PricewaterhouseCoopers report that was published in March 2012 found unacceptable levels of manipulation of waiting time figures in NHS Lothian, but the cabinet secretary has taken direct action to solve the alleged problems, and I compliment her on that swift action. *[Interruption.]* Labour members never like it, do they?

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Richard Lyle: No.

NHS Lothian was required to investigate

“why such a culture exists in NHS Lothian, what the reasons for it are and what needs to be done about it”.

A steering group commissioned an independent report to investigate the allegations. That report found a blame culture caused by inappropriate management styles but found that most staff were not affected by the cultural problems. The report complimented the immense pride that many staff have in working for NHS Lothian and the excellent teamwork that is evident in many departments.

Trust and confidence should be re-established through better staff engagement; a zero tolerance bullying and harassment policy should be introduced; and exit interviews should be carried out with staff who leave. The approach should be reviewed in six to nine months through confidential interviews with managers.

I welcome the report and take on board the points that are raised in it. There is no evidence that such practices are more widespread, and the reviews that the SNP Government has commissioned will confirm that waiting time practices throughout Scotland are completely transparent.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to use full names when referring to other members.

11:12

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I declare an interest, in that my wife is an NHS Lothian employee.

Not only did the cabinet secretary not come to the chamber to make a statement on the report but, now that we have a debate, she has been in the chamber for only a few speeches. I have no idea where she is, and she might at least have had the courtesy to remain to listen to members' speeches.

I was shocked but not all that surprised by the findings of the report into the management culture at NHS Lothian, which exposed outrageous practices, threatening behaviour and the use of unacceptable language against staff, such as

“If you don't reach your targets you can collect your P45”

and

“those of you with mortgages and career aspirations had better be afraid”.

Such words and tactics are those of playground bullies, not caring professionals.

All this was prompted by the blatant manipulation of the waiting time figures. We have now uncovered what was going on, and it is clear

that waiting times and the management culture are inextricably linked.

In looking into the issues, we are entitled to ask when the Scottish Government was first alerted to the bullying culture at NHS Lothian. Were the actions those of a rotten few, or was there a toxic mix of unrealistic Government demands against a backdrop of staff and resource cuts? Why does such a culture exist and what is to be done about it? How has the intolerable pressure that is being placed on the remaining staff, who are striving to meet waiting time targets, impacted on patient care? We need answers to those questions and many more.

I think that Sarah Boyack referred to the Investors in People report of November 2010, which started to expose some of the issues. It highlighted how

“some senior managers bully us with constant targets targets shouting and relentless pressure”

and said that leadership was

“based significantly on the hierarchy and power and was often described as ‘command and control’.”

Terms such as “bullying”, “blame culture” and “fear” were littered throughout the report. Why did no one at NHS Lothian or Government level do anything about that at the time? What did the chairman and the board do? Did they inform the Scottish Government?

I am glad to see that the cabinet secretary has returned from her travels. Will she tell us when she knew about the problems at NHS Lothian? I will happily take an intervention from her if she wants to respond.

Nicola Sturgeon: The exact chronology and chain of events are a matter of parliamentary record, in the statement that I gave to the Parliament about the PWC report. I am more than happy to discuss the matter further with any member.

Neil Findlay: I am sure that we will discuss it further. Why did it take so long for the practices and the bullying culture to come to light? The practices were not carried out only by people who have now left the organisation. What will happen to the people who remain? What responsibility lies higher up, at Government level?

I have many friends, relatives and constituents who work in NHS Lothian. They tell me about an NHS that is understaffed, in which staff are afraid to speak out, in which nurses cannot take a break during a 12 and a half hour shift and cannot get basic equipment, in which patients are boarded out to other wards several times during their stay, and in which morale is low and falling and the realities that staff face day in and day out are light years away from the spin and denials of ministers.

The report talked about the suppression of bad news, through a do-not-write-it-down policy. Reports were given a gloss and a positive spin and used oblique language.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have 10 seconds.

Neil Findlay: Okay—I will wind up, although I have much more to say. This vital issue will run and run, and I hope that we will have more time to discuss it, because four minutes is not enough.

11:16

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): I point out that it was Labour's decision not to concentrate on one subject this morning but to try to give everyone on its portfolio list a wee shottie in a debate. This is Labour's debate.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member give way?

Joe FitzPatrick: I will take an intervention from Ms Baillie in a second, to give her a second chance to apologise to all the workers in NHS Tayside whom she besmirched in her press statement of 3 May. The item is still on her website and is still besmirching the hard-working staff at NHS Tayside, who have done a fantastic job to reduce waiting lists over the years. I will give Ms Baillie the opportunity to apologise to them and to make clear that she will remove the press statement from her website.

Jackie Baillie: The approach of SNP back benchers and front benchers today has been to use NHS staff as a human shield for the failings of their Government. I take to heart what Jackson Carlaw said. There is a problem now and we need action now. Will the Government take action?

Joe FitzPatrick: I am disappointed but not surprised that Ms Baillie did not apologise. I take it that she will remove the offending press statement, which attacks hard-working staff, from her website.

The motion represents an attempt to attack the SNP Government on waiting times, but the simple, irrefutable fact is that waiting times have come down under the SNP Government. The days are gone when tens of thousands languished on waiting lists without any guarantee of treatment and thousands more were on hidden waiting lists, which the Labour Party—sorry, Scottish Labour—designed specifically to fudge the figures. Politicians' surgeries the length and breadth of the country were full of constituents protesting about long, worry-filled waits for treatment.

Right now, we have a Government that has achieved record waiting time reductions. We have the best-performing NHS in the United Kingdom. We should be proud of what our NHS has

achieved. No one is suggesting that there is nothing to consider. The cabinet secretary made it clear that she takes seriously the concerns from Lothian, and the local member, Jim Eadie, made a passionate speech about his concern for his constituents. No one is trying to paper over the cracks where things are not right. However, let us put on record that our NHS is doing a fantastic job throughout the country.

In Tayside, the most recent figures show that 100 per cent of in-patients and day cases are waiting for less than nine weeks, 100 per cent of new out-patients are waiting 12 weeks or less, 97.1 per cent of patients are going from referral to treatment in under 18 weeks and 96.6 per cent of people in whom cancer is suspected are starting treatment within 62 days.

Those are fantastic results and a fantastic record, which is why NHS Tayside took the unusual step of copying all the regional and constituency members who represent Tayside into their response to Jackie Baillie, to make sure that her disingenuous press statement was put straight. It is disappointing that she has still failed to put the record straight today.

Another disappointing issue is that, when we talk about health, the Labour Party is always prepared to use health for political posturing, rather than bringing forward concrete ideas that could support our NHS workers across the country.

11:20

Jackson Carlaw: I will concentrate on issues that arose from the one substantive and positive contribution to this debate, which came from Sarah Boyack. She looked into the detail of the report and, in the time available to her, prepared an analysis that pinpointed the key issue in all of this: that the management culture in NHS Lothian is what underpinned the inability of staff to feel confident to raise, publicly or elsewhere, the issues raised by what they knew was going on.

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackson Carlaw: I will, in a second.

I am reminded of an old school chum of mine, who was castigated on one occasion when he answered a question by saying, "As a result of Magna Carta, no-one could be put to death without their own consent." It seems to me that that is the issue here: who is going to whistleblow to their own executioner? As a result of the culture, the fear and suspicion of staff is that if they speak up, they will, at the end of the day, face disciplinary procedure.

That is all the more unsettling because, as a result of NHS partnership information network guidelines that we have talked about in this Parliament before, staff cannot be disciplined if they whistleblow on the ground of patient safety, but either they do not know that or they do not have confidence in that, and clearly in Lothian health board—and potentially elsewhere—there may be issues as serious and substantive as the ones that we are discussing that are not coming to the surface because the culture precludes that from happening.

We have paid tribute to the considerable efforts, the passion and the commitment of staff on the ground who are delivering the targets, but the worry has to be, why has all this been going on? What is it all about? Is it about the CVs of chief executives and managers? I have seen them come across my desk. Is it because they want to be able to say, “I reduced waiting times” in NHS whatever it is? No they did not; it was the staff underneath them and their efforts that have contributed to the reduction in waiting times. Chief executives and managers do not want anything that is bad news. Jim Eadie says that the public need to be reassured that the management practices in NHS Lothian do not exist elsewhere but, standing here, we cannot be confident that that is the case.

I was asked by Dr Simpson if I was surprised about NHS North Ayrshire and Arran and I replied, “Not only am I surprised, I am appalled”.

Similarly, we must accept that if a practice that surprises and appals us exists in NHS Lothian, it would be foolish and irresponsible of us to suppose that it is not happening anywhere else. The presumption should not be that it is happening, but that is what the investigation that the cabinet secretary has identified with Audit Scotland must uncover.

I come back to the depressing point about this debate. It is really not an occasion for a political trade-off, but I say to Richard Lyle—actually, I was going to ask on a point of order what “doing a Jenny” is, because I was not clear about that parliamentary expression—that when he said that this Government has been in power for a relatively short period of time, I had to think about that. It has been in power longer than MacDonald, Bonar Law, Chamberlain, Churchill—National, Attlee, Churchill—Conservative, Eden, Macmillan, Douglas-Home, Heath, Callaghan and Brown. For goodness’ sake—for Richard Lyle to say that ministers have not been in office long enough to know how to do their jobs is profoundly depressing for us all, so I do not think that that helped.

I say to the cabinet secretary that although I am upset by the tone of the motion and the

amendment and the conduct of the debate, the motion is underpinned by a fundamentally serious issue. Our responsibility as politicians is to resolve it.

11:24

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): Some of these Opposition-led health debates create more noise than light in terms of detail and substance, and today’s was no exception.

In the desperation of some to throw around as much mud as possible in relation to this issue, there is a danger that we lose sight of the significant progress that has been made by the NHS in Scotland. Unlike some, I wish to say thank you to the staff for their tremendous efforts in ensuring that they have achieved so many targets and have improved the NHS beyond recognition in recent years. I am not using them as a human shield; I am giving them genuine recognition for their hard work and achievement.

It is worth recognising that, before 1999, there were no waiting time targets in the NHS in Scotland. Look at what has happened. Over the past 12 years, this Administration and other Administrations have seen the waiting times target being met, a substantial reduction in healthcare-associated infections and an improvement in the way in which we deliver healthcare, with more people receiving day care treatment and having shorter stays in hospital. All of those things illustrate the significant progress that has been made.

We must recognise that that progress has brought benefits to patients. Of key importance to the NHS is the quality of care and treatment that it provides to patients. In the in-patient experience survey in 2011, 85 per cent of patients said that their experience of treatment was good or excellent. Again, that underscores the commitment and the dedication of our NHS staff, which I am more than happy to congratulate them on and thank them for.

We should also recognise that the NHS in Scotland is performing well compared with other parts of the NHS in the United Kingdom. That is because we are not complacent; we have been driving reform in our NHS to ensure that it performs well. Scotland’s performance in relation to seven of the 11 major procedures is the best of any region in the UK. Further, our NHS’s move from being a body that largely focused on ill health to one that does more to prevent ill health has caused mortality rates to drop and life expectancy to increase. We have a proud record of delivering healthcare improvements in Scotland, and we need to recognise that.

Sarah Boyack: I would not for a moment dispute the fact that, with extra resources and superb management, there has been big progress. Will the minister focus on the problems that were identified in the NHS Lothian report? The key problem is that, with less money and less staff, there are pressures. How do we get it right? What are the lessons?

Michael Matheson: I am just about to turn to those points. First, I should say that a lot of the allegations and innuendo that we have heard today have been about wider aspects of our NHS, not just NHS Lothian.

The Government has implemented the new ways guidance and has ensured that boards are taking it forward effectively. I have heard members talk about social unavailability and suggest that, in some way, a patient loses their waiting time guarantee, but they do not and it is factually incorrect to suggest otherwise. That is part of the mud slinging and does not help us to address the issue.

Jackson Carlaw, in his measured contribution, hit the nail on the head when he talked about how we can move forward from the findings in the NHS Lothian report and address the fundamental failings that it highlighted. Sarah Boyack and Jim Eadie also highlighted that, and drew attention to the serious failings in how the board handled the matter. Crucially, the report highlighted not one or two incidents of bullying and intimidation here or there, but a culture of bullying and intimidation, which the cabinet secretary has clearly said is unacceptable. That is why all 34 of the recommendations are being taken forward and the chair of NHS Lothian has been given the task of bringing forward a single integrated action plan that will address reporting, governance and culture to ensure that we can root out the unhealthy culture that has been allowed to develop in NHS Lothian.

We must also recognise that, although this report is damning in relation to the problems that were allowed to develop in NHS Lothian, the issues are confined to a small number of the 20,000 staff who work in NHS Lothian, many of whom, on a day-to-day basis, show tremendous professionalism and dedication to their work.

The report must be placed in the context of the limited number of staff who were perpetuating the culture of bullying and intimidation. However, we must ensure that the issue is addressed. As a Government, we are prepared to take the necessary action to ensure that the message is clear that bullying and intimidation will not be tolerated in any part of the NHS in Scotland.

11:30

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Waiting times have been one of the success stories of the NHS throughout Scotland since 1997, underpinned by Labour's decision to increase NHS funding radically in 2001. I hope that the time when patients could wait for years for an operation and could lie overnight on trollies has been consigned to history, although I hear stories from England about the trollies re-emerging.

However, the progress has stressed the system. The discovery that availability status codes—which, I say to Joe FitzPatrick, were created in the 1980s—that were designed only to allow patients to be removed temporarily from waiting lists were being wrongly used led Nicola Sturgeon, the then Opposition spokesperson, to attack Labour on the subject. The response was the creation, by Andy Kerr, of the new ways waiting times guidance, which was implemented by the SNP Government.

That is fine, but as I said in 2008, this is a complex system and it is likely that people will start gaming if they are under pressure. My warnings were ignored. In a speech in 2009, I said that doctors are being bullied by management in respect of targets and that it could become a serious issue. I did not know at the time that the Investors in People report in Lothian in 2010 would indicate, as Neil Findlay has said, that bullying was occurring in that health board.

The figures for social unavailability rose inexorably over the next two years and I again questioned whether gaming was going on. In other words, were we heading for a new scandal of hidden waiting lists? I was told that I was scaremongering. I am always being told that. The SNP's complacency, which its supine back benchers demonstrated admirably today, is utterly breathtaking.

Forced by our exposure of one form of gaming in Lothian, the cabinet secretary has finally had to intervene. Otherwise, the Lothians initial internal whitewash report would have brushed the issue under the carpet. Do we have confidence that the investigation by other health boards, which she has instigated, will not do the same?

Is all now well and are all the other health boards managing the new system so that the target data, on which the waiting times claims are based, is real? That is what the cabinet secretary believes. She has dismissed my observations on the appendix of the Pricewaterhouse report—*[Interruption.]* She has. The appendix shows substantial variation, month on month, in other health boards' use of exceptional retrospective correction of the social unavailability codes, yet I am told that this is not happening in any other health board.

Let us look at the central figures on waiting times, and bring a little reality to the situation. Yes, it was a new system in 2008 and, yes, it is complex, but here we are in 2012, with a self-congratulatory cabinet secretary trumpeting achievements, yet out of 111,000 referral-to-treatment incidents in the most recent reported set of statistics, 14,000 are unrecorded and unknown. We know that there are 7,700 patients for whom the referral-to-treatment guarantee has been broken—that is reported—but we know nothing about the other 14,000. How can we say that the waiting time guarantees are reaching the figures that the cabinet secretary keeps trumpeting?

The codes used in the PWC report were “other” or “patient contact”. I spoke to a Grampian general practitioner today in Mark McDonald’s constituency who said that he had re-referred a patient to gastroenterology this morning who had been removed from the waiting list having phoned and said that they were unavailable. Do not tell me that this is not happening. My GP colleagues—I have phoned 12 of them in the past week—are telling me repeatedly that this is happening. The combination of abusing the social availability status code, using “other” and “patient contact”, and short-term cancellation of clinics is causing massive disruption and considerable distress. That is not innuendo but reality, and the Parliament needs a reality check on the issue.

I decided to undertake a reality check by carrying out a freedom of information inquiry into the health boards—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Would Mark McDonald please stop shouting across the chamber?

Dr Simpson: I asked the boards how many concerns have been raised. Whenever I have mentioned the new partnership information network arrangement for whistleblowing and raising concerns, the cabinet secretary has reassured me that all is well. NHS Highland and NHS Borders reported their quarterly statistics on concerns since 2010 as being excellent, and 12 other health boards had no concerns reported to them and no record of whistleblowing. Is the cabinet secretary really telling me that, despite the stress that our health service is under, no concerns are being expressed by any member of staff out there? That cannot be true.

The cabinet secretary must introduce a whistleblowers’ line, which England introduced following the Mid Staffordshire inquiry, and after the General Medical Council and the Nursing and Midwifery Council sent out their new guidance. I phoned the line and was told, “I’m sorry, but we cannot deal with concerns from Scotland, except to give general advice.”

That is not good enough and it is letting our staff down. The staff whom we value and who are doing a good job are not able to express their concerns, and there is a much more widespread culture in that regard than the cabinet secretary is prepared to admit.

In the past few months, I have carried out a detailed analysis of the figures that are being presented, but I will not talk about that today. I can tell the cabinet secretary that she was right to say that her job is not to micromanage the health service—no minister can do that, and we do not expect her to do so. However, we do expect her to ask questions. If her civil servants are not telling her about the striking variations that are occurring, they are not doing their job, and she is not doing her job in ensuring that they give her that information.

There is a potential scandal out there. I can tell the cabinet secretary that there are concerns in other areas, which I will talk about in the next few weeks once I have checked them with the local health boards.

I turn to Joe FitzPatrick’s figures for Tayside, and the letter from Sandy Watson, which I received because I cover part of that constituency. In the letter, NHS Tayside revealed something else that is very interesting: referrals that are made directly to nursing staff and to allied health professionals are not recorded in the waiting times system. It is true that the original ISD published figures included figures related to nurses and allied health professionals. However, that was a mistake, and it was corrected by the health board. If I, as a general practitioner, refer a patient to a specialist service in a hospital—for diabetes, for example, which is one of the big ones—why is that referral not subject to a waiting time guarantee?

The health service system is changing. The system of referral no longer goes from GP to consultant but concerns many different aspects of the health service. If the cabinet secretary really wants to protect patients and ensure that the system works well, and if she wants to support staff, rather than using them as a shield—as she has done blatantly today—she must ensure that staff are working in a safe situation in which they are free from bullying and are able to raise concerns. When they cannot or feel unable to do so, they should have a whistleblowing line to call for support. That will give the cabinet secretary the information that she wants.

The Government stands accused not of not trying its best, but of not asking questions and of being completely and utterly complacent.

Scottish Executive Question Time

General Questions

11:39

Education (Finland)

1. Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on Finland's approach to education. (S4O-00999)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): I am always very pleased to learn from other countries' experience in delivering education services. Finland's approach is of continued interest to Scotland and, indeed, I visited Finland in March 2010 to see its system at first hand. I was pleased to meet again, on 2 May, Dr Pasi Sahlberg, who is the director general of the Centre for International Mobility and Co-operation in Helsinki, when he spoke in the Scottish Parliament about lessons from Finland. Although the Scottish education system is different from Finland's, a number of aspects of the Finnish approach are helpful for discussion, reflection and learning across the Scottish education sector.

Stewart Maxwell: As he has said, the cabinet secretary was present at the recent Nordic horizons event that I sponsored in Parliament and, in particular, at Dr Sahlberg's presentation on the Finnish education system. During that presentation, Dr Sahlberg showed that there is a significant correlation between the level of equality in a society and the level of education attainment. What lessons does the cabinet secretary draw from that and what impact might such a finding have on Government thinking with regard to Scotland's education system?

Michael Russell: Dr Sahlberg was very interesting on a range of issues, one of which Stewart Maxwell has highlighted. However, I draw attention to two things that he tweeted as he left Scotland, the first of which was to say that there should be

"More professional responsibility rather than bureaucratic accountability for schools",

which is a very interesting reflection on the need to increase teacher performance and invest in teaching. Secondly, he tweeted that we should

"Enhance teacher professionalism by shifting inspection from external Inspectorate to schools."

In other words, he believes that self-evaluation in schools is vital. We are moving forward with that.

As for equity, Dr Sahlberg's presentation highlighted a finding that has been mentioned in reports by the programme for international student assessment—PISA—McKinsey & Company and Michael Fullan. Scotland has a significant problem in that it is below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average in relation to the equity gap between the education attainment of children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and that of those from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. The attainment group that I appointed last year and which reported earlier this year was specifically tasked not just with looking at raising attainment for all but with examining how to narrow the gap in attainment. The PISA findings also showed that 86 per cent of the variation in performance in Scottish schools is down to variation within schools. In other words, children are not generally disadvantaged by having to attend poorly performing schools. That is really important.

New Farming Entrants

2. Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what progress has been made on increasing the number of new farming entrants. (S4O-01000)

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Stewart Stevenson): The Government has always put a high priority on encouraging new entrants to farming. We were the first Administration to introduce dedicated new entrant support which, so far, has delivered £1.1 million of support to 65 new entrants. Earlier this year, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment announced a new advice package for new entrants that is now being developed by the Scottish Agricultural College. In addition, the cabinet secretary intends to make an announcement soon on plans to hold a new entrant summit and to set up a new entrant panel to determine what can be done under the future common agricultural policy to encourage new entrants.

Nanette Milne: I thank the minister for his response, although I am slightly puzzled by part of it. From my regular meetings with farming representatives, I know that they are very concerned at what is becoming an ageing industry and at the limited opportunities for newer young entrants into it. In the previous parliamentary session, ministers promised to introduce a £10 million year-on-year new entrant scheme; however, in reality, the Scottish National Party delivered only a £10 million programme over the course of the whole session of Parliament, which provided limited new opportunities for entrants. What steps does the Scottish Government plan to take in this session of Parliament to support new

opportunities for the next generation of Scottish farmers? Will the minister agree to report back to Parliament on the number of new entrants who are being assisted as this session goes on?

Stewart Stevenson: I am unhappy to share Nanette Milne's concern and to agree that the increasing age of farmers is an issue for the industry. From 2000 to 2007, the number of farmers aged under 45 fell and the number aged over 65 rose from 22 to 27 per cent. A fundamental challenge that is in front of us is common agricultural policy reform, and the current proposals would inhibit our ability to support new entrants. It is very important that Scotland gets the support to address the issue of new entrants that it requires from the United Kingdom Government which, for the time being, has the lead in negotiating on the matter.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Does the minister agree that, although the measures that he has identified are welcome, a fundamental issue for new entrants is access to farming land and tenancies? The tenant farming forum is identified as the body that will deal with such concerns, but does the minister accept that the recent Moonzie case and the lack of clarity about its consequences add greater tension to the discussions? How will he ensure that we can be confident that the tenant farming forum's recommendations will be fair to all parties that are involved?

Stewart Stevenson: Presiding Officer, you will be aware that I cannot comment on a live case.

I am happy to say that we have been legislating to put into law the tenant farming forum's recommendations. We will continue to work with that forum to ensure that we get increased access to new entrant opportunities. For example, Forestry Commission Scotland, for which I am responsible, has created new starter units. Right across Government, we will take every opportunity to create ways in for new entrants.

Supply Teachers

3. John Scott (Ayr) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what discussions it has had with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authorities about the reducing availability of supply teachers in certain areas. (S4O-01001)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Michael Russell): The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is represented on the teacher workforce planning advisory group, which advises ministers on the number of student teachers that universities should enrol each year to ensure that sufficient teachers, including supply teachers, are available across Scotland. In addition, COSLA, together

with the Scottish Government and the teaching unions, sits on the Scottish negotiating committee for teachers. The SNCT meets routinely throughout the year to discuss relevant matters, including those that relate to supply teachers.

John Scott: The cabinet secretary will be aware that, since the introduction of the new reduced pay scales for supply teachers, some schools now have difficulty sourcing supply teachers because experienced supply teachers, who are now being paid less than probationers, are no longer prepared to travel to the more remote parts of Scotland, such as South Ayrshire, which are suffering disproportionately. What plans does the cabinet secretary have to address that growing problem?

Michael Russell: I will correct something that Mr Scott said. Supply teachers are paid for the first five days at the first point on the scale, which is not less than probationers are paid. We accept, however, that the negotiated agreement on supply teachers that was accepted by the trade unions was a difficult agreement. It was necessary to reach that agreement because of the resources that we had available. That said, I give John Scott the assurance, which I have given on a number of occasions, that we will keep the situation under review. We want to ensure that we are fair to everyone. We have insisted that local authorities honour the agreement in details, which means that once supply teachers move beyond the initial period, they revert to the place on the scale that they might otherwise have been at.

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary act to guarantee supply teachers a fair day's pay for a fair day's work?

Michael Russell: That is guaranteed by the agreement that we have that was entered into willingly by COSLA—including Labour local authorities—by the teaching unions, and by the Scottish Government. Misrepresentation of that agreement is not helpful to anyone.

Housing Options Hubs

4. Richard Lyle (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive how the recently announced additional funding of £150,000 for housing options hubs will be used best to refocus services to look at individuals' housing options. (S4O-01002)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): The funding will be used by the hubs to enable the sharing of practice between local authorities and their partners, all of which is aimed at preventing homelessness.

Richard Lyle: How will the extra funding be used to prevent future homelessness? What other

steps does the Government intend to take to tackle homelessness?

Keith Brown: The extra funding will support the good work that the housing options hubs have done to date. The housing options approach seeks to achieve sustainable and long-term solutions to individuals' housing problems. Working in partnership, the hubs have done substantial publicity work around housing options services, training needs analysis and implementing housing options information technology systems. They are putting in place the necessary infrastructure. Richard Lyle will be interested to know that the homelessness statistics that were published in February showed a 20 per cent drop in applications and assessments. That is the lowest in a decade and demonstrates the impact of the prevention activity that has been led by the hubs.

Public Facilities (Transport Links)

5. Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it promotes better transport links to public facilities. (S4O-01003)

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government promotes better public transport to connect people, places and work. Our investment is significant, such as the £0.25 billion per year on bus services, and it is wide-ranging, with new capital projects such as a £30 million programme of improvements for railway stations across Scotland and our £40 million support for Glasgow fastlink—which will be a rapid bus corridor linking the city centre with the new Glasgow Southern general hospital—and for improving transport links for the Commonwealth games.

Fiona McLeod: In relation to the £0.25 billion that is spent on buses, will the minister comment on the fact that Strathclyde partnership for transport has decided that MyBus cannot be used to access hospital appointments, as opposed to hospital visits?

Keith Brown: The bulk of that support will be spent on concessionary travel, with additional funds being provided for the bus service operators grant. MyBus cannot be used for attending hospital appointments, except in exceptional circumstances, because it has been agreed that those appointments are the responsibility of the national health service. That reflects the specialist nature of the transport that is required and the lack of flexibility on arrival times. SPT's website advises that patients should contact their general practitioner's surgery if they have difficulty in attending hospital appointments.

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): The minister recently repeated inaccurate claims that the cut to

the BSOG and the change in the formula were not reasons for the inflation-busting fare increases and cuts in services that we have seen. Why will he not utilise the extra money that was made available by the UK Government's budget to protect bus services in Scotland?

Keith Brown: The first reason is that Jim Hume has already asked us to spend that money on 10 or so different things; it cannot be spent more than once. It is also worth saying that we have provided £0.25 billion of support against the backdrop of the substantial cuts by the UK Government that he supports. The money is being used to ensure that we expand the services that are available. The member will, of course, know that the changes that we have made to the BSOG will help rural bus services, which the previous Administration—of which his party was a part—failed to do.

UBC Group (Administration)

6. Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive, in light of the potential impact on the construction industry, what its position is on the UBC Group entering administration. (S4O-01004)

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): This will be a very difficult time for staff who work for the UBC Group, and the Scottish Government is doing absolutely everything that is possible. We are working alongside the administrator and local councils to preserve or secure by other means as many of the jobs and as much of the business as possible.

For those who face redundancy, Skills Development Scotland met staff on Monday 14 May and the partnership action for continuing employment team representatives have arranged an event for staff on 23 May.

Jamie McGrigor: I thank the minister for that answer, but is he aware of the particular concerns about the loss of 90 UBC jobs in the Western Isles, which the leader of Western Isles Council, Angus Campbell, has described as being "a devastating blow" for the economy of the Western Isles? Last week, when the First Minister announced 90 new jobs for the Western Isles, he said that that number

"would equate to several thousand jobs"—[*Official Report*, 10 May 2012; c 8832.]

in a city the size of Edinburgh. What specific support can the minister offer the Western Isles and those 90 workers who have been made redundant?

Fergus Ewing: I am acutely aware of all those matters. I have been personally engaged in the situation since the news was announced that the UBC Group was to go into administration. I am

involved to a considerable extent in all the considerable work that is being done by the Scottish Government, the local council, the Hebridean partnership and people involved with UBC to secure the best possible result for all concerned. We are committed to doing that. The staff will have the opportunity to receive comprehensive and substantial support from PACE representatives, not least at the events that will be held in Stornoway and South Uist, as well as at the event in Inverness on 23 May.

Scottish Water (Consultation)

7. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what consultations Scottish Water must hold with communities prior to making changes to their water supply. (S4O-01005)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): Scottish Water is required by the Water Industry (Scotland) Act 2002 to have a consultation code. The code, which is available on Scottish Water's website, sets out how it and its representatives will work in partnership to ensure that individuals, communities and stakeholders are engaged in discussion early in the life of projects and developments. The code does not prevent Scottish Water from taking appropriate operational decisions concerning a water supply.

Rhoda Grant: The cabinet secretary might be aware of the change in water supply at Aviemore in Badenoch and Strathspey. Constituents are concerned about the safety of the water supply because of the taste and quality of the water. What consultation took place prior to the changes in the water supply and what action is being taken to remedy the situation?

Alex Neil: In line with the code that I described and with planning legislation, Scottish Water undertook extensive consultation of relevant stakeholders and customers in the Aviemore area prior to submitting its planning application for the new works in September 2008. I have had reassurances from the Drinking Water Quality Regulator for Scotland that the supply comfortably meets the stringent legislative standards. The regulator is continuing to monitor the quality of the supply and Scottish Water's response in addressing any consumer concerns.

Air Passenger Duty

8. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding devolving air passenger duty. (S4O-01006)

The Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment (Alex Neil): The Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth, the Minister for Housing and Transport and I have pressed our counterparts in the UK Government on a number of occasions over the past 12 months to devolve air passenger duty in quick order, but the UK Government has continued to prevaricate. That not only stifles our ambition to reform APD to better suit Scottish circumstances, but goes against the wishes of our four biggest airports and other significant interests, such as the Scottish Chambers of Commerce. We will continue to make the strong case for devolution of air passenger duty now.

Kevin Stewart: The managing director of Aberdeen airport, Derek Provan, has said that

"Air Passenger Duty in its current form will damage tourism and weaken Scotland's competitiveness.

It is growing in the UK at a time when other European countries have abandoned the tax entirely because of its damaging effects."

He continued:

"We call for the tax to be devolved to the Scottish government where we feel any revenues raised would be pushed back into helping support the aviation industry and attract new routes."

Does the cabinet secretary agree with Mr Provan?

Alex Neil: I absolutely agree with Derek Provan's sentiments that air passenger duty in its current form is damaging for Scotland's aviation sector, as well as for our tourism industry and wider economy and, of course, passengers. We have repeatedly urged the UK Government to consider the impact of APD rises in Scotland, but it has not listened. The only way to ensure that Scotland gets a fair deal is for APD to be devolved now. I welcome Derek Provan's support for the devolution of APD and the support of his counterparts from airports elsewhere in Scotland.

Early Years Change Fund (Childcare)

9. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the early years change fund improves childcare for pre-school children. (S4O-01007)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): There have been two allocations from the early years change fund that will increase the level of funded early learning and childcare provision. From 1 April 2012, £4.5 million per annum is being provided from the change fund to local authorities in their role as corporate parents to deliver additional early learning and childcare provision and to work with the parents, where appropriate. In addition, a further £4.5 million has been invested from the change fund in the communities and families fund to

promote community-based solutions for support for families and childcare.

We are establishing a sub-group of the early years task force to consider how we might develop high-quality integrated and co-ordinated family centres and early learning and childcare services.

Bob Doris: I thank the minister for that strong commitment. She will be aware of the recent suggestion by Children in Scotland about the possible use of future European structural funds for childcare provision. The funds could help to expand and integrate childcare with employability initiatives and work. Will the minister explore such matters with her Government colleagues in order to consider whether the area could be developed further?

Aileen Campbell: I acknowledge Bob Doris's commitment to early years policy. We are exploring the potential of European structural funds, as part of the Scottish Government's broader strategic approach. We are participating in European Commission working groups and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development networks on early childhood education and care. I will continue the dialogue with Bob Doris on the matter.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Before we come to First Minister's question time, I am sure that members wish to join me in welcoming to the gallery the President of the Austrian state Parliament of Voralberg, Dr Bernadette Mennel. [*Applause.*]

I am sure that members will also join me in welcoming Margo MacDonald back to the chamber. Welcome home. [*Applause.*]

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Engagements

1. Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what engagements he has planned for the rest of the day. (S4F-00671)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): Today, Bruce Crawford, the Cabinet Secretary for Parliamentary Business and Government Strategy, is meeting Jens Stoltenberg, the Norwegian Prime Minister, to welcome him to Shetland on Norway's national day, and to discuss plans for a deepwater quay decommissioning facility in the Shetland Islands.

I am delighted to announce to the chamber that, following discussions that I had in Oslo on Tuesday, the Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise will together make available £10 million to support a hugely ambitious project for the northern islands.

I know that the whole chamber will wish to welcome the exciting partnership between the Norwegian company ÅF Group and Lerwick Port Authority, which looks forward to securing decommissioning work on major offshore structures in the North Sea. The project could create up to 150 jobs in the Shetland Islands and Aberdeen, and deliver a scale of industrial capacity unmatched across these islands.

Johann Lamont: The Parliament debated the national parenting strategy this week. There was unanimous agreement that there had to be more support for struggling parents. That support is important because we know that some parents do not get it right, that the child is not always the priority, and that that can have tragic consequences.

Following the Declan Hainey case, the First Minister and I had constructive talks about child protection. Will the First Minister update the chamber on what progress has been made in that area?

The First Minister: I agree that we had constructive talks on that tragic case. As we discussed in the meeting, the Government will move forward through the children and young people's bill that is to be introduced. We will explore options on a range of areas to improve the situation so that we can get it right for every child.

Johann Lamont: We welcome progress. We urge the First Minister to recognise how serious the issue is and how quickly we need to move on it, given that we now know that in March 2010, just two weeks before Declan Hainey was found dead,

Renfrewshire Council received a report from another case review. The case was known as family 10. It is worrying that the review highlighted systemic failures in child protection. In that case, children were mistreated to a deeply distressing degree. The family 10 review was too late to save Declan. Two serious case reviews in Renfrewshire have found systemic failure, yet no one has been held to account. Does the First Minister believe that, after one death and two findings of systemic failure, Renfrewshire Council was best placed to investigate itself?

The First Minister: Johann Lamont should accept that the reviews that have taken place have certainly identified failings in provision. As have other investigations in the past, those reviews inform our intent to improve and enhance child protection across Scotland. These are vital matters and I am certain that if we show good will on all sides we can take them forward together as a united Parliament. We have both a legislative framework and a forum for ensuring that we improve not just our current inspection services, but our monitoring services. I think that, on that basis, the Parliament will do itself great credit by taking things forward in that manner on behalf of Scotland's children.

Johann Lamont: Hoping for it does not make it happen. This is a really serious issue and here is the real point: in 2009 the First Minister told members in the chamber that we had the best child protection inspection system

"anywhere in these islands and perhaps anywhere in Europe."—[*Official Report*, 25 June 2009; c 18904.]

Indeed, before the case of family 10 and before the death of Declan Hailey, the First Minister said in the chamber that his inspection system had found Renfrewshire Council to be one of the top five councils in Scotland. A few months after Declan Hailey was found dead, the inspectors went back to Renfrewshire Council to follow up on their first visit. This time, they concluded that Renfrewshire Council's efforts to keep children safe were excellent. They reported:

"As a result of the very good quality of provision to protect children and meet their needs, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection."

In the case of family 10 there were systemic failures. In the case of Declan Hailey there were fatal systemic failures. Yet, before and after those failures, the First Minister's inspectors provided two positive reports, the second of which claimed that the protection of children was excellent.

In light of the contrast between the First Minister's rhetoric about child protection and the reality, does the First Minister still believe that his inspection regime is the best in Europe?

The First Minister: Three times in that question, Johann Lamont referred to my inspection regime and my inspectors, but those people undertake vital work on behalf of the Parliament and the country. There is no doubt that the process of inspection and re-inspection has resulted in an improvement in child protection throughout Scotland. There is also no doubt that that systematic process, which I believed was supported across the chamber, has resulted in substantial improvements. As Johann Lamont must know,

"no place in the world can give a 100 per cent guarantee on the safety of all its children."

Tam Baillie, the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People, said that in January.

There are always—and should be—lessons to learn from such tragic cases. The SNP Administration and, I hope, the Parliament are perfectly prepared to learn them and are capable of doing so. If we act together, in not just legislative but administrative terms, we can further improve the situation for and protection of Scotland's children. We can do that on the basis that it is something that all politicians of all political persuasions want to do, and as a national Parliament we can take national action on child protection.

Johann Lamont: The people who are carrying out the inspections are doing an important job, but they are accountable and the First Minister is responsible for the capacity of the system to deliver. The First Minister's approach seems to be a counsel of despair. Although we cannot provide 100 per cent protection, we must do everything that we can to understand where the failures are in order to ensure that they do not happen again. Can he explain why the best child protection inspection system in Europe has failed to find the systemic failures that led to the maltreatment of children by a family and a baby's death? Can he explain why, after those tragedies caused by systemic failures, the best child protection inspection system in Europe still says that the child protection service is excellent?

The family 10 inspection was being carried out at exactly the same time as the significant review of the Declan Hailey case was saying that there were at least 16 actions that needed to be taken. In the light of those failures, will the First Minister please order a full independent public inquiry into child protection, not just in Renfrewshire but throughout Scotland, so that the public can be confident that our systems are protecting our most vulnerable children?

The First Minister: Let us see whether we can identify areas of agreement. Child protection measures require constant vigilance, therefore the

Parliament should support our partners on the ground across Scotland to ensure that there is continual improvement. We have updated “Getting Our Priorities Right”, the good practice guidance for professionals who work with children where substance misuse is a factor. We are also piloting the risk assessment toolkit, which will help with the protection of vulnerable children throughout Scotland. The development of a multi-agency learning and development framework is crucial because, in a number of tragic cases, it has been clear that the contact between the various responsible agencies has not been as good as it could have been. The revision of the child protection guidance for Scottish health professionals—the pink book—is also moving forward, and we will introduce a children’s services bill that will ensure that all children’s services have a stronger focus on early years prevention and early intervention. Those are the actions of the Administration.

The Parliament, which is not in the slightest complacent about the tragedies that have occurred, should know two things. First, the responsibility for wrongdoing and for the most tragic cases lies with the perpetrator. The idea that individual social workers, although accountable, are responsible for the actions of others is not the way that Scotland should look at these matters. We should support our social workers and social work departments to give the best possible protection to Scotland’s children.

The second thing, which I hope will carry the entire Parliament, is that the actions that have been identified, both administrative and legislative, show no sign of complacency on the issue, but reflect an understanding that constant vigilance and continuous improvement are absolutely necessary. As we bring forward the measures, as a Government and as a Parliament, I hope that members throughout the chamber will rise to the occasion on behalf of Scotland’s children.

Prime Minister (Meetings)

2. Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the First Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister. (S4F-00667)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I have no plans to meet the Prime Minister in the near future. Last time I met him, he told me that he was not particularly fussed about the date of the independence referendum. It is obvious that he did not impart that information to Ruth Davidson.

Ruth Davidson: It is a topsy-turvy week when the First Minister is quoted as saying that he will have to wait 1,000 days to have even a long shot at winning a referendum.

A fortnight ago, I and other members asked the First Minister a simple question—a question that he said he would not answer because he would tell all only to the Leveson inquiry. Unfortunately for the First Minister, Lord Leveson has entered the fray, saying that he is not in any way seeking to challenge the ability of Parliaments to proceed as appropriate. So I ask the First Minister again: was he hacked?

The First Minister: I suggest that Ruth Davidson read Lord Leveson’s statement, which is totally consistent with the view that I gave to this Parliament. She should reflect that, after Lord Leveson’s statement, Harriet Harman withdrew a range of parliamentary questions, accepting that Lord Leveson had indicated that the timetable should be perfectly satisfactory for meeting the requirements of both the judicial inquiry and parliamentary accountability.

I suggest to Ruth Davidson that she should accept the bona fides and good wishes on the issue.

Ruth Davidson: Perhaps the First Minister should accept this quotation from a Scottish parliamentary spokesman, who said this week:

“Ministers are accountable to the Scottish Parliament, and it is the role of MSPs to hold Ministers to account.”

I am doing my job, and I am asking the First Minister to do his. He is accountable to the Parliament and to the people of Scotland, but he is currently holding both of them in contempt. Therefore, I continue to ask: First Minister, were you hacked?

The First Minister: I am certainly accountable to the people of Scotland, as are all politicians in the chamber, but Ruth Davidson’s accountability to the people of Scotland has not been working out very well, according to election results.

After Lord Leveson made his comments this week, the Opposition in the Westminster Parliament accepted that the timetable for information was perfectly satisfactory, both in terms of the provision of information to the judicial inquiry, which was established on an all-party basis, and in terms of fulfilling the absolute requirement of parliamentary accountability and responsibility.

I could go on about the revelations this week about the incredible contact between Conservative Prime Ministers and major figures such as Rebekah Brooks, but let us just take it on the basis that I am happy to go to Lord Leveson and give a full account of my actions. I think that I will be in substantially less trouble when I give that account than certain members of Ruth Davidson’s party. That is the way in which we should do things, and

I will be delighted to answer Ruth Davidson's and anybody else's parliamentary questions.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Although welcome reductions in *Clostridium difficile* and MRSA levels were reported yesterday, for which we should rightly praise national health service staff, does the First Minister share my concern that, in this week alone, we have seen six deaths at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley, more than 30 wards closed and more than 100 people affected by norovirus across Scotland?

Aside from sending our condolences to the families concerned, will he agree with me that, in light of the substantial rise in norovirus, we need to consider establishing a specialist laboratory to combat that rising level of infection?

The First Minister: I am sure that Jackie Baillie will have seen the comments from Harry Burns in relation to the arguments for such a laboratory, and the stress on clinical efficiency in combating norovirus and other hospital-acquired infections.

We send our sympathy, as a Parliament, to those who have been caught up in the latest outbreak and those whose relatives have died. They have the assurance, as I think Jackie Baillie indicated in her question, that we treat hospital-acquired infections with the utmost seriousness.

The dramatic reductions in a range of hospital-acquired infections are due in substantial part to the efforts that are being made. I know that, in the past, Jackie Baillie has suggested that Scotland is the epicentre of hospital-acquired infections. I also know that her comments were based on a 2006 survey. Given the improvements that have been made, I hope that she will accept that the clinical determination to tackle norovirus and the other hospital-acquired infections is amply demonstrated in the decline in those infections. We realise that we must do everything possible and strive to our utmost to tackle those infections because of the tragic consequences that they have for patients and, indeed, for hospital staff.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): There are concerns in Aberdeen, the north-east and throughout the country about the recent ditching of a Super Puma helicopter. In light of the impact on employment in the oil and gas industry, what discussions has the Scottish Government had with the United Kingdom Government and its agencies regarding the grounding of the Bond Super Puma fleet?

The First Minister: First, I pay tribute to the pilots of the Bond helicopter that ditched last week for their excellent airmanship and quick thinking in the circumstances. [*Applause.*]

The decision to suspend operations of Bond's Super Puma fleet was a matter for the operator,

pending investigation into the cause of the incident. Both the air accident investigation branch and the helicopter manufacturer—Eurocopter—were quickly on the scene to investigate. In recognition of the importance of helicopter operations to the offshore industry, the AAIB disseminated the results of its initial investigation very quickly, which enabled Bond, in discussion with Eurocopter, to lift the flight suspension. The Scottish Government liaised at all times with Bond and the Department for Transport during that period, and I am satisfied that the correct action was taken in those difficult circumstances. I repeat my appreciation of the skill and human endeavour of the pilots concerned.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): The First Minister will be aware of the BBC trust's rubber-stamping of the BBC's job-cutting exercise, delivering quality first, and of the grave concerns that have been expressed about the potential impact of those cuts in Scotland. Does he agree with the BBC audience council Scotland's submission to the process, which expresses serious concerns about those proposals and believes that the implications for services in Scotland have not been fully explored? Does he believe that there is a basis for asking the BBC trust to review its decision?

The First Minister: Yes, I do. I share Sandra White's concern, and obviously I have discussed the matter with the BBC at some length to recognise its position as the national broadcaster in Scotland. It is difficult to reconcile the budget provision for the BBC in Scotland with its obligation in terms of not just the generality of programmes, but current affairs coverage at a particularly important time in Scotland's history. I hope that the BBC will reconsider, and I hope that there is a case to go to the BBC trust—I believe that there is—and that something of the damaging cuts can now be reversed.

Fostering Disabled Children

3. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to provide support to families fostering disabled children. (S4F-00675)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): It is important to recognise the role that foster carers play in caring for some of Scotland's most vulnerable children. Their dedication and commitment to developing the lives of those young people is a massive undertaking.

The Government is committed to a reform of children's services to ensure that every child gets the support that they need through embedding the principle of getting it right for every child in statute. We are committed to speeding up the change across public services and bringing forward

legislation to put that into effect. Children with disabilities in foster care and other care settings will, of course, benefit in particular from the programme.

Liam McArthur: As the First Minister will be aware, this week's Quarriers report provides depressing confirmation that children in Scotland with multiple disabilities and complex needs face the greatest obstacles in achieving a foster placement. Exhaustion and a lack of support were given as the main reasons for reluctance among three quarters of foster carers to take on a child with such complex needs.

Given those findings, what commitment can the First Minister give that targeted support will be available across the country to give foster carers the confidence that they can take on those more challenging roles? In particular, will he ensure that specific training and respite care are in place for foster parents across Scotland? If we accept that we are failing too many of our looked-after children, does he agree that the Quarriers report confirms that the failure with some of the most vulnerable children in our society is even more shameful?

The First Minister: We will examine with substantial care the Quarriers report and the YouGov survey for Quarriers. We are committed to promoting and reforming foster care to meet the increasing needs of children in care, especially those with additional support needs.

As Liam McArthur will know, the current financial support depends on the age profile of the child, but it also considers intensive needs and can range from £160 to £525 per week per child. Through the children and young people's bill that is to be introduced, we will explore options to introduce a set minimum allowance for fostering. I am sure that Liam McArthur will contribute substantially to discussions on that. He can be assured that we are very aware of and concerned about some of the aspects highlighted by the YouGov survey for Quarriers.

Alcohol Minimum Pricing (Effects)

4. Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the findings are of the latest research on the effects of minimum pricing of alcohol. (S4F-00673)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): The Scottish Government announced on Monday that the minimum price would be 50p per unit, taking account of inflation levels since these matters were last discussed. Academic modelling from the University of Sheffield shows that that price will result in 60 fewer deaths, 1,600 fewer hospital admissions, 3,500 fewer crimes and 32,300 fewer days of absence from work per year.

Bob Doris: Given the benefits to public health and the potential savings to the national health service, Labour's continued opposition to minimum pricing is both opportunistic and flawed. Despite Labour, however, minimum pricing shall be delivered. Does the First Minister therefore agree that the planned independent review of the benefits of minimum pricing is crucial both to allow on-going parliamentary scrutiny in this place and to demonstrate to the wider public the significant health and social benefits that minimum pricing can deliver?

The First Minister: I agree. NHS Health Scotland will lead on a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of minimum pricing. Consumption and harm will be closely monitored over time, and any differential impacts between different groups of the population—or, indeed, any unintended consequences—will be identified and explored.

There is now a substantial majority in this chamber in favour of minimum pricing, and I welcome that cross-party support. Members on the Labour benches should perhaps be aware that that support extends not just across the chamber but beyond this country. For example, I noted that the Labour Party's United Kingdom shadow health minister, Diane Abbott, in response to the news from Scotland, tweeted that she believes that Westminster should match the Scottish proposal. Scottish Labour is now in the truly remarkable position of being isolated on the policy, not just in this Parliament but in its own political party.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Can I say how delighted I am that the First Minister pays such attention to tweets from Diane Abbott? I look forward to that continuing.

The First Minister will be aware that we made it clear at stage 1 of the bill that Labour will support minimum unit pricing if the windfall to alcohol retailers is fully clawed back. The First Minister has the mechanism of the public health levy to do that, so why, at a time when his Government is cutting the alcohol treatment budget, will he not claw back the £125 million profit, rather than have it simply line the pockets of supermarket shareholders each and every year?

The First Minister: If on this issue Labour is motivated by concern for supermarket profits, why did it vote against the health levy affecting supermarkets? Jackie Baillie goes into one debate vitally concerned about the economic position of supermarkets and then turns up at First Minister's question time to complain that they will get a windfall.

It perhaps depends on which debate Jackie Baillie is talking in or which Parliament the debate is in but, basically, is it not the case that the Labour Party's opposition to minimum pricing boils

down to the fact that it is a Scottish National Party proposal? Never mind the benefits to Scotland, the impact on health, the lives that will be saved or the beneficial effect on the national health service: it is an SNP proposal and therefore it must be wrong. I say to Jackie Baillie that, in all conscience, that sort of attitude should be condemned to the past. It is out of step with the people of Scotland.

Margo MacDonald (Lothian) (Ind): I thank the Parliament for its welcome, although members might now not be too pleased at what they welcomed. I do not imagine that the First Minister had time when he was in Norway to ask the Norwegians how they manage their drink problem—they, too, like a drink. They come from the same sort of origin as we do and they have the same sort of history. Did he take the opportunity to discuss the possibility of Scotland becoming a member of the European Free Trade Association? Given our close relationship with Norway on energy, that seems a much better berth than the bill that would seek to absorb us in a common energy policy for the European Union.

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): I am afraid that that was very wide of the mark.

The First Minister: The range of discussions in Norway touched on many issues, including minimum pricing of alcohol.

Care Home Patients (Prescription Drugs)

5. Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Back to some reality. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Dr Simpson: To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the finding in the report by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in Scotland that care home patients are being prescribed powerful drugs for long periods of time without proper checks. (S4F-00682)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I wonder whether Richard Simpson's aside was a sign that he is not totally comfortable with the Labour Party's stance on some health issues.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society's report, "Improving Pharmaceutical Care in Care Homes", does not make the claim that Richard Simpson suggests that it makes. The report is a positive and welcome contribution to the future provision of care to the group of patients involved. The report's main finding highlights that pharmacists, working as part of an integrated multidisciplinary team, can improve the quality and safety of care for people in care homes.

The review of pharmaceutical care for patients in the community in Scotland, which was announced in October last year, is as part of its work considering evidence about the

pharmaceutical care service needs of residents in care homes and how best they should be met, with an emphasis on pharmacists' clinical role in achieving service delivery.

Dr Simpson: I welcome the First Minister's response and the group that is working on the issue. Is he aware of the research that was published in *The British Journal of General Practice* last month, which showed that, despite a welcome reduction in the prescribing of psychoactive drugs, residents in care homes are still 22 times more likely to be on antipsychotic medication? Is he also aware of the study that the General Medical Council commissioned on errors in general practice prescribing? Both those studies reinforce the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland's report of 2009 called "Remember, I'm still me".

Why is the Government denying my constituents in care homes the right, when they have capacity, to register for long-term condition monitoring by community pharmacists? Will the First Minister ensure that residents who do not have capacity have contracts with pharmacists, as in Tayside, to ensure safer and more effective prescribing for that vulnerable group and to tackle the problem of excessive psychoactive treatments?

The First Minister: The issue is substantial and important. I was puzzled because Richard Simpson's original question referred to a claim that the report made. As I am sure that he now realises, the report did not make that claim—it referred to the report "Remember, I'm still me" by the Mental Welfare Commission and the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care, to which he just referred.

My first answer was about looking at what is in the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's report, because it makes a number of extremely positive suggestions to take forward the matter. Given Richard Simpson's expertise in such issues, I will certainly look carefully at whether his contribution can be taken into account, in addition to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's report.

Scottish Government (Public Relations Services)

6. John Lamont (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the First Minister, in light of the Scottish Government's recent decision to hire a public relations firm, what its position is on whether a mechanism should be established to ensure that such services are not used for party-political purposes. (S4F-00688)

The First Minister (Alex Salmond): I am afraid to disappoint John Lamont, but the Scottish Government is not hiring a PR company. I am desperately surprised that he has not managed to

open his *Scotsman* to page 2 today, where he can read the apology, which says:

“we accept that the headline”

to the article

“did not accurately reflect the facts and fell short of our usual high standards. We apologise for the error and are happy to set the record straight.”

I am sure that John Lamont was about to say exactly the same thing.

John Lamont: I thank the First Minister for that very helpful response.

Given that the referendum on Scotland's future is fast approaching, does the First Minister accept that mechanisms should be put in place across Government to ensure that what is being done is the job of government and not simply the promotion of the Scottish National Party's separatist agenda?

The First Minister: That was a neat shimmy from the original question, was it not? I take it that John Lamont accepts that the premise of his original question was deeply mistaken and indeed total nonsense.

It gets worse, though, because when I had a look back to check when the services were first tendered, I found that that was not even under the Liberal-Labour Administration in Scotland but goes right back to the Scottish Office during the Conservative Administration. The idea that Michael Forsyth, that epitome of the middle way in politics, could possibly have led the Conservative Party in the direction of propaganda rather than information is something that I think that John Lamont and I agree is not possible.

Now that John Lamont knows that the report on which he based his question was totally mistaken, perhaps he will agree that the information that comes from this Government is information for the people of Scotland.

Alcohol Abuse (Armed Forces)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-02321, in the name of Paul Wheelhouse, on addressing alcohol abuse in Scotland's armed forces. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the work of veterans in Scotland and the sacrifices that they have made during their time in the armed forces; understands that there is a reportedly high level of substance misuse, particularly involving alcohol, among not only veterans, but also serving personnel; expresses concern at what it sees as the limited action that has been taken to support those with such problems; notes that the organisation, Combat Stress, has argued that many addiction problems are linked to self-medication for mental health problems; understands that research by Poppyscotland suggests that veterans in Scotland are more likely to experience alcohol misuse and homelessness than those from the rest of the UK; notes that 13% of serving personnel who responded to a King's College Centre for Military Health research study said that alcohol misuse was a problem for them and that 26% of these respondents were under 25; further notes the evaluation of the Gateways for Veterans pilot scheme in Inverclyde, which claimed that “vulnerable veterans in Scotland may be at particular risk of abusing alcohol due to the exacerbating factor of a culture of drinking in Scotland”; supports the Inverclyde initiative and other similar work, including that carried out by Veterans Scotland, its member organisations and other groups that provide support for veterans on matters such as substance abuse, homelessness and employment opportunities and in tackling the drinking culture that it believes exists in the armed forces; recognises the work of organisations such as the NHS that aim to provide the necessary support to armed services personnel who leave the forces with a substance misuse problem, and notes the calls from veterans' organisations to the Ministry of Defence to provide greater welfare support to veterans and serving armed forces personnel to significantly reduce the incidence of alcohol abuse and its subsequent impact on the lives of veterans once they have completed their service.

12:32

Paul Wheelhouse (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank members who signed my motion and those who will stay in the chamber during lunch time to hear the debate. In particular, I thank Opposition members for the support that has enabled the debate to be heard. I also thank Veterans Scotland—Bob McFarlane in particular—and Poppyscotland for their support in my endeavours to secure the debate.

People who are part of a generation the majority of whom—unlike the minister—have had the good fortune never to have to go to war and experience all its horrors can only imagine what our servicemen and women go through. I put on record my support for all our serving armed forces personnel and all our veterans. The debate

focuses on the alarming levels of alcohol misuse in the armed forces, but I do not want that to detract in any way from the vital importance of the armed forces' work or from the courage, heroism and professionalism that members of the forces demonstrate daily while they are conducting duties on our behalf.

Indeed, my admiration for our forces inspired me to join the cross-party group on armed forces veterans. The origins of the motion were heartfelt pleas by non-MSP members of the cross-party group, who asked MSPs on the group to seek a debate to raise awareness of the scale of the problem and to encourage the Ministry of Defence to confront the issue.

When I approached Veterans Scotland to indicate that I was willing to take the matter up on the organisation's and others' behalf, I was made aware of a key study on alcohol misuse, which was undertaken by Dr Nicola Fear, from the King's centre for military health research. The study, which is one of several that link alcohol and drug abuse to combat stress, revealed stark and alarming figures. The researchers undertook an extensive survey of 9,990 service personnel, and in the region of 13 per cent of respondents said that misuse of alcohol was a problem for them, either during or after their service. Further, the research indicated that the number of armed forces personnel who are misusing alcohol might be higher in Scotland than it is elsewhere. That is also indicated in the evaluation of the gateways for veterans pilot in Inverclyde, which I mentioned in the motion.

The King's centre for military health's study highlighted that, during the period from 1998 to 2004, eight of the worst 10 local authority areas in the United Kingdom for alcohol-related deaths were in Scotland, with the average death rates in Scotland almost double those for the UK as a whole. I do not want to cover ground that has already been widely debated in the chamber to do with the cultural problem that we have in Scotland, so I will leave the analysis of that there. However, I noted that the surgeon general himself cited wider societal change as a factor that influences alcohol consumption in the services. It is my opinion that the unique pressures that are faced by forces personnel fan the flames caused by societal practice.

Even more concerning is the fact that the study's figures show that 26 per cent of respondents aged under 25 felt that alcohol misuse was a problem for them. The figure rises from 11 per cent of those who have not been deployed to combat to 23 per cent of those of all ages who have served in a combat role.

At the most recent meeting of the CPG in April, I was grateful to the surgeon general, Vice Admiral

Philip Raffaelli, for joining the meeting to hear the concerns addressed by my motion and to attempt to allay them. The surgeon general and Jon Parkin, head of veterans services at the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, suggested that early leavers from the armed forces often have the most problems with alcohol misuse, which coincides with the evidence of the high proportion of young people with that problem.

If that is the case, it is all the more important that the MOD steps up its efforts to identify problem drinkers in the recruitment process, provides a stronger hand in deterring the adoption of a macho drinking culture during service and provides ever-greater support and signposting advice to individuals to get help. That could avoid the wastage of losing highly trained professional service personnel to problem drinking and the behavioural changes that come with it. Indeed, alcohol may well be a strong contributory factor to many early departures.

Also at the CPG meeting were a number of CPG members who are serving, ex-serving and associated armed forces personnel, and representatives of agencies such as First Base Agency in Dumfries and Galloway. They raised concerns about the easy availability of cheaply priced alcohol in on-base messes and other facilities, and expressed concern about the effect that subsidised alcohol and the ability to buy alcohol on a mess bill, rather than with cash, had in helping to encourage a binge drinking culture in the forces. Although the days of rum tots in the navy are long gone, the inherent drinking culture remains—a point recognised by the surgeon general. From anecdotal evidence, we believe that alcohol consumption is often encouraged as a means of decompression for those coming back from combat.

Although I accept that a degree of responsibility must be shouldered by people such as MSPs who are actively making laws to protect vulnerable people, MOD bases are in effect off-limits to us, to civilian licensing authorities and to health professionals. The bases have their own policing, health and disciplinary procedures. I therefore strongly urge the MOD, as the body responsible for the mental and physical wellbeing of our serving forces personnel, to review the support that it gives to serving forces personnel and to train more senior officers and non-commissioned officers to deal with and support their charges for whom alcohol misuse has become a problem.

I encourage the MOD to do more to control the use of cheap alcohol and promotions, if not to remove alcohol from barracks altogether, which would not make us very popular. Also, I encourage the MOD to do more to educate personnel

properly on the risks that they face in adopting a heavy drinking culture.

The motion encourages the national health service and the MOD to work together to provide even greater welfare support to veterans. We recognise that various veterans organisations have a strong role to play in addressing the risk of mental health issues in our forces.

Alcohol, when it is consumed irresponsibly, can destroy lives and prospects for relationships, getting a home or a job. Ultimately, it can destroy people's health. Anyone who heard the recent BBC Radio Scotland phone-in on "Call Kaye" will have heard first-hand experiences of today's veterans and their families, who feel that they were inadequately prepared for life outside the forces.

While serving, forces personnel benefit from a heightened sense of community, and the support of their comrades in arms is a great comfort while they are deployed. That runs alongside the close network of families left at home, often living in quarters and providing an alternative family for each other. However, it is almost unimaginable for civilians to appreciate the sense of loss that many feel when they leave the armed forces, even when they have not lost close comrades in combat.

The King's study indicates that there is quite a sharp rise in alcohol misuse problems among those who come back from combat roles. I suspect that many combat stress cases go undiagnosed and the sufferers may end up self-medicating with alcohol, having learned while they were in the forces that that is an accepted way of decompressing.

In February, the UK Government responded to the House of Commons Defence Committee's report "The Armed Forces Covenant in Action". The response recognised the work done to provide medical treatment to wounded, injured and sick service personnel in theatres of operation and during rehabilitation at home. I hope that that work will continue. I highlight the "Fighting Fit" report from 2010, which says:

"alcohol abuse is significantly associated with service in the Armed Forces and there is evidence that it is more common among combat veterans. Mental illness is a root cause of both homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system."

The MOD proposes to allow serving personnel to carry forward an NHS number through their military career—traditionally, when people join the forces, they have given up their NHS number, which has made it difficult to track them once they leave. It proposes to implement that policy in England, and will enter discussions with the Scottish Government as well. That will improve our

tracking of veterans and give us a better understanding of their medical history.

The motion discusses those who find alcohol misuse a problem while still serving as well as after they have left active service. I want to draw attention to that, because it is not just a problem of veterans—the problem starts while people are in the forces.

I dedicate this members' business debate to those who have given their lives for us and, crucially, to those who return from serving their country. Many of them continue to fight their own private battles once the guns have gone silent, and they deserve our full support.

12:41

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I declare an interest, as I am a member of the William Simpson's home trust, which I will refer to in my speech.

I congratulate Paul Wheelhouse not only on securing the debate but on his excellent analysis of the problem. I am sorry that I have not been able to attend meetings of the cross-party group on armed forces veterans, which I attended in the previous session.

Our soldiers are exposed to the most horrific scenes and situations while taking part in combat to protect our country. On return, some find the memories and flashbacks that are caused by their time in battle unbearable and turn to alcohol in an attempt to forget the tragedies that they have seen. We need to have a better support unit in place, to identify not only the tell-tale signs of the mental scars of war but also, as Paul Wheelhouse said, the initial signs of alcohol problems, which develop before that stage and which can be fundamental to our understanding of the situation.

We need to offer packages that deliver not only effective medical care, in general physical terms—things have improved in that regard—but more extensive psychiatric and psychological care. Because of the line of work that they were involved in, many people who have served in the armed forces feel that it is a weakness to admit to having a problem. We must do more to ensure that those brave men and women are able to come forward and speak about their problems.

Recently, I worked as a consultant addictions psychiatrist in West Lothian, which showed me something of the extent to which alcohol and drug use covers up post-traumatic stress from conflict, going back to the Falklands conflict, which I know that the minister was involved in, and to both Iraq wars and Afghanistan. I found that the expert help that I was able to get for some of those veterans at Hollybush house was invaluable. I know that the

Government has given support to that care home, and I hope that it will continue to do so.

There are some fine examples of other organisations and individuals who have created packages to support current serving personnel and veterans. One that I have been engaged with is Gardening Leave, a charity that was founded by Anne Baker Cresswell, which provides current and former servicemen and women with gardens in which they can grow plants and fruit in a safe and relaxed environment while contributing as much or as little as they choose. That might sound rather simplistic, but therapeutic gardening is critically important as a measure across Scotland not only for this group but for others. Trellis in Perth in my constituency co-ordinates 160 such therapeutic gardening projects. Gardening Leave is developing more centres and I hope that, where those centres do not operate, the Scottish Government will consider talking to Trellis about engaging with veterans, because some of them benefit enormously from those projects.

Another supportive organisation in my constituency is the William Simpson's home in Plean, which I mentioned earlier. It has existed for more than 100 years and looks after people with alcohol-related brain damage. More than 50 per cent of those individuals are veterans. Supporting them is important. The home is trying to raise capital to fund a new development programme to modernise its facility. Unfortunately, we have been unable to garner any Government support for that yet. I know that the economic situation is difficult, but I suggest that the minister might want to consider giving it some support.

I acknowledge the work of the Government in Scotland, previously in partnership with the UK Labour Government, which is reflected in the joint meeting of the veterans and mental health cross-party groups in the previous session of Parliament, where work was taken forward to ensure that those coming out of our armed forces are supported, that problems are identified at an earlier stage—and indeed in service—and that treatment and support are offered.

The work of charities such as Help for Heroes has an important role to play and they need to be engaged in the process.

12:45

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): As convener of the cross-party group on armed forces veterans, I am delighted to be able to take part in the debate. As other members have done, I commend Paul Wheelhouse for bringing the motion to the chamber. I know that he put a lot of work into getting the wording of the motion right and being

careful not to point the finger of blame too accusingly in any particular direction. I commend him for that—he is right not to do so because, although it is easy simply to blame this or that Government, this or that theatre of war or this or that regiment, it will do nothing to solve the problem that is so accurately highlighted in the motion.

The truth is that this is not about Governments, fields of war or regiments but about people. It is about people who have signed up to a job of work that may very well demand that they put their lives on the line in our defence, and it is about how we treat those people while they are undertaking that job of work and, perhaps even more important, as they prepare to return to civilian life—indeed, to a civilian life that offers none of the protection, camaraderie or peer support that they will most likely have come to depend on as servicemen and women.

There is a remarkable charity called Southwest Scotland RnR, which is run by a constituent of mine called Jennefer Tobin. Jennefer comes from a military background and she knows what soldiering entails. Some years ago, she was struck by the bland, somewhat uncomprehending faces of the troops she saw returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and decided, in her inimitable fashion, that some of those returning soldiers needed what she calls a jolly good holiday. She contacted the regiment, converted her home in Dumfriesshire, cajoled, persuaded and attracted a veritable army of local volunteers, and built up an incredibly effective means of getting returning servicemen and women, all of whom are wounded—sometimes physically but more often mentally—back on to the straight and narrow.

I once asked Jennefer how she measured the success of the exercise, and she said that if they are sleeping a full night's sleep and laughing naturally by the end of the week, it has worked. It was not until I met one of the groups that had arrived for her unique form of treatment that I saw exactly what she meant. They were clearly a group of young people—in this case men—in a very fragile state of mind. They were young lads just back from Afghanistan, who were almost all from difficult and challenging backgrounds and who had quite possibly signed up to escape from those backgrounds. What they had signed up to was probably a heck of a shock to them.

That will, I am sure, be replicated throughout the military. When they are sent into action, those brave young people will naturally seek comfort and reassurance with their mates over a few cheap subsidised drinks in the safety and security of base camp at the end of the day—comfort and reassurance that quickly becomes a daily habit and probably just as easily becomes a

dependency. It is not hard to see how someone like that—and there will be many of them—will have the greatest difficulty when they are thrown back into the bear pit of civilian life.

At the most recent meeting of the cross-party group, we heard of the considerable efforts that are being made in the armed forces to address the problems early. Those efforts are commendable, yet there clearly remains a huge dichotomy between what the military thinks it is returning to civvy street and what the numerous charities that pick up the pieces know is being returned to civvy street. There remains a great deal to be done. We owe it to those incredible servicemen and women to do everything that we can to ensure that it is done. Ending that dichotomy is our challenge. I suggest that it is also our duty.

12:49

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I thank my colleague Paul Wheelhouse for lodging this important motion for debate.

We owe a huge debt to the service personnel who put themselves at great risk to keep us safe. The risk of death in the Army is 150 times higher than the risk for the general working population, and the loss of life in the armed forces is a debt that we will never be able to fully repay. Although a lot of good work is being done, we need a more concerted effort to ensure that when those in the armed forces return from the field, they are better supported in their transition back into civilian life.

As the motion states, there is a wealth of evidence that links alcohol and drug misuse in veterans to self-medication for mental health problems, and we need to examine our attitudes and responses to both those issues. We know from the huge number of studies in that field that alcohol and drugs have historically been used by military personnel to cope with the intense stress of battle and as a way of mediating the transition from the heightened experience of combat to “normal” routine life, which is a transition that many of us cannot envisage.

Coupled with that change is the culture of drink in the armed forces that existed in the 1980s and 1990s, when alcohol was used as an aid to team building and there was an element of the train hard, play hard mentality. It is no coincidence that the service personnel who were in the armed forces at the height of that culture are now the ex-service personnel who are seeking help.

That situation is exacerbated by Scotland's relationship with alcohol. As the motion mentions, the Inverclyde pilot scheme referred to Scottish veterans being at particular risk because of Scotland's attitude to drinking. There are members in the chamber who are doing all that they can to

ensure that Scotland's relationship with alcohol changes. We are all aware that, too often, already vulnerable groups in Scotland are being drawn to alcohol misuse as a self-medication tool. While that culture exists, we as a society have a duty to help those brave men and women on their return to civilian life.

There is evidence that that armed forces mentality has changed to some degree. There is far less tolerance of alcohol intake during the week than there was previously, and there is zero tolerance on tour. If the mentality can change within the armed forces, it can surely change outwith them.

Whether we like it or not, there is still an underlying shame and stigma attached to the mental health issues that often go hand in hand with alcohol and drug misuse by veterans. That is highlighted by the fact that, on average, it takes 13 years from leaving the service to getting in contact with organisations such as Combat Stress, Veterans Scotland or—more locally to me—Glasgow's Helping Heroes.

However, although society could do more to break the taboo on mental health and not allow substance abuse to be so readily seen as the answer, there are groups, such as those that I have just named, that are working tirelessly to help veterans to acclimatise to civilian life again. Glasgow's Helping Heroes is one such group, which acts as a one-stop referral service for serving personnel, veterans and their dependants or carers. Of the many areas in which it helps veterans, providing information on local services to treat the underlying issues causing substance abuse is an extremely important one.

Interestingly, when the organisation was set up, it was generally those who fall into the combat stress average who were attending. They were male and in their mid-to-late 40s, and predominantly had been in the Army for less than 10 years and had undertaken at least one operational duty. Many of those self-medicating with alcohol were—and still are—homeless.

Age is certainly a factor. Among the younger veterans who are now attending, there is a lower incidence of alcohol misuse—although the figures are still too high—which correlates to the change in culture in the armed services. One therefore hopes that the tide is turning.

However, there is, and will continue to be, a huge demand for veterans centres. The Scottish Government has set up the Scottish veterans fund, which recently announced that more than £80,000 has been awarded to 11 groups countrywide to offer support and services to our veterans. The UK Government has also set aside

money to help to provide and improve veterans services.

In my constituency, Cathcart old parish church, led by the Rev Neil Galbraith, is working with Glasgow's Helping Heroes and other veterans organisations to create its own veterans centre in the church to offer services to ex-service personnel in the south of the city. The minister has already visited the project. The venue is ideally placed, with the Territorial Army stationed close by as well as great transport links and a local college that is keen to get involved in supporting veterans. Once the centre comes to fruition—the group is meeting today to move that forward—it will be a huge resource that veterans can use to get the help and support that they might need.

I am proud to serve in a Parliament for a party that has such close ties with its veterans. We must all work together to ensure that all the help and support that is needed is available. With great organisations throughout the country such as Combat Stress, Veterans Scotland, Poppyscotland and Glasgow's Helping Heroes, that help is slowly but surely being provided.

12:54

The Minister for Housing and Transport (Keith Brown): I, too, congratulate Paul Wheelhouse on securing this debate on what is an important issue and am gratified to see members' attempts at being as consensual as possible. I realise that there are a number of very important public policy and resource allocation issues to address but, from my discussions with veterans organisations and veterans themselves, I can tell the chamber that they appreciate the united front that the Parliament has often displayed on veterans' issues. I also welcome members' speeches, which illustrate their very clear interest in the issue and their determination to focus support and assistance on those with alcohol and drug problems.

Dr Richard Simpson will know that I am well aware of the William Simpson's home, as it was previously in my constituency, which he represented before me. Last night, I received a communication from a former MSP, Dennis Canavan, asking me to attend an abseiling event on Sunday. I am tempted to say to Richard Simpson, "If you do, I will, too," but, in any case, my association with the home and its redoubtable chief executive will continue. The home, whose origins are steeped in the military—it was founded by the parents of a returning naval officer—does tremendous work and I will continue to advocate its case in its efforts to raise funds.

In response to Paul Wheelhouse's important point about NHS numbers, I point out that

substantial work is being carried out on that matter. Officials are developing arrangements in partnership with the MOD to allocate numbers to all military personnel in Scotland to facilitate the provision of an NHS record for every serviceperson and the eventual migration of military and health details on to that record. Paul Wheelhouse was quite right to highlight an important issue that many veterans have mentioned directly to me.

I am also delighted to confirm that the Scottish veterans fund, which members have mentioned, has provided support to Gardening Leave to allow it to expand its services into Dundee and that I will be visiting its facility at the Tayforth centre in the very near future.

I know that this issue was discussed in detail at a recent meeting of the Scottish Parliament cross-party group on veterans, which heard from the MOD surgeon general, Vice Admiral Philip Raffaelli. As members have pointed out, it is the responsibility of the armed forces themselves to tackle alcohol and substance misuse by serving personnel. As employers, the three services have put in place clear and unambiguous rules that must be obeyed under pain of court martial. James Dornan suggested that, historically, the armed forces have had a reputation for a work hard, play hard culture. That is understandable and, to some extent, inevitable. However, as Mr Dornan made clear, that culture is changing for the better. Alcohol consumption by service personnel is permitted, provided that it happens in controlled circumstances and off duty. Soldiers, sailors and airmen and women have the armed forces' reputation to maintain—which they do, with pride and honour.

Apart from the very dangerous work that they carry out, service personnel have to work with heavy, sophisticated and dangerous equipment and must do so in full control of their faculties. Everyone is aware that, under such circumstances, no serviceman or woman can be under the influence of alcohol, so we must welcome the fact that the services have programmes for and training on sensible and responsible drinking. Drug use is also strictly forbidden. The armed forces routinely conduct random drug tests and those caught using drugs are dismissed.

It is important to stress that, when they leave the armed forces, the vast majority of service personnel return to civilian life and live quietly and successfully in their communities. No one should take from the debate the idea that service inevitably leads to problems with alcohol, drugs or mental health. However, we recognise that, for some people, problems will arise and might lead to heavy drinking or drug use. That is a tragedy for

the individuals concerned and, as has been made clear in the debate, it often leads to other problems such as family breakdown, a lack of employment opportunities and perhaps even homelessness.

Many types of support are in place to help those with alcohol and drug problems. Naturally, the armed forces are considering better and quicker ways of identifying those who might be at risk of falling into alcohol and drug dependency and that work will, in itself, lead to improved and tailored interventions.

As members have said, a number of service charities offer a range of support packages and I applaud them for their selfless work in support of veterans. They offer invaluable assistance in myriad settings across Scotland, some of which we have heard about today. That is why the Scottish Government has set up the Scottish veterans fund and allocated more than £400,000 to projects of direct support to the veterans community.

The armed forces are a reflection of the society from which they recruit. It is inevitable that some individuals will become involved in problem alcohol or drug use. That can manifest itself in a number of ways. However, despite all that has been said, it is important to recognise that problem alcohol or drug use are no more prevalent in the armed forces than they are in an equivalent demographic profile within wider society. The national alcohol strategy, "Changing Scotland's Relationship with Alcohol: A Framework for Action", sets out a broader agenda and adopts a whole-population approach, which is augmented by guidance for the provision of effective alcohol treatment and support services.

The "Quality Alcohol Treatment and Support (QATS)" report from 2011 outlines 14 recommendations that, if embedded in practice, will help to better identify and respond to the specific needs of people, including veterans and those in the armed forces.

Alex Fergusson: I understand entirely what the minister said about the statistics on dependency in the armed forces reflecting those in normal society. One of the earlier speakers mentioned decompression, or coming away from the highly stressful situation of modern service and modern warfare and going back into civilian life. Does the minister accept that that is an issue? Given that the backgrounds from which many people come into the armed services allow potential problem cases to be identified, does he also accept that much more work could be done to identify potential problem cases, and to follow those people through the decompression stage and back into civilian life?

Keith Brown: The member raises two distinct issues, one of which is decompression. Nobody would dispute that that happens. From my limited experience a long time ago of going through a traumatic event, I know that the experience of decompression that happens afterwards was almost always associated with alcohol. One report called it self-medicating. It is obviously a problem. The heightened levels of stress that are associated with serving for long periods of time in Afghanistan or, in the past, Northern Ireland are bound to have an effect, and alcohol comes into that picture.

I do not want to apportion any blame, but it is also true that some have said that the armed forces cannot be held responsible for the people they recruit if they have a pre-existing propensity to be involved with social problems, if I can put it as generally as that. I do not accept that that is the case. For centuries, the armed forces have harvested people from their communities and they have a responsibility to those people. From what I am hearing now from the armed forces and the MOD, they are taking that responsibility seriously. They should continue to do that.

The Alcohol etc (Scotland) Act 2010 came into force on 1 October 2011 and is a significant step in the battle against Scotland's unhealthy relationship with alcohol. The main measures in the act are a ban on quantity discounts in off-sales that encourage customers to purchase more than they might otherwise, a restriction on material promoting alcohol, and the involvement of health boards in licensing issues, notwithstanding Paul Wheelhouse's point about the limited ability of civilian organisations to involve themselves with what goes on on MOD bases.

There is a substantial range of legislation in place, which I mention to point out that the general issue is certainly being taken extremely seriously by the Government. We are aware of some of the particular issues that present themselves in relation to serving service personnel and veterans, which is why we see the breadth of assistance that is available. I do not think that we are at the end of that. We are about to do a refresh of our veterans strategy, and this is one of the issues that will be covered.

I am grateful that the issue has been raised and for the work that has been done by the cross-party group. Raising these issues is the best way of ensuring that we improve our response to dealing with such problems.

13:04

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Executive Question Time

Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy

Carers (Mental Health)

1. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive how it will improve access to mental health services for carers with mental health issues. (S4O-01009)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): We have—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Can we get the minister's microphone on, please?

Michael Matheson: We have legislation that has, at its heart, fundamental principles to ensure equal access to healthcare for all, including carers. Carers have a legal right to an assessment of their own healthcare needs, and services and support should be put in place to meet those needs.

The new mental health strategy, which is to be published in the summer, will set out our future direction for mental health services and health improvement, including how we can better understand and support the role of families and carers.

Together with the significant resources invested in delivery through "Caring Together: The Carers Strategy" and increased funding for short breaks, we are ensuring that carers are supported to manage their responsibilities with confidence and in good health.

Annabel Goldie: The latest figures show that there are 657,000 carers in Scotland. According to a recent study by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, six in 10 carers have suffered a mental health illness. A majority of all the carers who took part in the poll had never sought help or support. Should we not ensure that the national health service takes a much more proactive approach to supporting carers, and that information about what help is available and where to find it is prominently displayed in health centres and libraries?

Michael Matheson: The member raises an important point, and I am aware of the report to which she refers. It is important to recognise the invaluable role that carers play in our society, in supporting cared-for individuals. The Government is doing what it can, through our strategy, to try and assist and support carers in that caring role. I understand the challenge that many carers face in accessing services, and that is why, over the past three years, we have provided £14 million to

health boards through the carers information strategy to make sure that information is provided and available to carers on how they can access support and assistance through the health service.

As I mentioned in my earlier response, we intend to publish our mental health strategy in the summer. In that, we will set out ways in which we intend to try to assist carers and their families in addressing the issues around mental health.

The Presiding Officer: Question 2 is in the name of Joan McAlpine. I note that she is not in the chamber to ask the question. This is not the first time, nor is it the second time, that Ms McAlpine has acted in this way. I expect an explanation from her and an apology for the discourtesy to the chamber by the end of the day.

Health Waiting Times (NHS Grampian)

3. Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what recent discussions ministers have had with NHS Grampian regarding waiting times. (S4O-01011)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Ministers meet regularly with national health service chairs and discuss issues of importance to the NHS, including waiting times. The Minister for Public Health also discussed waiting times at the board's annual review on 1 November 2011.

Lewis Macdonald: I understand from comments reported in *The Sunday Times* that concerns about social unavailability codes were raised with NHS Grampian as long ago as 2009. Did ministers consider making those concerns known to the public? If so, what action did they take?

Nicola Sturgeon: The Information Services Division did not make concerns known to ministers. I am not sure whether Lewis Macdonald was in the chamber for the debate earlier today. If he was, or if he was watching it, I am sure that he appreciates the importance that members on all sides of the chamber attach to the issue.

I have received an assurance that NHS Grampian is applying the new ways guidance around social unavailability correctly. As I have stated before, social unavailability should be used only when a patient has advised that they are not going to be able to accept an appointment for a period of time due to work or social reasons. The vast majority of patients who are socially unavailable have a period of unavailability applied for less than three weeks.

The chief executive has confirmed that, in Grampian, social unavailability is applied only after discussion with the patient. However, to ensure

that rules are being applied appropriately, NHS boards will, this year, undertake an internal audit of their local waiting times management and processes, including reporting mechanisms. Audit Scotland has also indicated that it will undertake a review of waiting times management across Scotland.

Clostridium Difficile (Raigmore Hospital)

4. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will provide an update on the recent outbreak of Clostridium difficile at Raigmore hospital. (S4O-01012)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Two outbreaks of Clostridium difficile in Raigmore hospital have been reported to the Scottish Government in 2012. The first was in January and affected eight patients in wards 4C and 3A. More recently, the Scottish Government was advised of an outbreak in April, which affected three patients in ward 2C. That outbreak was declared over on 23 April. The lessons from debrief meetings that were held by NHS Highland following those outbreaks are currently being taken forward, locally, by the board.

As members are aware, reducing healthcare associated infections is a priority for the Scottish Government and we have put in place a comprehensive programme of actions. The Health Protection Scotland report that was published yesterday shows that good progress has been and is being made by the national health service in reducing outbreaks of C diff.

David Stewart: Members will be well aware that C diff can be a serious intestinal disease, particularly for the old, the frail and the vulnerable. Is the cabinet secretary aware of the Roslin institute study that highlighted the risks of C diff for patients who transfer from large to small hospitals, which is a regular occurrence in the Highlands and Islands? Will the cabinet secretary confirm what detailed screening protocols are in place to protect patients who move from one hospital to another, in order to prevent outbreaks of C diff across Scotland?

Nicola Sturgeon: That is a serious question, and I take the issue extremely seriously. I am aware of the study that the member referred to. As he would expect, as with any such study, the Scottish Government and our HAI task force will carefully consider it and ensure that any lessons that can be learned are applied.

On the details that the member asked about, I am happy to send him some written information about the protocols, practices and procedures that

are in place in order to minimise the risk of infection and cross-infection, not only with regard to the specific issues that he referred to but in general.

I am sure that, like me, the member will welcome the fact that, in the past year, C diff cases have reduced by more than a third. As long as there is one case of an avoidable infection in our hospitals, my view is that we still have more work to do. Nevertheless, that reduction, which follows on from similar reductions in recent years, is welcome. As I did this morning, I put on record my thanks to all the staff in the NHS who have worked hard to deliver that improvement.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Although the infection-control measures in hospitals are welcome, we should not ignore the role of antibiotics in cases of C diff. I understand that antibiotics can kill harmless bacteria while allowing C diff bacteria to multiply in greater numbers. Given the two outbreaks at Raigmore this year, has an audit been done of the prescription—or, perhaps, the overprescription—of antibiotics in the area?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am happy to furnish Mary Scanlon with that information specifically as it applies to NHS Highland and Raigmore. Because she takes a close interest in these matters, I know that she will be aware that antimicrobial prescribing forms a key plank of our efforts to reduce C diff outbreaks. Ensuring that we have appropriate prescribing of antibiotics is an important part of reducing all healthcare associated infections, but it is particularly important in relation to C diff. Indeed, the success in improving the appropriate prescribing of antibiotics—in particular, certain types of antibiotics—has played a significant part in the reductions that I have referred to. Those issues and others must always be kept uppermost in the minds of everyone who is involved in our health boards in order to ensure that reductions of the kind that we have seen continue in the years to come.

New-build Community Health Facilities

5. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what the public consultation process is when national health service boards are considering where to locate new-build community health facilities. (S4O-01013)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): NHS boards must routinely communicate with and involve the communities and people they serve to keep them informed of their plans and performance. When boards propose to change the way in which local

health services are provided, including where services are delivered in the community, it is important that there is robust, visible and effective engagement with the public.

Government guidance was introduced in 2010 to support boards in their statutory duty to inform, engage with and consult their patients and the wider public. The Scottish health council has an important role in advising and supporting NHS boards in meeting that obligation.

Mark Griffin: In Kilsyth, there are much-welcomed plans for the development of a new community health centre. However, along with existing health centre medical staff, I have concerns that there are accessibility issues relating to the preferred site. What can the cabinet secretary do to continue to assure my constituents that users of the new facility will be fully consulted before a final decision is taken on site selection?

Nicola Sturgeon: I will ensure that the member's comments, which I am sure reflect the views of his constituents, are made known to the local health board. The member will appreciate that the matter is one for NHS Lanarkshire. However, it is my understanding—I think the member's question reflects this—that the board has not yet reached a final decision on the site for the new Kilsyth health centre.

The board must follow the guidance in the Scottish capital investment manual, which sets out the criteria that need to be met when selecting sites for capital projects. Those require engagement with local authority partners to identify potential vacant sites that are publicly or privately available.

I am sure that the health board would be happy to discuss the matter further with the member in order that it can be sure that it is taking account of all relevant views on the matter.

National Health Service (National Planning Forum)

6. Duncan McNeil (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it ensures that the work of the national health service's national planning forum and its sub-groups is widely reported. (S4O-01014)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): On completion, national planning forum reports are published via the Scottish Government website. They are also available locally via NHS board chief executives and directors of planning.

Duncan McNeil: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, the national planning forum completed a crucial report on transcatheter aortic valve

implantation in November 2010, but the report was not published until 17 months later. It has been suggested to me that the report was kept hidden for fear of fuelling an already hot debate on the issue. However, it would appear that it is not the only report dealing with a controversial issue that has been held back. The health economic evaluation study of Eculizumab—a paper that has been referred to on the Scottish Medicines Consortium website since late 2010—has still not been published.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that in the interests of trust and transparency, reports such as those should be made widely available as soon as possible so that patients and clinicians can be fully informed of the conclusions and so that we avoid the suspicion that is bound to arise in issues that are a focus of debate?

Nicola Sturgeon: In general terms, I agree with the member. There were two issues in his question, which I will deal with separately, although I appreciate that he is making a more general point.

First, in relation to the national planning forum and the report on TAVI, the status of the report was one of work in progress because the forum was awaiting the availability of further evidence of clinical and cost effectiveness. The report was shared with NHS boards via chief executives and directors of planning. As soon as possible after the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence guidance was made available at the end of March, the report was placed on the Scottish Government website, so that it was available as part of the bigger body of evidence on TAVI. As members will be aware, the national planning forum is centrally involved in work that is under way to establish a TAVI service in Scotland as quickly as possible.

On the second part of Duncan McNeil's question, in relation to the Scottish Medicines Consortium, I know that he will appreciate that the SMC is different from the national planning forum, in that it operates completely independently of ministers. I am happy to pass the detail of his question to the SMC and have it respond, but it would not be appropriate for me to tell the SMC when it should and should not make such information publicly available.

In general terms, however, I believe in the greatest possible transparency around what are often very difficult and complex decisions. I hope that that reassures the member.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary advise when, as a result of the national planning forum's work, TAVI treatment will be provided in Scotland? Will it be routinely available on the basis of clinical judgment, as it is in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Nicola Sturgeon: Work is going on just now to make a TAVI service available as quickly as possible. I am happy to keep Parliament advised of progress on that, and as soon as it is possible to do so I will give a definite indication of when the service will go live.

Patient eligibility for TAVI will be decided on the basis of clinical judgment, which will operate as members would expect and—as is the case in all such matters—within clearly defined protocols regarding which patients are suitable for that particular procedure.

Waiting Times (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde)

7. Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to reduce waiting times in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. (S4O-01015)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): We continue to support all boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, to ensure that patients get swift access to the services that they require.

Hanzala Malik: Health boards are required to ensure that the minimum length of time from arrival at accident and emergency to admission, discharge or transfer is four hours for 98 per cent of patients. However, none of the A and E departments in Greater Glasgow and Clyde is meeting that standard. What will the Scottish Government do to address that?

Nicola Sturgeon: As Hanzala Malik and other members will appreciate, the four-hour A and E standard is extremely important, not just for patients who are admitted to accident and emergency, but to ensure that patients move through all parts of the system as quickly as possible.

In recent years, performance has improved. However, some boards consistently struggle to meet that standard. In some cases, that is because of particular circumstances—winter, for example, is more challenging—but there is no doubt that health boards have a duty to meet the standard.

I am happy to write to Hanzala Malik with further information about how the Scottish Government works with all health boards—not only Greater Glasgow and Clyde—to ensure that they have systems in place that allow the target to be met consistently and sustainably.

Obesity (Schoolchildren)

8. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is

doing to tackle obesity among schoolchildren. (S4O-01016)

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): We jointly published with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities the prevention of obesity route map in February 2010. The route map makes a long-term commitment over 20 years to tackling overweight and obesity issues in order to help to achieve a healthier Scotland and to contribute towards sustainable economic growth.

The route map recognises that obesity is not just a health issue, but a consequence of our culture, society and lifestyle. We need to work across all areas of Government to ensure that local and national policies are directed at supporting people to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. A key element of the work to prevent obesity is aimed at schoolchildren and the early years.

Gil Paterson: Will the minister consider additional initiatives, which could be rolled out across Scotland, to remove vending machines that contain unhealthy food and drink from schools?

Shona Robison: The Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2008, which we introduced, explicitly proscribe the sale of unhealthy food and drinks in all schools, including from vending machines. The impact of those regulations is evident in the results in the World Health Organization study that was published earlier this month, which showed that the consumption of fizzy drinks by 11 to 15-year-old schoolchildren has halved in the past decade.

There are some excellent local initiatives to promote healthy eating in schools. When the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning visited Dunoon grammar school in January to see the British Heart Foundation's latest food for thought campaign, he was very impressed with the piloting of healthy products in vending machines. However, we can always do more in that regard.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Does the minister agree that our efforts to tackle obesity must start long before school? Given that research suggests an increased probability of formula-fed infants being obese by the age of three, what action is the Scottish Government taking to encourage and support breastfeeding as part of the measures to tackle obesity among children?

Shona Robison: I thank Elaine Smith for her question, and for her long-standing efforts in that area. She is right: the evidence is clear that the earlier the intervention, the better, and that—as we set out in our route map—breastfeeding is an important part of preventing obesity.

Health professionals provide much of the support for new mothers, but more innovative work includes peer support groups in which women work with young women in particular to help them to see the benefits of breastfeeding their babies. We would like more of that to happen.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The Government will be delighted to hear that, at the European Union congress in Lyon last week, Scotland was recognised as being a world leader in an evidence-based weight programme. I refer to the counterweight programme. Is the Government as dismayed as I am to learn that, despite the cabinet secretary's answer to my previous question on the issue, all six staff in the national counterweight programme were declared redundant at the end of April and the programme has therefore effectively been abandoned as a national programme?

Shona Robison: Not for the first time, the member is being very economical with the truth. It has not been abandoned at all; in fact, it has been mainstreamed into the work of health boards. As the member knows as well as I do, not every health board used counterweight. We have allowed allow health boards to choose how they take forward this important work. I hope that that will correct the member's misinterpretation of the facts.

The Presiding Officer: Question 9, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, was not lodged. The member provided me with an explanation and an apology.

Ambulance Cover (Shetland Islands)

10. Jean Urquhart (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the outcome is of the trial of using retained staff to provide ambulance cover in the Shetland Islands. (S4O-01018)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): A proposal for a retained ambulance scheme was approved by the Scottish Ambulance Service board in spring 2009. The operation of the scheme was formally evaluated during the first six months of operation and it is now the subject of on-going clinical audit and governance arrangements.

The retained staff in Shetland have received a range of training to allow them to be crewed with a paramedic as part of an emergency response crew, and they are providing an enhanced and more resilient service for patients. The transition to the new Ambulance Service academy has had an impact on the further development of the scheme, but I have been advised that, over the next 12 to 24 months, the retained staff in Shetland will be trained to ambulance technician level.

I hope that that type of retained scheme and other innovative service models will be developed in other remote and rural areas to support local communities.

Jean Urquhart: I thank the cabinet secretary for her reply. It has, in fact, covered my supplementary, which was going to be about that model being used in other rural areas of Scotland.

Lung Cancer (Early Symptoms)

11. Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Executive what it is doing to raise awareness of the early symptoms of lung cancer in risk groups. (S4O-01019)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Earlier this year I launched the final implementation plan for the detect cancer early initiative. Lung cancer is one of the three cancer types that the initiative will focus on in the first instance. A social marketing and fieldwork campaign has already been run to help to address fears and negative attitudes to cancer and its treatment. The campaign is designed to encourage people to present earlier with any suspicious signs or symptoms. As a follow up, cancer-specific symptoms and signs campaigns will be run from the summer and continue over the winter period. Those will start with a campaign on breast cancer, followed by one on colorectal cancer and then one on lung cancer.

Evidence shows that people living in deprived areas are more likely to develop lung cancer, so the lung-specific campaign will concentrate on reaching people aged 45 and over in those areas, with a particular focus on females in recognition of the increased incidence of lung cancer among women.

Alex Johnstone: I thank the minister for her very comprehensive answer. I apologise for the fact that only since I lodged the question last week have I become aware of a national television campaign, which is doing exactly what we want to be done. I must apologise for the Conservative Party in general. We will take the lesson from today that we should read the papers and watch the television more.

The Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary.

Nicola Sturgeon *rose*—

Alex Johnstone: However—[*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us have the "However", then.

Alex Johnstone: My specific follow-up question relates to an issue that the cabinet secretary touched on. The TV campaign that is running

features a middle-aged man. As the incidence of the disease gradually drops, the balance shifts towards more women being affected as a proportion. Will she undertake to ensure that there is monitoring of the performance of any campaign in raising awareness among women, to ensure that they do not miss the symptoms?

Nicola Sturgeon: I say, in the spirit of consensus, that no member should apologise for raising the important issue of cancer awareness and detection in the chamber. I am happy that the member has done so.

I am not sure which particular campaign the member is referring to. The Scottish Government's detect cancer early campaign that has been running recently has a woman as the key character in the advert. I absolutely take the member's point, and in my original answer I made the point that there are two particular issues that we have to make sure are addressed by any campaign on lung cancer. The first is the fact that more people in deprived areas get lung cancer, and the second is that the incidence of lung cancer among women is growing. I assure the member that both those aspects will be taken into account as we develop the detect cancer early programme for all three of the tumour types on which it focuses.

Day-case Targets (NHS Tayside)

12. Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive what steps it has taken to ensure that NHS Tayside meets the nationally agreed targets for day cases. (S4O-01020)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): As part of the delivery of the nationally agreed target for day cases, NHS Tayside was set a board target of 75.2 per cent, to be met by the end of March 2011. The latest published data for the end of March 2011 shows that that target was delivered by NHS Tayside when it reached a performance level of 76.7 per cent.

Jenny Marra: As the cabinet secretary knows, day cases are a cost-effective way of treating patients. They are much cheaper than overnight stays in hospital. However, cost-effective day cases in Tayside have been reduced by almost one third since Labour left office in 2007. What is the cabinet secretary doing to ensure that national targets are being met and that the number of day cases climbs back up to the levels that existed under the previous Labour Administration?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am not going to turn the question into some kind of party-political ping-pong because I agree with Jenny Marra about the

importance of increasing and promoting day-case surgery. That is not just because it is cheaper and more cost effective for the national health service, although it undoubtedly is, but because it is also more convenient for patients. Most patients would prefer to have any procedure done on a day-case basis than be admitted to hospital as an in-patient.

Across the country, day-case rates have been rising in the past few years, and that is a good thing. However, as in so many other areas, there is still work to do and I hope that all members will accept and agree that pushing up day-case rates even further is an important priority that will deliver benefits for the health service and for patients.

Health and Social Care Integration

13. Mike MacKenzie (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the integration of health and social care. (S4O-01021)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): On 8 May I launched the consultation on the integration of adult health and social care. During the three-month consultation period, a thorough engagement process will take place with a wide range of stakeholders in the national health service, local government and the third and independent sectors. The analysis of the consultation will take place in the autumn, and it will inform and develop the policy and legislative proposals that will follow.

Mike MacKenzie: I thank the cabinet secretary for her answer, which partially answered my supplementary. I am sure that she was aware of the concerns that were raised last year by the Royal College of Nursing and Audit Scotland about the proposed model for the integration of health and social care that was being pursued by NHS Highland and Highland Council. Is she able, at this point, to say whether those concerns have been addressed as the integration of those services has proceeded?

Nicola Sturgeon: As the member knows, NHS Highland has been pursuing a particular model of integration—the lead commissioning model—and I support the health board in doing that. Any process of change, whether in health and social care or in any other walk of life, leads to anxieties, and it is important that health boards and local authorities work with staff and others to make sure that their views are taken into account as the process develops.

One of the reasons why we have taken a deliberate approach to the wider consultation on health and social care and are doing the three-month consultation to which I referred in my first answer is to make sure that we get the expert

views of all the stakeholders who are involved and the staff who work on the front line in those services. There is no doubt in my mind that our direction of travel is the right one and that it will deliver real benefits to patients and service users across the country.

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): I have spoken to many interested parties about the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Bill that is going through the parliamentary process. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, to be effective, the development of SDS must go hand in hand with the further integration of health and social care? I would also be interested to know whether she can give us a timetable for the proposed legislation.

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree with the member that we should see our integration of health and social care agenda and the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Bill as two sides of the same coin. They will work best if they develop in tandem. The Minister for Public Health, Michael Matheson, is leading for the Government on the Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Bill, and I know that he welcomes views from members of all parties on how we can ensure that it delivers what we want it to. As always, there will be adequate opportunity for members to scrutinise the bill as it goes through Parliament and to propose amendments, when they think that that is appropriate. I know that Michael Matheson would be happy to have further discussions with the member if she would find that helpful.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware of the significant underspend that occurred in the first year of the change fund. According to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, that was a result of pressure caused by

“draconian procurement processes for working with the third sector.”—[*Official Report, Health and Sport Committee*, 13 March 2012; c 1130.]

Will the cabinet secretary outline how the Government plans to work with local authorities to amend the procurement procedure to address that issue?

Nicola Sturgeon: We need to get all such issues right and to work in a collaborative way to deal with them. A number of comments have been made about the procurement process—bodies such as Audit Scotland have had things to say about it. As we take forward the consultation on the integration of health and social care, it is important that we see the process as an opportunity not just to bring the structures together, but to deal with any other barriers to the effective and fair commissioning of services. I would welcome submissions to the on-going consultation on how we might do that better from

members of all parties, all of which will be treated in the spirit that members would expect. If good suggestions are made, we will take them forward.

National Health Service Dentists (Orkney)

14. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Executive how the rate of adult registrations with an NHS dentist in Orkney compares with the national average and what plans the Scottish Government has to improve the situation for patients in the islands. (S4O-01022)

The Minister for Public Health (Michael Matheson): As at 30 September 2011, 55.6 per cent of adults in Orkney were registered with a dentist under NHS general dental services, whereas the figure for Scotland as a whole was 73 per cent.

Responsibility for the overall provision of NHS general dental services in the area rests with NHS Orkney. It is taking measures that are aimed at improving access. The Scottish Government has provided significant financial incentives, grants and allowances that are aimed at encouraging dentists to join NHS boards' dental lists and to continue to provide NHS treatment.

Liam McArthur: I thank the minister for his response and, indeed, for his correspondence with me over recent months. I acknowledge that progress is being made, but the figures for Orkney on adult registrations with an NHS dentist and participation rates remain far below the national average. I discuss that concern regularly with the chief executive of NHS Orkney, and I know that meetings have been held recently to consider how improvements might be accelerated.

Given that the minister has accepted that NHS Orkney faces particular challenges and that current improvements appear to be failing to close the gap between the figures for Orkney and the national average, will he agree to look at how progress can be accelerated and whether that could be done through a lump-sum funding arrangement, so that adult patients in Orkney can look forward to the same access to an NHS dentist that their counterparts elsewhere in Scotland enjoy?

Michael Matheson: The member is correct to say that we have been in correspondence on the issue. Although it is disappointing that the registration level in Orkney is below the national average, since 2007 there has been a 21.4 per cent increase in the number of adults in Orkney who are registered with an NHS dentist. Significant progress has been made, but it is clear that there is more to be done.

I know that NHS Orkney is looking at extending the amount of chair time that is available through NHS dental services and that it is considering the

recruitment of additional staff to provide that increased capacity. I understand that it is in dialogue with a practice in Orkney to establish whether it would consider applying for some grant funding to allow it to extend the service that it provides, thereby increasing capacity in the islands.

The chief dental officer will contact NHS Orkney in October, when it expects to be able to highlight the progress that it has made in increasing the levels of registration. At that point, we will consider whether there are further measures with which it requires assistance.

General Practitioners (Remote and Rural Areas)

15. Dave Thompson (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support is available for general practitioners in remote and rural areas. (S4O-01023)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): A range of financial, educational and practical support is available to GPs who work in remote and rural areas.

Dave Thompson: The Acharacle medical practice in Ardnamurchan in my constituency is to lose its two doctors and its practice manager on 31 August. It appears that provision of out-of-hours cover, 24/7 working and the need for more established support from NHS Highland have been major factors in the decisions of the doctors and the practice manager to resign. Will the cabinet secretary—who I know is well aware of the issues in Ardnamurchan—give me an assurance that she will look into that serious situation as a matter of urgency?

Nicola Sturgeon: I recognise the close interest that Dave Thompson has taken in the issue and in other issues that affect Ardnamurchan. I am well aware of the circumstances surrounding the medical practice in Acharacle. All members will appreciate that service provision in some geographical locations is challenging, but that does not take away from the fact that people who live in such areas deserve the same quality healthcare as people who live elsewhere in Scotland receive. I expect the health board to work closely with the local community to ensure that adequate service provision is put in place. I am happy to give Dave Thompson an assurance that I will keep a close eye on developments. I would be happy to discuss the issue with him or his constituents at any time.

Selective Dorsal Rhizotomy

16. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on providing selective dorsal rhizotomy on the national health service. (S4O-01024)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): Decisions on the use of the treatment for individual patients who might benefit are a matter for national health service boards, following the advice of clinicians in collaboration with their patient in each case.

Graeme Dey: NHS Tayside has approved referral pathways and criteria for the use of SDR. My constituent Brooke Ramsay has been advised that, as she meets the criteria, her operation will be funded by the NHS. Will the same or similar pathways and criteria be adopted in other parts of the country and, if so, will the detail of the pathways and criteria be made available to parents of young cerebral palsy sufferers so that they can determine whether their child is likely to benefit from the procedure?

Nicola Sturgeon: I am glad that Graeme Dey's constituent has had her treatment approved and I hope that he passes my good wishes to her and her family. In my initial answer, I made it clear that the decisions are a matter for individual health boards, based on the circumstances of individual patients.

However, as Graeme Dey rightly said, a national clinical pathway and referral protocol for the treatment has now been agreed and NHS Tayside has adopted that process for referrals. The member is right that there should not be simply a Tayside referral pathway. It is, and should be, a national referral pathway, so that the decisions, which are often difficult, are made that bit easier.

Commonwealth Games 2014 (Edinburgh)

17. Marco Biagi (Edinburgh Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what benefits will be seen in Edinburgh from the 2014 Commonwealth games. (S4O-01025)

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government is committed to creating a lasting legacy and maximising the benefits for the whole of Scotland from Glasgow hosting the 2014 Commonwealth games. Edinburgh's refurbished Royal Commonwealth pool reopened on 20 March 2012. It will host the diving events for the Commonwealth games and is now available for the local community to enjoy. More than 100,000 visits have been made since it reopened.

In addition, four community sports hubs are now operating and delivering services to their local

communities. Local businesses are benefiting, with nine Edinburgh-based companies to date having won Commonwealth games related contracts. Six young people from Edinburgh are part of Young Scot's youth legacy ambassador programme, through which they will develop new skills by engaging in a wide range of legacy activity and championing that among their peers and local communities.

Marco Biagi: Does the minister agree that the Commonwealth pool, which is already a legacy of a previous Commonwealth games, provides a fine example of how to ensure a lasting and effective legacy from an event such as the Commonwealth games?

Shona Robison: I was fortunate enough to visit the pool just before it reopened. It is a fantastic state-of-the-art facility of international quality. I look forward to the Commonwealth pool playing an extremely important role in the Commonwealth games in two years. I am sure that it will also attract a number of international events, which of course will benefit the local economy in Edinburgh.

The Presiding Officer: Question number 18, by Liz Smith, has been withdrawn. The member provided an explanation.

Air Ambulance Helicopters (Faults)

19. Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the implications are of the discovery of faults in Scottish Ambulance Service air ambulance helicopters. (S4O-01027)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Cities Strategy (Nicola Sturgeon): The safety of patients, air crew and paramedic air ambulance teams are of paramount importance. When a fault was discovered at the beginning of April in a component part of the rotor hub on one of the service's EC135 helicopters, a replacement part was fitted and the aircraft returned to operational service. Subsequently, and as a result of a similar fault being discovered in two EC135s in service elsewhere in Europe, an enhanced regime of safety checks has been introduced.

Rob Gibson: Will the new air ambulance contracts provide any guarantees that the kinds of faults that were discovered last week in the EC135 helicopters that are used by Bond Air Services and other operators can be avoided in the future?

Nicola Sturgeon: The contract is yet to be awarded and announced, so Rob Gibson will understand that I am limited in what I can say about the detail of that contract. Suffice it to say that it is incumbent on the Scottish Ambulance Service and those it contracts with to ensure that everything possible is done to minimise any faults

occurring in any of its air ambulance aircraft. Clearly, there can never be an absolute guarantee that faults will not develop. That makes it all the more important that robust safety checks are in place, that safety checks are carried out, and that appropriate action is taken at all times to secure and ensure the safety of those who fly in them.

Physical Activity

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-02904, in the name of Shona Robison, on meeting the challenge—physical activity and its contribution to tackling obesity. I call Shona Robison to speak to and move the motion. Minister, you have 13 minutes.

14:56

The Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport (Shona Robison):

I am pleased to open the debate by exploring the significant challenge that obesity presents to Scotland and the Scottish people. I will also set out how physical activity contributes to tackling the problem.

Obesity levels are rising internationally, and Scotland is not alone in facing what has the potential to be one of the most difficult health challenges that we will see in our lifetime. I will put the issue in context. We have made good progress on a number of public health interventions, from smoking cessation to our approach to reducing alcohol consumption. Obesity is one of the next challenges for us, because our obesity levels are the third worst among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, behind the United States of America and Mexico. That is the stark reality that we face.

I am sure that all members will agree that the rationale for addressing obesity is compelling, not just for our national good but for the health of every individual in our communities. If we were to do nothing, the direct cost to Scotland by 2030 would be around 70,000 more type 2 diabetes cases, 400,000 cases of hypertension and 21,000 more heart attacks. Those are frightening statistics, but it gets worse because as well as obesity having a direct impact on the health of individuals, it is likely that if obesity levels continue to rise the cost to the Scottish economy will be around £3 billion, or 2 per cent of Scotland's gross domestic product by 2030.

That is why we set out our approach in 2010 in the preventing overweight and obesity route map, which outlines our commitment to addressing the main challenges of obesity through four themes: energy in, the working age population, early years intervention and energy out, which is the focus of this debate. It is more than two years since we published the route map, and I intend to bring back to Parliament a full and comprehensive update report next year on the progress that we have made.

Although our progress in a relatively short time is welcome, we need a transformational change to

shift our culture. We aim to achieve our aspiration of the majority of Scots being in a normal weight range by 2030. Our national strategy will help us to deliver that, but it is important to re-emphasise that it will not be achieved overnight or even within the lifetime of this Parliament.

The report "Growing Up in Scotland: Overweight, Obesity and Activity", which was published last week by the Medical Research Council, reinforced the challenge as it showed that 22 per cent of six-year-olds have been found to be overweight. The report also showed that the majority of them had already been classed as overweight at four years old, which underlines the importance of addressing the issue.

Members will be aware that we introduced a child's healthy weight health improvement, efficiency, access and treatment target in 2008 in recognition of the seriousness of the problem. More than 8,000 children have been engaged in locally based interventions and we have established a new target of more than 14,000 children coming through programmes over the next three years. That builds on and complements our recent take life on campaign, which targets families. We know that habits that are formed in childhood and adolescence continue into adulthood. Interestingly, evaluation of last year's take life on campaign resulted in 76 per cent of parents encouraging their children to be more active and 59 per cent doing more physical activity with their children. We hope to build on that successful model in the future.

It is recognised internationally that overall physical activity levels are declining, but Scotland is bucking the trend—albeit with small increases—in the number of adults who are active. Scotland has made every effort to push ahead with international best practice, and I am pleased to inform members that we have taken action in all the areas that are recommended in the European Union policy guidelines on physical activity.

Increasing physical activity on its own is not the solution to obesity, but I firmly believe that, as part of a wider programme of interventions, it will go a significant way towards achieving lasting results and will improve health outcomes. Physical inactivity is one of our major health challenges and contributes to nearly 2,500 deaths in Scotland each year. The cost to the national health service is around £91 million each year, and a further £58 million is associated with the cost of medicines to treat conditions that are associated with physical inactivity. I find it astonishing that, although many other health risks are commonly understood, physical inactivity, although one of the major causes of mortality, is largely overlooked. I will return to that later.

According to the World Health Organization, physical inactivity is the fourth leading health-risk factor and accounts for 6 per cent of all deaths globally, placing it behind hypertension, tobacco and high blood sugar. Last year, the four United Kingdom chief medical officers published their guidelines, which stated that adults should be active for at least 30 minutes at least five times a week, and that children should be active for 60 minutes every day. Evidence tells us that meeting the minimum target in the guidelines will reduce overall mortality by 30 per cent and that 30 minutes of walking daily provides more protection against death than any preventative medication. Put simply, if physical activity could be bottled and sold as a drug, it would without doubt be a superdrug.

We are making progress, with 39 per cent of adults now meeting the recommendations in the guidelines, which is up from 37 per cent in 2009. However, the biggest progress is being made among teenage girls, for whom the figure has steadily increased from 64 per cent in 2008 to 70 per cent in 2010. That demonstrates that our targeted investment in that group is delivering results.

Let me turn to what we intend to do to drive forward progress. Resources are crucial to achievement of results. I am delighted to announce that, despite the difficult financial environment and budgets being under pressure, we are maintaining the physical activity budget at £3.3 million per year for the next three years. We are also working with our delivery partners to introduce a more creative and innovative approach in this area. That builds on the success that we have delivered so far and includes continued investment in Scottish Athletics to support the jogscotland programme, which has over 430 jogging groups with almost 22,000 members. That approach is consistent with improving the alignment of sport and physical activity.

We are also providing a substantial investment of £1.2 million each year to the Paths for All Partnership, which delivers a walking programme throughout Scotland and has a proven track record in engaging older Scots in particular. That recognises the tangible benefits that arise from providing older people with opportunities to be active and builds on the evidence of previous investment. We are also delivering efficiencies by aligning the Paths for All Partnership's activity with other walking projects to build on their ability to deliver more than 11,000 people regularly taking part in the 440 community walking schemes throughout Scotland.

I have been taken with the overwhelming evidence of the health benefits that come from walking, which is why I am delighted to announce

the development of a national walking strategy that will set out our ambition and aspiration to ensure that the support and infrastructure is in place to maximise the opportunities for everyone to walk.

We have also listened to the people of Scotland and increased the sustainable transport budget. That will help to develop the infrastructure of the national cycle network, which covers 2,000 miles and was responsible for 40 million journeys in 2010. The network is important because it connects communities and provides cycling opportunities. That is why I am happy to accept Alison Johnstone's amendment.

We will continue to use the excitement of the Commonwealth games and other events to deliver a legacy and to build on the success that we are already achieving. A major plank of the work is our focus on schools and the early years, and our commitment to deliver two hours of physical education for every primary school pupil and two periods for every secondary school pupil is only part of the story. Although we are making progress, with 64 per cent of primary schools and 67 per cent of secondary schools meeting the target, we are determined to do more. That is why we have made available to local authorities nearly £6 million of additional support to ensure that the gap is closed by 2014.

The work forms an important part of our approach to early years intervention. It is designed to raise awareness and to educate young people about the importance of being physically active. The work includes dance, swimming and education projects and it builds on lessons that have been learned in our successful active schools programme, which has delivered 5 million opportunities to children and more than 79 different activities.

We are also developing an active girls programme, which will be supported by about £1.5 million over the next three years, to build on the success of a number of dance-related projects that are aimed at teenage girls.

Community sports hubs also play an important part, and the 57 that are in place, many of which are based in schools, are increasing opportunities to be active. That is consistent with our desire to open up the school estate and ensure that all communities have access to local school facilities. We aim to build on the good progress through the new school sports award that will be launched shortly to recognise and celebrate best practice in schools.

However, I want to do more. Although about 43 patient referral mechanisms are already in place throughout Scotland, there is an opportunity to formalise the links and pathways between NHS

referral and physical activity opportunities at community level. To that end, we will work with the Royal College of General Practitioners to develop a patient centred high-quality general practitioner intervention that will build on and complement existing referral systems. Up to £100,000 will be made available to support an exciting new approach to a health intervention that will seek to adopt a more intensive approach that will test a mix of rural and urban models. It will explore individual health risks and lifestyle choices and it will be delivered alongside an appropriate referral mechanism to community sports hubs, leisure centres, walking groups and sports clubs. It will also inform our approach for future referral and support.

I can also announce that work is being done to draw up an implementation plan for the Scottish version of the Toronto charter, which is the gold standard of international best practice for investment in physical activity. That model was published in 2010 and it is internationally recognised as being revolutionary because it systematically explores the evidence to inform public policy investment by determining what works and what does not, through the lens of physical activity. The charter has the potential to deliver lasting results and to achieve the culture shift that we need in order to reduce both the financial costs and the human costs of inactivity.

We all enjoy a lifestyle and an environment that encourage us to be inactive and to overconsume. It will require a shift in culture and thinking to translate that into a position in which being active becomes normal for everyone. I want Scotland to be transformed and to become internationally recognised as an active society, but that has to start with how we see ourselves and Scotland. The work that I have described should be open to scrutiny and review, and that is why I am committed to coming back to Parliament regularly to report on how we are progressing with the challenge of obesity. I am pleased to commend the motion to Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the detrimental health impact that obesity can have on individuals, including an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers, and the strain that it places on NHS resources and the wider economy; acknowledges the key contribution that physical activity can make to tackling these issues; recognises that, in Scotland, levels of participation in physical activity are increasing, defying the international trend; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to and initiatives promoting and encouraging physical activity across all Scottish communities; notes the scale of the challenge in getting people more active, and supports the drive to create a lasting active legacy for the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

15:09

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): No matter what age each of us is, I am sure that, if we individually thought back to our own childhood, we would agree that our lives are significantly different from those of our mothers and fathers. In the majority of cases, the energy that our parents expended going about their daily lives was significantly greater than that which we expend. Most men in my father's age group worked in manual jobs and travelled by public transport, and they often had a walk at either end of their journey. Mothers carried home shopping every day because freezers were not commonly available. If they had employment outside the house, they often came home knowing that they still had several hours of cooking and cleaning ahead of them without many of the labour-saving devices that we take for granted. The children with whom I grew up walked to school every day, and we played with our friends outside the home every moment that we could in sun, rain or snow. We seemed to walk for miles. Indeed, studies show that, per person per year, people walked 63 miles less in 2003 than they did in 1975. Our working, home and school lives involved much more built-in activity.

My point is that our lives and lifestyles have changed so significantly over such a relatively short period of time that we have hardly noticed, and our physical activity levels have dropped to a point that is seriously bad for us. The fact that the problem is relatively recent might account for so little having been written about it and there having been so little interest in the area until recently.

We know that inactivity contributes to heart disease, strokes, diabetes and some cancers as well as to mental health problems. Therefore, it is important that we all consider our lifestyles and increase the amount of energy that we expend. For that reason, we have every sympathy with Alison Johnstone's amendment, and we will vote for it at 5 o'clock.

Some studies have suggested that the walkability of local neighbourhoods is directly related to physical activity levels and that the promotion of physical activity should be a key element of urban planning in the future. Being active often also encourages us to be more interactive with our families, neighbours and friends. It can be particularly important for older people, who can all too easily become isolated. I think that that is the point of the Greens' amendment, and I look forward to hearing what Alison Johnstone has to say about it. We would all do well to remember what I have said when we talk about planning in the various committees and levels of the Parliament.

The health benefits of activity are undisputed and the relationship between poor health and inactivity is clear, but we are debating the link between obesity and inactivity. We must bear in mind that there is conflicting evidence on that. There are studies, including one that was carried out in Plymouth over a period of 11 years, that seem to show that it was not so much a lack of exercise that caused children to gain weight, but that they became less active because they had become heavier. My colleague Dr Richard Simpson will address that issue more fully in his contribution. However, whether obesity and activity are linked as closely as the motion suggests, it is absolutely clear that being overweight or obese is very bad for a person and that being active is good.

I have drawn members' attention before to a statistic that worries me, and I make no apology for doing so again. It is a fact that, until the age of 12, boys and girls are as active as each other, but at the age of 12 or thereabouts, girls stop being active and almost immediately drop to a level that their male counterparts do not reach until they are 40. Therefore, we need to continue to encourage young women and girls to find new ways to increase their participation, whether in dance, Zumba, cheerleading or organised sport. I welcome the minister's comments in that regard.

Most of those young women will go on to become mothers, and statistics show that children are more likely to be overweight and inactive if their mothers are overweight and inactive. It is frightening that many parents do not recognise obesity in their own children. Understandably, they do not want to admit that there is an issue and a problem in that regard. We need to ensure that support and help are given to those families. We need to break that cycle and if we can use the Commonwealth games and indeed the Olympic games to spur people on to become involved in sport, in dance or in just walking more often we should do so.

We must instil better eating habits in our young people. After all, our nation seems to have not only a unique and dangerous relationship with alcohol but a particular obsession with fast food. I am genuinely depressed at the number of young people to be found queueing outside fast-food outlets at lunch time, particularly as many of them are school or college students. We all enjoy the occasional curry or fish supper but, when it is a person's daily lunch time meal, it is not good for their health and cannot be good for concentration levels after lunch and, in turn, overall attainment levels.

As a result, we must actively combat the twin evils of bad diet and low activity levels.

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP):

A number of authorities in Scotland have taken policy decisions to refuse hot food licences within a certain distance of school establishments. Does Patricia Ferguson agree that that is one way of combating the queues of schoolchildren outside fast-food outlets that she mentioned?

Patricia Ferguson: I certainly think so. However, we must also ensure that the food that is offered in schools is appetising enough to encourage young people to stay and eat it, instead of leaving the school in the way that the member has indicated.

Breakfast clubs, which were an early first step in my area, have had a significant effect on local school pupils' eating habits. Instead of—as is often the case—skipping breakfast altogether, the children who attend the clubs are encouraged to have fruit and cereal in the morning. They are also encouraged to get into the habit of brushing their teeth regularly, with the knock-on effect of a reduction in the number of primary school students needing treatment for dental caries. Again, that must be a good thing.

Although I find the Scottish Government's motion optimistic, I have to say that the minister has backed it up with some very interesting information on current Scottish trends and I am pleased to hear that we appear to be bucking the trend in activity, if not in obesity. Of course, that is often due to the initiative of local groups and the encouragement that they get from local authorities and community planning partnerships, which understand the benefits of increased participation in local communities.

At this point, I want to mention the North Glasgow Healthy Living Community in my constituency, which organises a range of activities over the year. The most notable is probably the annual 5K, in which I have taken part for the past four or five years—and, in case anyone doubts that, I have the medals to prove it. I am usually in the walking category but the event is also attended by those who are wheelchair bound, families with their buggies and so on. It is a fantastically social occasion and a good way of getting people out to enjoy the fresh air. The event is supplemented by 1Ks for local primary school pupils and attendance levels are remarkable. Literally thousands of people have taken part in those events over the years and I am always delighted to be a part of them.

Both our amendment and that of the Conservatives seek to remind the minister that her Government has still a long way to go to deliver on its PE pledge. Not only has the commitment been watered down, but even the watered-down target is nowhere near being achieved.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Patricia Ferguson: Unfortunately, I am in my last minute. I am sure that the minister will take the chance to respond later.

We accept that PE is not the only factor in creating a healthier and more active nation; nevertheless, it is a good place to start, although I stress that it must be PE of good quality. Indeed, my colleague Mark Griffin will say more about that later. As PE classes in schools are often where we find tomorrow's sporting stars and those who will inspire future generations of young people and encourage them to become active, I sincerely hope that the Scottish Government will refocus its efforts and its activity to deliver that important pledge. That said, I welcome the minister's announcements and look forward to hearing more about them and having a very constructive debate about their content in the weeks and months ahead.

I move amendment S4M-02094.3, to insert at end:

"but, in noting the importance of establishing good habits of physical activity from an early age, regrets that the SNP's manifesto pledge of two hours per week of quality physical education has been delayed and watered down."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Nanette Milne. You have six minutes, but there is time if you feel inclined to take interventions.

15:19

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): No one can doubt the need for action to address the increasing problem of obesity in this country, whose health consequences are well known and cannot be overstated. As we have heard, ISD Scotland published figures on childhood obesity only last week that revealed that 21.4 per cent of primary 1 children in the academic year 2010-11 had a body mass index that put them in the overweight bracket. The proportion of obese pupils was up from 9.5 to 9.6 per cent and it is particularly worrying that the number with severe obesity has risen from 5.4 to 5.5 per cent. It is a shocking indictment that more than 5 per cent of Scotland's young people are severely obese.

Almost a quarter of women and just over a fifth of men in the UK are already classed as obese—those are the highest figures in Europe. Experts predict that, on current trends, 48 per cent of men and 43 per cent of women will be in the obese bracket by 2030 and many more will be classed as overweight. Surely we must prevent that prediction from becoming a reality.

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): I am a bit of an expert on the subject, in which I have practical experience. One issue in relation to obesity is that

proper care is not provided at the very early stages. When I was a child, my mother fed me double doses of milk, which the NHS did not really pick up or follow through. That means that I have been overweight throughout my life. Does the member agree that, to prevent obesity, we need to tackle that important issue at a very early stage?

Nanette Milne: I am coming to that matter. I agree absolutely with the member. I, too, was an overfed young baby. As I get older, I struggle to keep my weight in the right place.

There is no doubt that physical wellbeing and maintaining a healthy weight depend largely on the combination of a well-balanced healthy diet and a physically active lifestyle and that the problem of obesity must be tackled on both those fronts. In yesterday afternoon's debate on the development of a national parenting strategy, it was emphasised that parenting starts pre-conception and continues through to adult life. I am in no doubt that encouragement and support for an active and healthy lifestyle should be an integral part of parenting. Being overweight is often a family problem, and finding a solution to overweight children often starts with a family making changes together for a healthy family lifestyle.

I welcome today's debate and the Government's commitment to promoting and encouraging initiatives to increase physical activity in all Scottish communities. There are many examples of good practice across the country, but we have a very long way to go. The Government's obesity route map and the actions that are being taken in line with its principles are a good template for where we should go, but I agree with the Ramblers Association that

"action at a population level is required to support wholesale behaviour change country wide to enable the nation to live healthier lifestyles as a default choice, and this preventative action needs appropriate levels of investment."

That investment must start with our children. If they are encouraged from an early age to be physically active, they are likely to maintain that pattern throughout life and to pass on that lifestyle to future generations once they become adults.

We should seek to remove the barriers to physical activity that many children face nowadays. Our risk-averse, health-and-safety-conscious and litigious society results in many young children being kept indoors, glued to television and computer screens, because of our natural fear of traffic hazards, predatory adults or the discarded equipment of those who depend on injected drugs.

Children are driven to playgroup, nursery and school, and they might well be prevented from

taking part in the rough-and-tumble playground games that taught previous generations of children how to protect themselves as they grew up to face life's hazards. Near home, children face signs that say, "No Ball Games", "No Golf Practice" and suchlike, because they have not been taught how to behave responsibly outdoors or how to respect their neighbours.

I realise that I sound old-fashioned, but I feel strongly that children should be given freedom—within reasonable limits—to experience informal outdoor activity and interaction with their peers. It is not natural for a young animal to sit still—most want to be active—so it is concerning that the most recent Scottish health survey showed that as many as 28 per cent of children do not undertake the recommended amount of physical activity each day.

That brings me to my amendment, which is on physical education provision for schoolchildren. I note the cross-party consensus on that, about which I am delighted. The Government's election pledge five years ago to provide two hours of physical education per week for Scottish pupils was welcome and we are all extremely disappointed that so far it has not been achieved. It might be the case that, as the motion says,

"levels of participation in physical activity are increasing, defying the international trend",

but we need to remind the Government that there is no room for complacency and that it should be looking to implement its manifesto commitment.

Action is being taken in many communities to improve levels of physical activity. Members were given examples ahead of the debate by Ramblers Association Scotland, which I know will be delighted by the commitment that the minister gave to the development of a national walking strategy. We have been given evidence by the Paths for All Partnership and the Scottish Sports Association. Yesterday evening, there was an excellent presentation from the inclusive design for getting outdoors consortium, on how older people can be encouraged to undertake regular activity.

In my area, I immediately think of the parents who are organising a walking bus to school, of groups such as the Grampian Cardiac Rehabilitation Association, and of Aberdeen Sports Village, which runs a hugely popular aerobics class for retired people—the class is fully subscribed every week and there is a waiting list to join it. The sports village is one of the best-ever developments in Aberdeen and is busy every day of the week with people of all ages undertaking various kinds of exercise.

My party has committed to a charitable trust fund to give all pupils in Scotland the opportunity to receive at least one full week of residential

outdoor education between the ages of 11 and 15, and to opportunities for greater participation in grass-roots sports.

Everyone can take exercise, whether they are children playing hide-and-seek or other active games or adults walking to work, walking instead of using the lift to go upstairs—and downstairs, as I see some of the young researchers in the Parliament building doing—cycling or participating in organised sport. The imminence of the Olympic games and Commonwealth games presents an ideal opportunity to promote physical activity as the best possible legacy of the events.

The minister announced interesting initiatives, which I hope will be successful. I look forward to hearing how they progress.

I move amendment S4M-02904.2, to insert, after "trend":

"notes, however, that the Scottish Government has not succeeded in delivering on its 2007 pledge to provide two hours of physical education per week for all school children in Scotland, but".

15:27

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I really welcome this debate. It is essential that we understand the challenges that obesity currently poses to our national health and the devastating impact that it will have in future if we do not do all that we can do.

We have shared—and I am sure that we will continue to share—many facts and figures during the debate, many of which cause great concern. We need to hear them, because they will act as a catalyst and a strong call to action. That is important, because obesity limits the lives and life chances of too many Scots and is costing us a fortune—socially and economically.

There are many consequences of having an obese population, including human suffering and an increase in the demand for and cost of healthcare services. The British Medical Association said in its briefing for the debate that obesity-related illnesses cost the NHS in Scotland in the region of £171 million in 2003. Given the increase just in the numbers of people who have type 2 diabetes, the cost has increased markedly, as the minister noted.

Scotland has one of the highest levels of obesity in the OECD countries, with more than a million obese adults and more than 150,000 obese children. Six in 10 adults and three in 10 children are obese. The increase in the obese population did not happen overnight. Earlier this week, a programme on television documented life in the 1970s. I was struck by the scenes of jubilant Scottish fans celebrating a good result in a home

international football match in 1977; I was also struck by the generally trim body shape of the people who were celebrating. What has changed, and what can we do about it?

Professor Philip James, the chair of the international obesity task force, thinks that we have created an obesogenic environment, which has made it difficult not to become overweight, and that factors outwith individuals' control are having an impact. For example, designing towns and cities around the car has had an impact on the number of people who walk to and from work and to shops—Patricia Ferguson touched on that. Our lifestyles are increasingly sedentary, with the increase in desk jobs and the attraction of couch-potato recreation choices such as TV, surfing the web and video gaming. Our best intentions are constantly challenged by a marketing-savvy food industry that encourages consumption of unhealthy food items, with children being particularly manipulated.

Dr Dennis Bramble and Dr Carrier of the University of Utah, and Dr Daniel Lieberman of Harvard University, have studied the impact of running on the human body and, indeed, on human evolution. Their studies investigate the impact of the fact that we no longer need to use our bodies in the way that our hunter-gatherer ancestors did, and how successful we have been in developing technology and equipment that turn lazing around into a way of life. Let us be honest: how many of us do not use the remote control to turn the TV channel?

Dr Bramble notes that humans have a mind/body conflict. He says that

“we have a body built for performance, but a brain that's always looking for efficiency.”

We conserve energy as a survival mechanism, so encouraging physical activity, among many Scots, is hugely challenging. However, an active life must become our way of life—physical activity is a habit that Scotland must cultivate. The western diseases that shorten so many lives were largely unknown to our ancestors, as were plasma TVs, bath-size tubs of popcorn, and super-size junk food offerings.

As the Ramblers Association points out, six out of 10 adults and 28 per cent of children do not meet minimum recommended physical activity levels of moderate physical activity. Walking is free—it does not need any equipment. Living Streets notes that 22 per cent of households on less than £10,000 use walking as their main mode of transport, compared with only 8 per cent of those with income more than £40,000. On the school run every morning, I walk or cycle along the Union canal. Those 15 minutes are some of the best-quality time that I can spend in the week. I

welcome the fact that 80 per cent of people joining the Paths for All Partnership's walking groups are women, because women are disproportionately uninvolved in sport and physical activity.

What is to be done? We have a national plan and we have to implement it. We can reduce obesity by investing 10 per cent of our transport budget on active travel, as recommended by the Association of Directors of Public Health. We need to ensure that the Government target of 10 per cent of trips being taken by bike in 2020 is achieved. We need to ensure that all our pupils receive a minimum of two hours per week of PE. Some schools go way beyond that, but schools such as South Morningside primary school, in Edinburgh, have space constraints and high pupil numbers, which make that very difficult.

It is essential that national and local government continue to work together to provide solutions if we are to achieve that target. Active schools is doing a great job, letting school pupils try a wide variety of sports and physical activities, such as street dance. Active schools' charges are low, but if someone has two or three children and is on a tight budget, those charges for extra-curricular activity might be off-putting, or simply unaffordable.

Concern around costs in local authority provision exists, too. Squeezed family budgets and reduced incomes affect the ability of people to take part in formal organised sport and fitness activity. I want the Government and local authorities to work together to ensure that such facilities are affordable.

Despite many opportunities to use brownfield sites, open green space continues to be under pressure from development. Young and old alike need access to informal green space if they are to benefit from important unstructured activities—from rounders, to just pottering around, to goalkeeping.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask you to come to a conclusion, please.

Alison Johnstone: I thank the minister for her intention to support my amendment. I move amendment S4M-02904.1, to insert after the first “active”:

“; considers physical activity among children and young people to be a priority; recognises the important role that the design of the built environment, active travel and access to open space have in promoting a culture of informal physical activity; considers improving facilities and reducing costs to users to be preventative spend and key to enhancing participation in sport and physical activity”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the open debate. Speeches should be of six minutes.

15:33

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I thank the minister and the Government for lodging the motion. I also thank them for grasping the nettle of obesity and for the couple of reports that were produced in the previous session of Parliament. Those reports set out some new groundwork, which was commendable.

We also have an action plan, to which others have referred, which I think runs to some 15 pages. I will go briefly through a few parts of that action plan and reflect on how the plan affects my part of the world.

Patricia Ferguson said that this is a particularly urban issue—I hope that I did not overstate that. I want to make the point that this is not just an urban issue. If someone lives in a relatively small town, once they have walked across the town and come back again, there is not very far for them to walk. Different places have different problems and different constraints, and we need to address them all.

I want to make it absolutely plain, in case it is not obvious, that exercise is a personal issue. When I go back to my office this afternoon, the choice of whether I take the stairs or use the lift is—providing that the lift has not broken down—my personal choice. As we talk about social effects, places, social constraints and the obesogenic environment—all of which are perfectly valid points—we have to remember that the amount of exercise that we do is entirely up to us, as is our diet. However, we must accept that we all live in varied circumstances and that we cannot force people to exercise, which means that we must ensure that we have an appropriate strategy that covers everybody.

As a preliminary point, I state that I recognise, as others have, that our society has reached a point at which being overweight has become normalised. Parents might simply not recognise that their children, and they themselves, are overweight.

The action plan places considerable emphasis on cycling. I make the obvious point that cycling is not very safe when cyclists have to share the road with cars. Cycling is at its safest and arguably at its best when there is a dedicated cycle route. I live in Brechin, in my constituency, which is approximately 10 miles from Montrose in one direction, 10 miles from Forfar in the other direction and 10 miles south of Laurencekirk. Those are all journeys that my constituents could make—for work or pleasure—by bike if they did not have to compete with cars either on main roads or on twisty minor roads, which each pose different dangers.

I note that, around the country, there are many unused railway lines. Dr Beeching might have given us part of the solution. There are many areas where putting a cycle track along an old railway line would go a long way towards providing dedicated cycle routes, which would help many of us.

The same thing applies when it comes to walking. I made the point that the issues around exercise might not only be of concern in urban areas. My wife and I frequently go walking, and we need to be able to go places where we are not competing with cars or barbed wire. Even in Brechin, which is a relatively wee place, it is not necessarily easy to find many of those places, and we tend to finish up on the same circuit.

I live in a wonderful environment in which crime is almost unknown. I recognise that many Scots do not live in such an environment, and I also recognise, therefore, that providing a safe environment in which people can go for a recreational walk is crucial and may in fact be the overwhelming factor in many urban settings.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Does Mr Don accept that, in itself, simply having more people walking in their community—rather than feeling that they have to go somewhere else, because they do not feel safe in their area—helps to enhance the safety of that area, and that streets and paths that are walked more often become safer just because people are choosing to do that?

Nigel Don: The member makes a fair point. A busy, occupied space is a much safer space—until, of course, it becomes so crowded that the pickpocket has a field day.

The action plan mentions attractive green spaces, and I make the point that Scotland is an attractive and green place. If people can get out there, they can go on wonderful walks. Over the past week, those of us whose local paper is *The Courier* will have received some wee booklets about walks in Scotland. My wife and I realised that we had done many of them. However, we also realised that it was hard for people to get to them if there is no suitable bus access. We need to address that issue. If we want to get people out of cars we have to ensure that they do not need cars, and having bus routes to the right places is part of that.

My time is running out, but I would like to make one more point. We have many public facilities. Surely schools in particular should be accessible out of hours. I know that that point is clearly understood, but we need to work on it to ensure that sports facilities are as usable as possible by the local community.

15:40

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): Obesity is a major problem in Scotland. We have one of the highest rates of obesity—only the United States of America and Mexico have higher levels. The latest Scottish Government figures, in 2010, show that 27.4 per cent of those aged 16 to 64 were considered obese, which is a rise of 10.2 per cent since 1995. On average, the percentages were slightly higher for children. According to the Scottish health survey, 32.5 per cent of children had a BMI outwith the healthy range.

More worryingly, “Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Scotland” estimates that by 2030, 40 per cent of the adult population in Scotland will be obese. Obesity not only increases the risk of diabetes but leads to high blood pressure and an increased risk of heart attacks. The projected increases by 2030 in all of those show concerning trends. Furthermore, there is the pressure on the health service’s resources. The report estimates that NHS costs will have doubled by 2030. I am sure that the scale of the problem is clear to everyone in the chamber. The real issue is what we can do to reverse those trends so that the 2030 predictions do not come to pass.

Physical activity is important, but it is not the only way to tackle obesity. First, we need to raise awareness of the issue. The recent growing up in Scotland study found that nine out of 10 parents with obese or overweight children did not recognise that there was a problem. That is a worrying statistic and would seem to suggest that we are failing to raise awareness and educate parents effectively so that they raise the next generation to have healthy eating habits and active lifestyles.

Secondly, we need to promote the benefits of breastfeeding. Audit Scotland’s 2010-11 overview of the NHS showed that many NHS services were failing to meet breastfeeding targets. It is clear that more work needs to be done in that area to encourage and promote breastfeeding.

A recent study carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute in Ireland found that

“children who had been breast-fed for three to six months were 38 per cent less likely to be obese at nine years of age compared to exclusively formula-fed children. Those breast-fed for six months or more were 51 per cent less likely to be obese.”

Numerous studies throughout the world have come to the same conclusion. We need to do more to promote breastfeeding in Scotland.

Continuing the catch-them-young theme, the jumpstart programme run by NHS Ayrshire and Arran holds activities all around Ayrshire for kids aged from five to 15, encouraging them to eat more healthily and exercise more. Starting at five

means that those children develop healthier lifestyles that become the norm, and they take that with them throughout their lives. Jumpstart is a 10-week programme that consists of a range of fun activities and allows the children to make new friends. Parents, too, benefit by discussing ideas, sharing tips and getting tailor-made programmes to use at home for their child. Once they have completed the course, children who took part get a free pass for a local leisure centre for six months.

So far the programme has been a great success. As of November 2011, 550 children and young people have taken part, and the numbers have been increasing. The spin-off is that parents are getting involved and learning about obesity and the associated problems, too.

The successful jumpstart programme’s popularity was spread mainly through word of mouth. Programmes such as that, which raise awareness and help tackle obesity, could reach many more young people if we put more effort into promoting them.

The forthcoming Commonwealth games offer an excellent opportunity to develop activity programmes and raise awareness of obesity, but we must ensure that all parts of Scotland benefit, rather than focusing solely on areas where the games are taking place.

I welcome the minister’s announcements today. However, the Government is failing to meet its pre-election pledge from the 2007 Scottish National Party manifesto, in which it promised to

“ensure that every pupil has 2 hours of quality PE each week delivered by specialist PE teachers.”

In November 2010, it was reported that only 55 per cent of primary school children and 23 per cent of secondary 1 to secondary 4 pupils were getting that amount of PE, and that, in most cases, it was not being delivered by specialist PE teachers.

Despite the Government pulling money from the education budget and sportscotland to provide local authorities with additional resources, that pledge has now been watered down to just two periods per week for S1 to S4 pupils.

We all understand that money is tight, but it would make more sense to spend to save: to be more efficient in supporting and promoting healthy and active lifestyles, and in so doing to reduce obesity.

We cannot afford to fail, and we need to do more to ensure that we prevent the 2030 predictions from coming true.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I must ask the member to conclude.

Margaret McDougall: We need to become more effective at preventing obesity rather than just dealing with the consequences later. The clock is ticking, and we need to get that right.

15:46

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Obesity is a highly complex matter and a difficult subject to tackle, due to the number of factors that are involved. If we had a simple cause, we would have a simple solution. Two of the main causes of obesity are the type of food that is eaten and the overconsumption of food.

It is difficult to define the facts in relation to that simple statement, however. For instance, those who exert themselves in physical exercise or sport can eat more, but they must pay close attention to what they digest and when. That is because there must be a balance between eating and exercise, as well as the need to eat at regular intervals. If that does not happen, the balance of weight can go hopelessly wrong, even for top athletes.

One of the major challenges is the eating habits and exercise of children today. Again, that is not just about what they eat and when, although that is vital. The food must also be healthy. Another important aspect of today's eating habits is the manner in which children and adults consume their food. How many of us have our meals sitting in front of the television at irregular intervals, rather than eating at the table in an organised manner at roughly the same time every day? That sounds easy to achieve, but working parents find that time is not on their side with regard to organising such regular meals.

We must also contend with the modern entertainment that is so readily available to children. There is wall to wall children's television, most of which is highly entertaining and highly successful in attracting audiences, from very young children to young adults. Children can also sit on the sofa with their hand-held consoles, game choices for which run into the tens of thousands and cater for practically everyone from cradle to grave.

My daughter, who attends gymnastics three days a week, still has her eye firmly fixed on her Nintendo DS. She can master that at the same time as playing the part of Hannah Montana as she recites songs sung on TV by the US star. It takes her mum or me to encourage other pursuits to prevent overindulgence, so I know that such matters are difficult for many families.

However, if we can take steps to make a difference and tackle long-term obesity, perhaps we can have some success with our children, as they are more likely to react positively if the message is consistent and the messenger is a

person to be trusted. The starting point must therefore be with parents, guardians and schools. When it comes to schools, without a doubt a great passport to avoiding obesity is sport and exercise. It is good to know that 55 per cent of primary schools get two hours of PE per week, which compares with only 5 per cent of primary schools in 2005. Meanwhile, 60 per cent of secondary school pupils get at least two periods of PE a week. As has been highlighted, we must go further and do much better than we do now. I therefore welcome the assistance and support from sportscotland, which will add £3.4 million. That is bound to help to reach 100 per cent of pupils, a target that members certainly all want to achieve.

We must explain the consequences of obesity to the responsible persons in a child's life. There is the real prospect of very serious health conditions, such as diabetes, which can cause blindness and loss of limbs. I am fairly certain that many parents are completely unaware of the dangers involved in obesity in children and that they have no idea that they are literally feeding their children to death and, at the same time, not encouraging them to do at least the minimum amount of sport or exercise.

Unfortunately, the statistics show that unhealthy parents who are overweight or obese are likely to have overweight or obese children, so we also need the parents to participate in sport and exercise.

However, it should not be only doom and gloom stories that are portrayed. The benefits gained from tackling obesity and winning over it should be the overriding goal and target. It should not be about just how children look, but how they feel about themselves. Losing their extra weight will breed confidence and will benefit not only their health, but their outlook in life and their future prospects. I believe that girls, who may be mothers, will respond positively to the message that they can look forward to being an adult, to a healthy life and to bringing children of their own into the world.

It is just possible that the children can lead the way. If we can get it right with our children, perhaps they will lead their parents to a better, healthier life.

15:52

Mark McDonald (North East Scotland) (SNP): I thoroughly enjoyed Alison Johnstone's speech and I am happy that we will back her amendment at decision time. She speaks with great authority on the issue. I have had many discussions with her about sport, on Twitter and in private.

Patricia Ferguson made the interesting point that we walked 63 miles a year less in 2003 than we did in 1975. I did a quick calculation and I am

pretty sure that I made that difference up during the recent local election campaign but, leaving that aside, it is a worrying statistic that, as a nation, we are walking a great deal less.

I am aware that I am probably in no position to lecture people on physical activity, although I made my long-awaited five-a-side football comeback at the weekend—we shall speak no more of that.

I speak as somebody who, as a teenager and as a young person, was very active. I competed for my local athletics club and have district and national medals at home. However, like many, I stopped exercising in my late teens and that, combined with both a poor diet and what we shall euphemistically refer to as the student lifestyle, sent my weight spiralling upwards. It has been a struggle to reverse that ever since. Those who follow me on Twitter will know that I have chronicled that as Mark versus the flab. Nonetheless, my experience emphasises that although physical activity in our younger years is good, it has to be sustained, because stopping at any point can send someone into a period of reversal, which undoes all the good and can still lead to problems in later life.

I was also interested in Patricia Ferguson's point about children queueing at fast food outlets and, in my intervention, I raised a point about the policy decisions that some local authorities have taken in relation to licensing applications for hot food stands, mobile hot food units or hot food establishments within a certain proximity of a secondary school. I absolutely take on board the point that Patricia Ferguson made in her response to me, which was about ensuring that we provide nutritious and appetising food in our schools to encourage pupils to stay and eat there.

There is one area where I have personal difficulties in that regard. My former school, Dyce Academy, which is in the area that I represented on the council and now represent as an MSP, is situated right next door to an Asda supermarket. For as long as I can remember, there have been queues of schoolchildren going into the store either to buy chips and pies from the hot food takeaway, or going into the store itself and buying less healthy products because they are available there. At the end of the day, the store probably has its profit margin in mind, and there is no doubt that the profits are heavily boosted by young people going in and purchasing such food, but when they can control what is being sold to young people, they should reflect on that and on the role that they can play in encouraging the young people who go into their stores for their lunch to make healthy choices.

Prior to entering the Parliament, I was involved in the coaching of youth football. We can all see

the benefits of grassroots sporting activity and what it can deliver. It is important that our society does all that it can to nurture and develop grassroots sporting clubs across the range of sporting activities. As well as the two hours of PE that has been spoken about in today's debate, we need to focus attention on extra-curricular sporting activity. In many schools, that very much depends on having a willing teacher who is able to give up their time to provide that activity. At my school, one teacher in particular gave up a huge amount of his time to run the school basketball team. He is still at the school and still running that team, to the best of my knowledge. Once that teacher retires, will someone else take on the running of the school basketball team? That is an issue that we need to reflect on.

The work that is being done to develop the Commonwealth games legacy and cashback for communities is having a positive impact on developing and nurturing grassroots sporting activity, and the Government is to be commended for its actions.

Nanette Milne spoke about the Aberdeen sports village. One of the things that I was most pleased to be able to do as part of Aberdeen City Council was to push through the new 50m pool that is being developed in Aberdeen. Again, that will massively benefit my and Nanette Milne's constituents in the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire areas by giving them access to such high-quality facilities in the north-east of Scotland.

I agree that we are talking about not just sport, but getting people to be more active in general. Walking instead of using the car is something that we can all do that can have a big impact. We should all aspire to a more active nation, and as members of the Parliament we should do all that we can to lead by example. Society will, undoubtedly, reap the benefits as a result.

15:58

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate on a pressing issue. We have heard from various speakers that Scottish people who are obese experience a negative impact on their health and wellbeing. We have heard about the strain that they put their bodies under, the increased risk of developing heart disease and certain cancers, and the cost to the economy and the NHS in Scotland. We also know that Scotland's record among developed nations is one of the worst for levels of obesity.

An increase in regular physical activity is one of the key ways in which we can address the problem, and one of the best ways of driving up levels of physical activity is through a culture of

regular exercise and participation in sport. Our schools have a key role to play in that.

When I was at secondary school—although it was not yesterday, I think that it was more recently than anyone else in the chamber—[*Laughter.*]

Gil Paterson: What makes you think that?

Mark Griffin: Mr Yousaf challenged me on which of us was younger and I won through on that, so I can say with some confidence that I am the youngest member in the chamber.

When I was at secondary school, my classmates and I got two periods of PE every week. Those two periods were certainly beneficial to me, although I never needed much encouragement to take off my shirt and tie and get my shorts and T-shirt on—I promise members that I do not have a change of clothes with me, so they need not worry. That meant that although my time at secondary school predated the Government's targets, if those targets had been in place at the time, they would have been met and my classmates and I would have contributed to another positive statistic for the Government.

However, we must look at the education that is delivered in such lessons. When I was at school, the two classes in my year were merged and then split up into a boys group and a girls group. Roughly 25 boys would be getting ready for PE in the changing room when the PE teacher would announce his entrance by shouting, in his deep, booming voice, "Right boys—football!" There would be a cheer from most of us and then—rain, hail or shine—we would be sent out on to the ash football pitch for a 40-minute grudge match between the two registration classes. From first year to fourth year, I was involved in twice-weekly football matches between the C class and the D class. There was little else by way of PE in between.

As I said, that was beneficial for me. I loved playing football and I still do. As members can imagine, in a west of Scotland school, most of the guys in my class enjoyed it, too. I cannot speak in a debate about sport without mentioning the fact that one of those guys was Darren Barr, who I imagine will feature for Hearts in the Scottish cup final at the weekend.

However, not everyone enjoyed football. The same core of five to 10 pupils would forget their kit or have sprained ankles or sore heads, or they would just mill about the pitch to avoid a confrontation with the teacher. Those five to 10 boys would never have got into the culture of regular activity through their two periods of PE, as the extent of their physical activity was the short jog from the changing room up to the football pitch. Despite that, they would still have been

classed as having their two periods of PE every week, in line with Government targets.

I am glad to say that things have changed at my old school. After I left it, the previous Scottish Executive made St Maurice's high school a sports comprehensive, along with two other schools in North Lanarkshire. That was done to advance the principle of raising achievement for all, which involved recognising that education was not just about academic success and, similarly, that sporting and physical activity was not just about football.

Fitness motivators were piloted to introduce in the PE curriculum classes such as body jam, cheerleading and dance classes. The intention was mainly to encourage girls to participate, but boys took part, too. The provision of those classes marked a shift away from the regular netball PE lessons, which seemed to disenfranchise more girls than football did with boys. North Lanarkshire Leisure now provides free access to the gyms and swimming pools in the area for S5 and S6 pupils during exam time to help continue the culture of regular physical activity beyond S4.

Active schools co-ordinators are driving up participation and performance levels in schools. At the recent St Maurice's high school awards, the regional and national successes of girls basketball, netball and football teams were amazing to see. Their performance was at a much higher level than that of the equivalent boys teams. I spoke to some of the recipients of awards, who told me that they were planning on moving on to university and that they would join university sports clubs and teams because of the positive experience that they had had at school.

What has happened in North Lanarkshire and at St Maurice's, in particular, is a shining example of how to engage pupils in sport and physical activity by providing the time for high-quality PE teaching that covers a wide range of sports and activities, and which caters for all abilities.

One of the getting it right for every child principles is that children should have

"opportunities to take part in activities such as play, recreation and sport which contribute to healthy growth and development".

We should ensure that we have a new generation of young Scots for whom a culture of irregular or no physical activity is alien, because they have been engaged in high-quality physical activity that suited them and which they enjoyed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): You must close now, please.

Mark Griffin: However, we will not achieve that if we continue to count throwing 25 boys out on to a football pitch for two periods a week as a

success. I look forward to hearing from the minister how the quality of physical education will be assessed as we move forward with the range of initiatives that she has announced.

16:05

Margaret Burgess (Cunninghame South)

(SNP): I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on tackling obesity in Scotland. We must remember that obesity is not confined to Scotland and is a global problem. The World Health Organization has spoken of obesity as

“the greatest health threat of the 21st century”.

In 2008, 1.5 billion adults worldwide aged 20 and over were overweight or obese. In 2010, 43 million children were overweight or obese. That is worrying. We have heard the worrying statistics in Scotland on young people who are obese and in some cases severely obese. We have heard that adult obesity in Scotland is predicted to reach well over 40 per cent by 2030 if we do not deal with the issue.

We have heard about the risks of being overweight or obese, which include a risk of serious disease and premature death. Obesity also contributes to an increased risk of osteoarthritis, low self-esteem, depression and psychological problems. Those latter issues apply to children as well as to adults. In 2007-08, the estimated cost to our health service was £457 million, and the figure is predicted to increase. It is therefore vital that we try to halt any further rise in obesity, while reducing existing obesity levels among the population.

We need to put the issue in context and understand that preventing obesity is a complex matter. The 2008 report by Sheffield Hallam University that followed an earlier foresight report states:

“There is no example anywhere in the world where the obesity trend has been reversed”.

I say that not to argue that we cannot do it, but to point out that the challenge is huge. The same report talks about the obesogenic environment that promotes obesity and unhealthy weight levels. That is just by circumstance and not because of anything that has been done deliberately. Alison Johnstone referred to our reliance on vehicles and the fact that our built environment is designed around that. We have labour-saving devices, easy access to and availability of cheap, high-fat and high-sugar foods, internet shopping, eating out, fast foods and takeaways, super-sized products and genetic and social factors.

Of course, there is insufficient physical activity. Therefore, the challenge is great and requires a complex and multifaceted solution. The cross-

cutting approach in the Scottish Government's obesity route map recognises that. It makes commitments to tackle all the factors that contribute to an overweight and obese population: food consumption and diet; behaviour in the early years; health and wellbeing in the workplace; and physical activity. Paramount in that is early intervention. Many members have made the point better than I could about the importance of intervening at an early age.

Much of what I was going to say has been said, so I will say a little about my personal experience of the challenge of trying to maintain a healthy weight. Many people have said to me, “That is not a problem for you, Margaret,” but all my adult life, I have struggled to maintain a healthy weight. I have gone to every weight loss club known and reached the target at every one. I have been 2 stone lighter than I am now and 3 stone heavier. However, in the past seven years, I have managed to maintain a healthy weight. I have always had a healthy lifestyle and eaten healthy foods, but I believe that the difference is that I have sustained physical activity, which is walking. I appreciate the minister's comments about walking and the national walking strategy. Physical exercise alone will not result in weight loss, and nor will changing eating habits. We need a combination of the two to maintain a healthy weight.

The focus should be on maintaining a healthy weight, because it does not benefit any of us if our weight goes up and down. I know many people who are in the same situation as me. For me, there is evidence that walking has made a huge difference.

It is not an easy task, even for people like me who were not overweight as a child. We must recognise that there is a lot more involved than just saying to people that they should cut down what they eat and take a bit of exercise. Lots of other factors must be considered.

The minister outlined many of the initiatives that the Scottish Government, in partnership with local authorities and other organisations, is taking to increase physical activity among our population. The initiatives include investment in cycling, encouraging walking to school, two hours of quality PE each week—which we hope to achieve by 2014—and investing £25 million from cashback for communities directly in sporting facilities. In my constituency, Kilwinning benefited from that money. There is also the legacy of the Commonwealth games, which will ensure increased access to sports facilities and a more active nation.

Regular physical exercise is important in the jigsaw of tackling obesity, but we are not all budding athletes or fans of the gym. We need to

look at what activities are available. There has to be a variety: walking, cycling, aquarobics, swimming, Zumba and keep fit, to name but a few. We have to aim for every section of the population. We must recognise Patricia Ferguson's point about young girls, who, on reaching the age of 12 or 13, give up physical activity. That is a time when a lot of young girls' body shapes are changing, and they do not want to strip off and take up gym. We need to look at a variety of physical exercise because that, I believe, will have a positive impact on our stated aim of having people live longer and healthier lives.

16:11

Dennis Robertson (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP): I am guilty as charged, Presiding Officer. I stand before you as a person who knows that he is overweight and does not take enough exercise, but who is perhaps not totally inactive. I walk to work most days. Perhaps I have no other option, although Mr Q, my dog, is not with me this afternoon—he is out walking.

Obesity is a complex matter, but one that must be put into perspective. We must find out what the causal links are. Yesterday, we discussed the national parenting strategy in the chamber, and that links to part of what I will say this afternoon. As parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and relatives who have young children, we have a responsibility. It is not so many weeks since Easter passed. How many of us indulged in the Easter festivities and went out and bought our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews chocolate? We had alternatives and choices. We could have taken them something healthy. Did we? We know that a healthy option is better for them but, as role models, did we take that step forward? If we are going to make a change, it is our responsibility to make it. We must not be a society of people who just tell others, "This is how you do it"; we must adopt the philosophy ourselves and lead by example.

In my constituency of Aberdeenshire West, we have some of the most wonderful opportunities to keep active. We have fantastic forestry walks, areas where people can ramble, hillwalking, rivers in which we can canoe, areas where we can take our mountain bikes and areas where we can just have leisurely pleasure walks. However, as Nigel Don said, sometimes it is an effort to get there. If the infrastructure is not there to enable people to get there, they might not go.

In Huntly in my constituency, the Deveron Arts organisation had what I think is a unique initiative: a slow marathon, which I took part in. I do not have the medal to prove it, but I did sign up. The marathon involved walking the distance from

Huntly to Ethiopia and back. One of the participants in Deveron Arts is from Ethiopia and she came up with the idea that if our schools and people in our community all signed up, we would walk a distance equivalent to 225 marathons. With the number of people who took part, we covered the distance from Huntly to Ethiopia and back. That was a nice initiative for getting children, parents and older members of our community involved, all walking whatever number of miles they wished for the slow marathon. There are nice initiatives out there that people can do that do not take money or a Government to implement.

I congratulate Aberdeenshire Council on endorsing the community sport hubs, which are a way of getting our younger people back into sport—hopefully, at a cost that is affordable to them. Sport, physical activity and exercise alone are not the answer, however. We have heard the stark reality of the statistics, which cannot be addressed by exercise and physical activity alone. As Margaret Burgess concluded in her speech, we need a combination of exercise or activity and the right food in the right amounts. Often, we eat the right food but the quantity that we take is far beyond what we require.

I thank Patricia Ferguson for taking me back to all my yesterdays. She reminded me of when my mother tied the dusters round my feet and asked me to slide up and down the hall to polish the linoleum. I inform the younger members in the chamber that that was before fitted carpets.

I say to Alison Johnstone that in 1976 I was a fit, healthy 20-year-old. I was fit and healthy because I swam three times a week, I ran at Meadowbank stadium, I went abseiling and I canoed. Why did I stop all those activities? I started work and my lifestyle changed. I went into a completely different lifestyle and the time that I had available to do those things changed.

Currently, my lifestyle in the Parliament is different. I do not eat regular meals because the activities in the Parliament—the various events that I attend, and so on—mean that I cannot. However, that is no excuse. The problem is that we all try to find an excuse for why we are overweight, why we do not take exercise and why we are inactive. We need to find solutions and accept the fact that we must be role models for our young children. We should ask them not to do as we say, but to do as we do.

16:17

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): As many members have emphasised, there is a complex relationship between obesity, physical activity and general health. We all know that obesity is a risk factor for

many diseases, including several cancers, as was emphasised at the Scotland against cancer conference a couple of weeks ago. Perhaps we can also agree that there are many factors involved in obesity, of which the lack of physical activity is just one and probably not the most important.

Since physical activity is the main focus of the debate, however, we should remember two points. First, physical activity is beneficial to a range of health factors—particularly cardiovascular health—quite apart from the obesity dimension. Secondly, physical activity will be beneficial for obese and overweight people even if they remain obese or overweight. Sir Harry Burns made that point when he spoke at lunch time today at the cross-party group on health inequalities. All of that explains why physical inactivity has been identified as the fourth leading risk factor for mortality globally.

I welcome much of what the minister announced today—for example, the initiative with the Royal College of General Practitioners, the quality interventions and the emphasis that she placed on dance-related projects for teenage girls, who often lose interest in other forms of activity during adolescence. I point out that such activities may also be beneficial to teenage boys and, indeed, older boys such as myself.

I also welcome the minister's announcement of the national walking strategy and the emphasis that she and other members placed on walking generally. More people are travelling about in cars and sitting at desks in offices all day, so there is a particular issue about getting exercise as we go to and from work. I welcome what she said about the Paths for All Partnership and the walk to work scheme that is running this week, as workers across the country take to the paths of our cities to prove that, where there is an option to go on foot, we should make the most of the paths that are available.

A similar campaign is running for schoolchildren in response to recent figures that showed that fewer than half of Scottish schoolchildren walk to school. I welcome the emphasis that Alison Johnstone put on creating the best environments to encourage walking, and I am sure that she would support me if I made the same point about cycling. If we had safer roads for cyclists, that would help more people to travel in a healthy way. I support the target of having 10 per cent of journeys made by bike, and also the demand that several groups have made for 10 per cent of the transport budget to be spent on active travel.

The minister also mentioned the tangible benefits of exercise for older people. Increasing physical activity and exercise in older people has been identified as a key target by the World Health

Organization active ageing framework to reduce the global burden of non-communicable diseases.

One of the delights of being on Twitter is that, if we follow the right people, we read all sorts of interesting postings. This week, Lesley Holdsworth, who led the older people's work for the Kerr review, tweeted a selection of Cochrane reviews that assessed the benefits of physical activity and exercise for older people. I could speak for up to my time limit on that, but I had better not, because I want to move on.

Quite rightly, much of today's debate has focused on young people. The minister said that the PE target will be met by 2014 and mentioned £6 million of extra funding for that, but I am sure that she is aware that, in her local authority area, the number of PE teachers has been reduced recently. I am sure that she will use whatever influence she has with the administration to reverse that, but it highlights the discrepancy between the overall rhetoric of policy and what is actually happening in many cases on the ground.

Shona Robison: Does the member recognise that Dundee City Council is one of the best performing councils when it comes to the delivery of the PE targets? Also, we have to rely on classroom teachers to deliver PE in primary schools because, with the best will in the world, six specialists across 38 schools are not going to be able to deliver two hours of PE to all pupils.

Malcolm Chisholm: I accept to some extent what the minister says about primary schools, but I think that we all agree that specialist teachers are required in secondary schools.

The Government also made a manifesto pledge to work towards a guarantee of five days of outdoor education for every school pupil, but information that was published in July 2009 in response to a freedom of information request revealed that only seven local authorities held information centrally on outdoor education and in none of them had all pupils been involved in it.

We need to address the cultural challenges that lead to obesity in young people and in people more generally. That was recognised by Dr Andrew Walker in his study of the economics of obesity in Scotland in 2003. I will not quote the cost that he mentioned, because it is a lot more now than it was then, but he said that, for any strategy to work, it must take into account the complexity of the condition and not simply address it as one issue in isolation. He stated:

“A radical programme is needed to tackle this serious modern health issue - a nationwide and collaborative obesity management strategy: firm targets, structured care, health promotion, disease prevention and collaboration between Government departments.”

I trust that the minister is at least ensuring that that collaboration is taking place, and hopefully most of the other objectives as well.

16:23

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): It has been an interesting debate. I learned lots of interesting things that I did not anticipate finding out this afternoon. For example, I now know what the baby diets of both Hanzala Malik and Nanette Milne were. I did not expect to learn that, nor did I expect to find out that Mark McDonald was a highly active person until he started obsessively tweeting Alison Johnstone, or that Gil Paterson's real reason for being physically inactive is that he secretly watches "Hannah Montana" with his daughter.

Much of what has been reiterated this afternoon was not alarming; many of the poor health statistics are more predictable than alarming, if we are honest about it.

I welcome the tapering off of the decline in healthiness and of the increase in obesity, and the gradual increase in physical activity that we have heard about, but poor health and diets and low physical activity levels are not inevitable in Scotland. I am reminded of recent conversations about alcohol. Harry Burns has already been mentioned. He talks about a relationship with alcohol as not being inevitable and takes us back just a few decades to when Scotland was seen as a moderate nation in its drinking habits. He has significant information to pass on about how we can promote positive health outcomes in Scotland. He speaks about people not necessarily being born healthy, getting older and having their health decline, but about the need for Scottish people—indeed, all the people in the world—to nurture and develop their health as they go through life. That is vital as we take forward any initiative to tackle obesity and promote physical activity.

I want to say a little bit about the work that goes on in schools. Other members, including Mark Griffin, have shared their school experiences. I concur with part of what Mark Griffin said. It is hard to believe, but I was quite a fit and healthy person at school, as I had a teacher who promoted Gaelic football—not football—in it. I bought into that and was a fit and healthy young man as a result. It is about giving additional choice in schools to young people rather than offering just traditional sports, which, for parts of the west of Scotland, seems to have always meant soccer. In that context, I will give a little mention to St Roch's secondary school in Springburn, which has developed quite a successful rugby initiative, which is good to see. It diversifies the team sports agenda there, although much of the work is done on a voluntary basis by staff and parents.

I would like to mention the success of the active school networks and the £12 million per annum investment to give a structured approach to physical activities in schools, not only the traditional sports. Excellent work is going on in schools.

We have heard about the transition between school and later life, particularly for young females, who tend not to stay physically active as they get older. There is a similar but not identical trend for boys; it is just not as marked. The transition between school and the life of work is a key point and the Government has to find a way of taking more action to keep people physically active at that point. Physical activity is a habit that many people get into at school but do not retain, for whatever reason, once out in the world of work. It would be good to hear more about how we can take that forward.

On the strength of community sports clubs, I have been remarkably impressed by the organisation of running clubs across Glasgow and Scotland. Earlier this year, I had the privilege of attending the Nigel Barge 10K race for Maryhill Harriers. I say to Patricia Ferguson that I did not participate in the race—I am impressed that she has done 5Ks regularly in the past few years—but a plethora of running clubs took part, and there was a junior section, which was fantastic to see. We have to find a way of promoting such things across Government.

Many community sports initiatives have been supported by cashback for communities, which I welcome. I give a small plug for the twilight basketball initiative in Glasgow. I know that Glasgow Rocks has been quite heavily involved in that.

Another fitness initiative that has been successful and which has received a lot of publicity recently is the football fans in training initiative, and I had the pleasure of visiting Parkhead to see it in action. I want to plug the general work that all football clubs do, not only with the FFIT programme, but in throwing open their doors and facilities to the wider community to promote a range of activities for young people in the local area and their staff. I think that Gil Paterson mentioned the world of work, and Dennis Robertson mentioned that the world of work does not sit well with a fit and healthy lifestyle. Whether we are talking about Glasgow city chambers, Parkhead, town halls across the country or large employers, perhaps workplaces must do more to promote fit and healthy options and lifestyles for workforces and the general public who stay in the area. They have the facilities. They can throw them open, and people can get benefits from them.

Finally, the football fans in training initiative that I mentioned is carried out in partnership with the University of Glasgow. I hope to see for the first time real and robust data on the benefits of using sporting clubs as preventative spending champions in the positive health agenda to provide evidence for investing more in that. We should invest more in that approach, but I realise that we must get evidence to monitor its effectiveness.

16:29

Alison Johnstone: I welcome the generally consensual nature of the debate. There has been some disagreement, on the two hours of PE for example, but I think that it is fair to say that we all know that if children have access only to two hours of PE each week, we will not see a fit, healthy Scotland any time soon.

Margaret McDougall and Hanzala Malik spoke about the importance of optimal nutrition from the very beginning of life. Patricia Ferguson and Nanette Milne noted how physical activity was part and parcel of life in the not-too-distant past. If we were to introduce more 20mph zones and the Living Streets model, that would provide far more opportunities for young people to play outside and for their parents to be more relaxed about that.

Mark Griffin mentioned his recent schooldays. I welcome his recognition that football is not the only sport. Bob Doris touched on the fact that Gaelic football might be an attractive alternative—perhaps we can try that some time.

I was touched by Margaret Burgess's personal experience, which highlights the need for physical activity. This morning, I was speaking to Bill Walker, who is the head coach of Edinburgh Athletic Club. He emphasised the fact that if we obsess about diet, we will have people who are focused on what they are denying themselves, whereas if we focus on physical activity, we improve our self-esteem and wellbeing. Gil Paterson's comments hit the nail on the head: fitness should not only be about aesthetics; it has to be about wellbeing.

Dennis Robertson rightly touched on the need for a work-life balance and the fact that we in this building should lead by example. I try occasionally to get out for a walk after lunch. It is difficult, but we can try harder.

I completely disagree with Mark McDonald's comments: he clearly is in a strong position to speak on the issues, as his understanding of the issues and the need for action is obvious. We will continue to campaign on getting women on to "Question of Sport".

Nigel Don spoke about open space and said that whether to be physically active is a personal choice. I agree to an extent, but it is far easier to get out and exercise in a crime-free, pleasant environment than it is in some of our inner-city and peripheral housing estates.

Affordability and family finance come into the issue, too. If I had not been granted an athletics scholarship in my competitive days, my family simply could not have afforded for me to train six days a week, as I was one of four children. There are other factors in play in our choices.

Patricia Ferguson noted the impact of the design of our built environment. As I said at the start of the debate, there is a view that we have designed an obesogenic environment. Redesigning and rethinking our streets, workplaces and the layout of our cities will take time and require sustained effort, but that is essential to embedding physical activity into daily lives and schedules.

The minister talked of the obesity route map action plan, which is a good collection of policies and actions that cut across the different areas of Government that need to take action on obesity. I am glad that it was updated at the end of last year and that it is monitored. Five of the route map action plan points refer directly to the design of our cities and built environment. Four action plan points refer to access to open space and promoting children's play. The availability of safe outdoor space is identified as a key driver of childhood activity. Another four points refer directly to promoting walking and cycling, and several more talk of providing routes to school or work. All those points are highlighted in the Green amendment.

We clearly agree on what must be done to improve physical activity and help to tackle obesity. However, that agreement needs to be followed by spending decisions that mirror it, prioritise active travel over a car culture and support sporting facilities when money is tight. That is money well spent—it is preventative spending. Nigel Don commented on cycle paths, which are a good example of such spend. Indeed, I support Malcolm Chisholm's comments on safe cycle paths.

The Scottish Government currently spends less than 1 per cent of its transport budget on active travel. That proportion has dropped for the past two years. I believe that the minister is sincere about tackling obesity. We can make great inroads if we invest more in active travel, so I ask her to raise the issue loudly in the Government. Money that is spent on active travel will cut obesity and health spending.

In 2006, the “National Audit of Scotland’s Sports Facilities” found that an investment of £110 million was needed every year for the next 25 years to bring facilities up to an acceptable standard. The Commonwealth games have focused minds. Investment has been made in many facilities, and I welcome the focus on the legacy.

Investment in elite sports is important, but local access to good-quality affordable sports and leisure facilities is a key part of the solution to embedding physical activity in the culture and minds of young people across Scotland. I ask the minister to speak to local government colleagues in Edinburgh to ensure that they work with the community group that hopes to run Leith Waterworld—a local pool that is a unique facility—as a community model.

The debate is important. I hope that it will inform the update of the obesity action plan, but that is not enough by itself. I ask the minister to highlight in her closing speech the need for budget decisions to focus on forms of preventative spend that have multiple benefits, which include tackling obesity. Not all the solution to our obesity crisis comes from central Government, but it is clear that central Government has an important role to play. I welcome the minister’s commitment to action on the issue.

16:36

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I begin by apologising for missing one or two speeches, including Alison Johnstone’s opening speech.

I have some simple questions for members. Are they larger or smaller than they were when they first arrived in Parliament? Are they heavier or lighter than they were? In the previous parliamentary session, I observed that I had never met some members on a staircase. The situation is similar in this session.

One innovation in this session has been the burgeoning range of home baking at the coffee stall, which fair flies off the counter. I assume that people in this building consume those goods. The canteen trays fair groan with produce at lunch time. As Dennis Robertson observed, sometimes the issue is the quantity of food rather than its content.

Some of my parliamentary colleagues exercise. John Lamont took up running last year. He has become an absolute bore about the whole thing and he enters marathons around the world. There is an age at which men and Lycra should not meet. I sometimes see him as he comes back into the building looking a very poor soul, which does not inspire me.

I suppose that the point that I am trying to make is as in Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night”:

“Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?”

Part of the reason why people eat such things is that they quite enjoy them, and therein lies the problem. It is not really enough for MSPs to hope that we can change public attitudes, but a lot of members have pointed to the direction to take.

In opening the debate, Shona Robison sold efforts short in one sense. Anecdotally, my impression as I go about is that more people are exercising. I am aware of more people cycling, running and actively participating in health clubs. The issue is not that we are having no success. However, Patricia Ferguson made an instructive point about the disparity between boys and girls. At the age of 12, girls almost cease to take exercise—they exercise at the rate that men of 40 might. It was interesting to hear that, individually, we walk 63 miles fewer per year than we did in 1975.

I do not know how many colleagues have followed the series “Two Greedy Italians” on BBC 2. In one singularly depressing episode, the presenters went to their home region and heard that, although Italy had had the lowest rate of obesity among young people in Europe, it now has the highest rate in Europe. The social dynamic had underpinned that change. I have always thought of Italy as a country of large families, but they are a thing of the past—most households now have a single child. There has been a trend away from the family meal, when people prepared good-quality, healthy food, which had to go further to feed a large family, towards reliance on what is available in machines, on fast food and on simply giving people money to go and buy whatever is available at lunch time, which might mean a popular choice rather than a healthy choice, as seems to be the disease in this country. The problem is therefore not just in Scotland, although, as the minister said, our record is not good and stands in the way of progress.

I listened to what Mark Griffin had to say. I do not know what he is on, but if we could all have some of it, there might be hope. I suspect that he is on youth, in which case we are all doomed. Until I was 27, I was only 9 and a half stone. Then I married and it all went downhill—[*Interruption.*] Well, you women want us to go and meet your mothers and all that sort of thing—we used to do exercise before we did that—

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Enough!

Jackson Carlaw: Richard Simpson is worried for me. The point is that there are all manner of dynamics at play.

A key point that Alison Johnstone, Margaret Burgess and Dennis Robertson made is that walking is free and is something that we could all do far more of.

At the centre of the debate was the recognition that, given that we must address the health challenges that have been talked about if the health service is to cope with demographic changes, tackling the issue with young people is the key. I wonder whether, if we told young people in secondary school that they could leave school an hour early if they had met certain PE criteria, the young people would all queue up to take part. Sometimes there has to be some sort of incentive. If we just say to young people, "If you do not do otherwise, you will grow up to be chronically obese," that simply does not resonate with them.

The speeches that we heard today were perhaps all made in similar form when we last debated the issue, when the strategy to which the minister referred was unveiled. It is clear that there is an on-going issue. The potential cost of £3 billion in 2030 to which the minister referred is a challenge that we must ensure that the people who succeed us in the Parliament do not have to meet, because it will be impossible to meet it. Politicians and the wider community must find a way to make the next generation want to exercise. That is the magic ingredient that we have not yet discovered.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for that sparkling performance. I call Dr Richard Simpson, who has just over seven minutes.

16:42

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I do not intend to sparkle with revelations like those that have been made by some members. We have had a consensual debate, and it has been none the worse for that.

Patricia Ferguson was right to say that the starting point is the recognition that the world has changed. I go back even further than many members do. As a five-year-old, I walked half a mile down a hill to catch a corporation bus and then another half mile to primary school at Perth academy. There was still rationing at the time, so the diet side of things was not particularly important. We just did not get the sweets, fast food and so on that are available today.

Of course, if we go back even further, obesity used to be a sign of wealth. Today it is a sign of greater poverty. Obesity is so endemic in the population that it is a problem. Two thirds of adults are overweight. We have a generation that is largely inactive and is happier to watch on television the amazing exploits of people such as our champion Dr Andrew Murray, admiring his

marathon to the pole or his ultra-long-distance runs, such as his run to Ethiopia—which he did in one go, rather than over 200 marathons in the way that Dennis Robertson described. Perhaps such exploits put people off doing, rather than watching.

Many members reminded us that obesity increased from 17 per cent in 1995 to 27 per cent in 2010. The proportion is predicted to rise to 40 per cent by 2030 if the trend does not change, as Margaret McDougall said. The minister and other members outlined the stark consequences of failure to reverse the trend.

As Malcolm Chisholm reminded us, obesity is only partly about activity. Margaret McDougall emphasised the importance of promoting breastfeeding. That is a starting point, although I would go back a step, because we need to work with pregnant women to promote their good health.

Gil Paterson, in a thoughtful speech, made clear just how complex tackling obesity is. Diet is important; family meals play a part, as Jackson Carlaw reminded us. Parents wrestle with television and games technology, as Gil Paterson said. Perhaps the Wii that we give our children to exercise with is a palliative to our consciences, rather than being real exercise.

When Scots gave up porridge in favour of salt-laden, high-calorie energy foods, when we moved from home cooking to prepared foods, when we went from taking sandwiches to work to eating takeaways, high in saturated fats, we began to travel down this path, which could lead to a reversal of many of the extended years that have been achieved in the past generation. Meanwhile, the health inequality gap simply increases.

What has become clear, and was re-emphasised at the conference in Lyon last week, is that treating children on their own is ineffective. It has to be about treating mothers and families; that is the way forward and the research evidence is now becoming clear on that. Dennis Robertson correctly identified parents as critical and grandparents, too, are perhaps important. A number of speakers made the important suggestion that we need to look to ourselves. I regret that the Parliament does not have a gym or, rather, it has a gym but no equipment. That is a poor thing not just for us, but for our staff. We are employers and we need to look after our staff.

Patricia Ferguson referred to the gender gap and Mark McDonald gave personal testimony of his own struggles, from his 20s on, with exercise and resisting fast food. Margaret Burgess reflected on something that is more true of women but does not apply only to women, which is the see-saw of weight. We need to recognise that a bit more.

In question time today, the minister batted away my question about the counterweight programme. I say to her that I was not being economical with the truth in any way when I said that the Government's efforts to transition the programme into health boards, which I would applaud, have resulted in six redundancies in the counterweight programme. Scotland is leading the world with that programme—that is a fact. I am certain that it was not the Government's intention, but the reality is that there has been a failure in transition, as there was with healthy living centres, which had to be rescued by money; and as there was with the retired and senior volunteer programme, which was important in my area in providing exercise for people with learning disability. We need to look at the transition of programmes.

Malcolm Chisholm rightly said that physical activity is not the most important factor, because someone can be overweight and really quite fit and have an extended life with a reasonable quality of life. If someone is overweight and unfit, that is less likely.

I will not go into the consequences of being overweight, but diabetes is probably the biggest challenge, which could lead to a reversal of the cardiovascular gains that we have made. Many cancers are associated with obesity as well.

What should be done? We have targets. Labour in 2004 set the target of two hours of physical education for every pupil, to be met by 2008. Progress was slow. The target date was moved by the SNP, despite a promise in 2007 to meet it. It has now been moved further, to 2014. The watering down of that contract is regrettable. The Health and Sport Committee showed in its report on pathways into sport and physical activity that East Renfrewshire, for example, with good leadership and good commitment, achieved the two-hours goal and an extensive range of participation in sport. That shows that the target is achievable, but there has to be a drive from the new leadership in the councils to achieve it. I hope that it will be a subject of early discussion with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, using the money that the Government has—I am glad to say—announced.

There are other broken promises. Malcolm Chisholm referred to the five days of outdoor education. I add to that the free swimming that was promised and the moratorium on building on playing fields, which does not seem to have been fulfilled completely.

The mainstreaming of active sports coordinators is important, as is inreach from sports and athletics clubs. As Bob Doris said, an inspirational teacher in a sport—he mentioned Gaelic football—can often be instrumental in encouraging people into sport. In my area, we had

a teacher at Wallace high school who was interested in canoeing—

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The member needs to wind up.

Dr Simpson: I was told that I had between seven and a half and eight minutes by the Deputy Presiding Officer, but I will wind up, Presiding Officer, obeying your instructions.

There are many other things that I would have mentioned, such as Trellis, which is involved in therapeutic gardening; woodlands; and the importance of achieving good walking. However, I will conclude by asking members to support the amendment in my name and saying that we will be supporting the amendment in Alison Johnstone's name.

The Presiding Officer: Apologies, Dr Simpson. There was obviously a failure in communication.

16:50

Shona Robison: As many others have said, the debate has been largely consensual, so I will deal with the disagreements first and get them out of the way before I talk about members' contributions.

A number of Labour members mentioned the target of two hours of physical education a week in primary schools. It is absolutely my intention to tackle that long-standing target. I gently point out to Labour members that, three years into the Labour Party's tenure, only 3 per cent of primary schools were meeting the two-hour target. Five years into our tenure, that figure stands at 64 per cent, and at 67 per cent for secondary schools. No one is speaking from a position of strength on this issue. However, we should agree that we have now set a date for the delivery of those two hours a week. I hasten to add that Labour's manifesto had no end date for the issue and promised only to make progress on it. I do not think that that is good enough, which is why I have set an end date of 2014, to coincide with the end of the Commonwealth games. The target has been around for too long.

As others have said, two hours of PE in primary school and two periods in secondary school should be a minimum. In itself, that is not enough. That is why the other things that are going on in our schools and communities are important. I will discuss those things in a minute.

In her opening remarks, Patricia Ferguson noted that, as well as thinking about energy out and physical activity, we must also think about energy in and eating habits, which are equally important. Earlier, I said that I was not trying to cover all the four main pillars of the route map, but that I

wanted to focus instead on just one. However, her point was absolutely right.

I pay tribute to the North Glasgow Healthy Living Community initiative. Such community-based programmes are important, particularly when they can secure the trust of the community in order to help to change behaviours.

Nanette Milne talked about advice in the early years. That is important.

Alison Johnstone said a number of important things. She talked about the affordability of and access to facilities, and mentioned active schools. I hope that I can reassure her by saying that the majority of active school sessions are free, partly because 73 per cent are delivered by volunteers. That is a good thing. We have also said that affordability is one of the key tests of whether a community sports hub will receive money from sportscotland. We have to ensure that the local community can afford to use those facilities.

It is important that the Paths for All Partnership is encouraging more women to be active. That is why we are continuing to give it funding.

Nigel Don always has interesting remarks to make. I acknowledge that parents' recognition of weight issues is important, as is the availability of walking and cycling routes. A lot of the work that has been done around walking groups in urban areas is intended to help people to make the most of what they have in their locality, rather than getting them to go outwith their locality to take part in walking activities.

Patricia Ferguson: I am struck by the point that the minister has just made, particularly in the context of Dennis Robertson's point about the fact that we ourselves fail to have that healthy work-life balance. Perhaps a legacy of today's debate might be that we start an informal group of MSPs who are interested in these issues and might want to walk together now and again, either at lunch time or in the evening. I am sure that, across the parties, there would be enough of us to make that something that we could do to set an example.

Shona Robison: I am happy to agree to that. There could be some interesting conversations along those routes. We should lead by example, and that is perhaps one way of doing it. I note, too, the comments about the use of the gym. That issue may need to be revisited over time.

Margaret McDougall talked about the even earlier benefits of breastfeeding. There is always more that we need to do to promote and encourage that. She talked about the jumpstart programme in NHS Ayrshire and Arran—again, that is very important—and the benefit of the Commonwealth games for the people of Scotland. We want to deliver a minimum of 150 community

sports hubs throughout Scotland, because that is a tangible, important benefit.

Gil Paterson talked about the power of television and, in his case, "Hannah Montana" filling his television screen. "The Saddle Club" fills ours; my purse is emptied when we have to go to the riding school at the weekend, but at least that is a good physical activity.

Mark McDonald talked about the control of food outlets. We are doing a lot of work with local authorities on what happens beyond the school gate.

Mark Griffin made a very good speech, in which he talked about us not getting so obsessed with the two hours or two periods of PE that we do not consider what goes on in those two hours or two periods. That is absolutely right, which is why the aim of part of the funding that we have secured for that through Education Scotland is to consider quality. Education Scotland has a working group to look at how we can drive up the quality of physical education in primary and secondary schools. There are some great examples out there, but we need to ensure that that quality is happening everywhere.

Like Mark Griffin, I pay tribute to North Lanarkshire Leisure. Its target is to deliver 50 per cent of North Lanarkshire's secondary schools as community sports hubs. That is a good model for elsewhere, and I am keen to support it.

Margaret Burgess gave a good personal account of some of the challenges that she has faced and the importance of walking, which has been a theme throughout the debate.

Dennis Robertson reminded us of the outdoor opportunities in Scotland and talked about the excuses that people use. I would point members to a good YouTube video called "23 and 1/2 hours", which is about how to be inactive for 23 and a half hours. It is food for thought.

Similarly, Malcolm Chisholm talked about the role of outdoor education and Bob Doris talked about workplace intervention—

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me, minister. Will members who are arriving in the chamber please do so quietly and stop their conversations?

Shona Robison: The point about workplace interventions is a good one. Many workplaces are trying to organise walking groups and activity groups at lunch times. However, the life transitions period is important, too, because when many young people go to college or university, some of their sport and physical activity habits change. We are working closely with various sectors to do what we can.

Jackson Carlaw said that it all went downhill after he got married; I am sure that Mrs Carlaw would say the same. In fact, I have already phoned her to tell her—not really. He made the important point that his impression from anecdotal evidence is that more people are exercising. I agree. People are getting the message, but we must not be complacent. We have to step up the pace.

Richard Simpson mentioned Dr Andrew Murray, our physical activity champion. He is by no means saying that we have to go on excursions, walk or run to the Sahara to meet the challenge of physical activity. He leads from the front and inspires other health professionals to recognise the importance of physical activity—that is important. If we could get every health professional to prescribe physical activity instead of other things, would we not be in a better place, given the opportunities that that would present?

I will not discuss counterweight because I did so earlier and I want to end on a consensual note. The debate has been important, but it is not the end of the journey. I would be delighted to come back next year and give a full progress report on the obesity route map. I thank everyone for their contributions.

Member's Statement

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Before we move to decision time, Joan McAlpine wishes to make a short statement to members.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I wish to apologise sincerely for my absence from the chamber at health and wellbeing question time this afternoon. I realise that that was not the first time that I have done that, and I understand the gravity of the matter.

The fault is entirely mine: I am afraid that I completely lost track of time. I realise that I have no excuse for not being present in the chamber when required. I apologise for showing such disrespect not only to you, Presiding Officer, but to Parliament and to my fellow MSPs.

I take this as a salutary lesson, on which I will reflect.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. I welcome the fact that Ms McAlpine has come personally to the chamber to apologise, and I note her explanation.

It is a great privilege to be a member of the Scottish Parliament, and I expect all members to carry out their duties diligently on behalf of the people who elected them. I make it clear that, as Presiding Officer, I will not tolerate discourtesy in the chamber or to the chamber. I am determined that all members will respect each other and the Scottish Parliament.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on justice, if the amendment in the name of Kenny MacAskill is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Alison McInnes falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-02906.2, in the name of Kenny MacAskill, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02906, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on justice, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)

(SNP)

McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)

Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 39, Abstentions 14.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: That means that the amendment in the name of Alison McInnes falls.

The second question is, that motion S4M-02906, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on justice, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)

McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)

Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 43, Abstentions 10.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the key role played by civilian staff in Scotland's police forces in helping to protect communities; recognises and values the dedication and hard work of police staff and police officers in Scotland, which have resulted in a 35-year low in recorded crime; agrees that reform is essential to protect policing from UK Government budget cuts and that police reform will protect local services, create more equal access to specialist support and national services and strengthen the connection between services and communities while removing costly duplication; notes the strong progress being made to deliver a single police service of Scotland; recognises that civilian support staff will continue to play an important role in the new police service of Scotland, and supports the Scottish Government's commitment to continue to work closely with staff associations and unions to ensure a smooth transition to the new police service of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-02905.1, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02905, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on health, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and

Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)

Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 51, Abstentions 2.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that S4M-02905, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on health, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)

Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 51, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the substantial progress made in reducing waiting times under both this and previous administrations; recognises that this is due to the hard work of all NHS staff in delivering shorter waiting times for patients across Scotland and in particular commends staff for continuing to achieve the 62-day cancer time target that was missed during the last Labour-led administration; welcomes the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 and the introduction of the treatment time guarantee later this year, which will help ensure that there is no return to the hidden waiting lists of the last Labour-led administration under which over 35,000 patients were denied their treatment guarantee; recognises that waiting times targets need to be properly monitored and therefore welcomes the forthcoming NHS boards' reviews of their waiting times practices; further welcomes the fact that Audit Scotland will conduct a separate review of waiting times to build on its 2010 review, and believes that, taken together, these reviews will provide assurance about the transparency of waiting times across Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-02904.3, in the name of Richard Simpson, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02904, in the name of Shona Robison, on meeting the challenge, physical activity and its contribution to tackling obesity, 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)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)

Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 53, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-02904.2, in the name of Nanette Milne, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02904, in the name of Shona Robison, on meeting the challenge, physical activity and its contribution to tackling obesity, 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)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)

Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dugdale, Kezia (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Malik, Hanzala (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Lothian) (Con)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 52, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-02904.1, in the name of Alison Johnstone, which seeks to amend motion S4M-02904, in the name of Shona Robison, on meeting the challenge, physical activity and its contribution to tackling obesity, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-02904, in the name of Shona Robison, on meeting the challenge of physical activity and its contribution to tackling obesity, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the detrimental health impact that obesity can have on individuals, including an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers,

and the strain that it places on NHS resources and the wider economy; acknowledges the key contribution that physical activity can make to tackling these issues; recognises that, in Scotland, levels of participation in physical activity are increasing, defying the international trend; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to and initiatives promoting and encouraging physical activity across all Scottish communities; notes the scale of the challenge in getting people more active; considers physical activity among children and young people to be a priority; recognises the important role that the design of the built environment, active travel and access to open space have in promoting a culture of informal physical activity; considers improving facilities and reducing costs to users to be preventative spend and key to enhancing participation in sport and physical activity, and supports the drive to create a lasting active legacy for the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

James Graham, Marquis of Montrose

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-02253, in the name of Christine Grahame, on commemorating James Graham, Marquis of Montrose and member of the first Scots Parliament. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that 2012 is the 400th anniversary of the birth of James Graham, fifth Earl and first Marquis of Montrose, considered to be one of Scotland's finest battlefield commanders, poet and political thinker, and, as a member of the first Scottish Parliament from 1636 until 1641, he was a commissioner on the Committee of Estates, which acted to some extent as a committee of public safety, and became the formal opposition to the king; notes that there will be a service of commemoration at St Giles Cathedral on 21 May where his embalmed heart and bones are interred; considers that this important period of 17th century Scotland is little known and little taught despite its relevance to the current constitutional debate in Scotland, and believes that it is further evidence that Scots should be more aware of their own distinct history as the constitutional present and the future are the progeny of the past.

17:11

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): It is a privilege and quite strange to find myself, a Grahame and a member of the Scottish Parliament since 1999, addressing members about an ancestor—the e in my name was a later addition—who was a member of a somewhat different but ancient Scottish Parliament, which nevertheless appears to have exercised some influence and control of the then Government, which was the monarchy.

I lodged the motion to remind the Parliament of its ancient roots. The first Scottish Parliament was a unicameral Parliament that was first mentioned on record in the 13th century, when a meeting took place in Kirkliston in 1235. The Parliament met until prorogued sine die at the time of the Act of Union 1707, and until Winnie Ewing said on 12 May 1999:

"I want to begin with the words that I have always wanted either to say or to hear someone else say: the Scottish Parliament, which adjourned on 25 March 1707, is hereby reconvened."—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1999; c 5.]

Some of us were there and a tingle went up our spines.

I want to remind members of the man born 400 years ago, whose execution on 21 May 1650 at the Mercat Cross just up the Royal Mile will be commemorated in St Giles cathedral on Monday. His head was fixed on a spike in the Tolbooth and

his limbs were fixed to the gates of Stirling, Glasgow, Perth and Aberdeen.

In those long gone days, people did not just lose power or position; they lost their heads. Today, politicians or soldiers can be consigned to the back benches or elevated to the Lords—they could even become a columnist—but in those times, they lost their lives in the most callous and cruel fashion.

I move to the beginning, and the birth of a renaissance man who was a politician, a leader, a military commander and a poet. He achieved all that between 1612 and 1650 in what we would consider a short life of 38 years. His beginning was as the only son of John Graham, the 4th Earl of Montrose. His mother died when he was only six. At the age of 12 he was sent to Glasgow to prepare for college. His father died when he was 14 and he became clan chief but, being a minor, he was placed under the tutelage of others.

He went to the University of St Andrews, that ancient university that was founded in 1413. He appears to have been a generous man, as he donated funds for a new library at the University of Glasgow. He was already writing poetry when he went to France and Italy to complete his education, including spending time at a French military academy.

In 1638, at the ripe age of 26, he returned from France and signed the national covenant, which, in short, was to confirm opposition to the Stuart kings interfering in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. By way of background, members may recall that, from the Tudors through to the Stuarts, kings of England believed in the divine right of kings, which meant that they were not only ruler of the land but head of the church. That thread of history runs from Henry VIII and his dispute with the Pope over the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon.

That was unpalatable to the Scots and, even to this day, any monarch of Scotland is not head of the Church of Scotland, although they remain head of the Church of England. Therefore, when Charles I thrust upon the Scots the book of common prayer and declared that opposition would be treason, it was like a red rag to a Scottish bull.

It was all about battles for power and the balance of power. Then, monarchs, nobles and the churches were involved, with the covenanters taking on the monarchy. Today, multinationals, Parliaments—international and national—the media and so on all struggle with the balance of power.

However, from leading the covenanters—Montrose led the first regiment of covenanters across the Tweed when the Scots invaded

England in the second bishops war—he came to oppose them. Such were the machinations of the time that intercepted correspondence from Montrose to King Charles, in which he criticised Argyll, resulted in Montrose’s arrest on charges of conspiracy against the ruling Committee of Estates. In 1641, he was imprisoned in Edinburgh castle and demanded an open trial. Instead, he was—for political reasons, one could say—released on bail. Think of today’s equivalent: intercepted e-mails, hacked voicemails, police charges, political resignations, public humiliation, people being trailed through the tabloid press, careers in tatters. Plus ça change.

Two years later—and this is a potted version—he opposed the solemn league and covenant, because he suspected that it went beyond its original remit to being a vehicle to undermine the king’s ultimate authority, and he pursued the royalist cause thereafter.

In 1644, his career was on the up. He was appointed lord lieutenant of Scotland and a string of military victories followed, until he suffered a bloody and devastating defeat to the covenanters at Philiphaugh in the Borders in 1645.

Just as happens in all wars, compromise was eventually found and, in due course, Charles did a deal with the covenanters and disavowed Montrose, who was displayed as he was taken to his public execution. The rest, as they say, is history, which is where I came in.

Politics and patronage, principles and pragmatism—there is nothing new in that. The politics of that time shifted as the sand. Principles—I believe that Montrose was a man of principle—fell under the sword of pragmatism. Where can we see that today?

This extraordinary man, whom his chaplain the Rev George Wishart described as

“a most resolute and undaunted spirit”,

has left his own threads of the past to today. He was a man who lived by his own words:

“He either fears his fate too much
Or his deserts are small,
That puts it not unto the touch
To win or lose it all.”

I humbly think that there may be a wee bit of his DNA in me; and, yes, above my fireplace there is the Grahame family crest with the words, “Ne oublie”—never forget—and, yes, I wear a Grahame sash on special occasions.

History—national and personal—matters, so we should not forget the Montroses of our history, the covenanters and all that came before and after, even though our views of them may differ. It is a cliché, but I repeat it nevertheless: you have to

know your past to understand your present and, possibly, to determine your future.

17:18

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing this debate and on succeeding in making Scotland’s story in the mid-17th century a focus for debate in the modern Scottish Parliament.

Christine Grahame emphasised that Scots should be aware of our own history, and that history has much to teach us about our relationships with other countries in these islands and beyond. That is all very true, but from Christine Grahame’s point of view, Montrose’s meteoric career is perhaps, more than anything else, a cautionary tale.

Scotland’s story in the 1630s is fundamentally a tale of chronic disunity and political failure, featuring among other things religious civil war, political and personal betrayal, clan warfare, the sack of Aberdeen and other towns by Montrose’s armies, the slaughter of Gaelic-speaking women and children on a Borders battlefield in the name of reformed religion, and, as Christine Grahame said, politicians who could lose their lives and their family’s livelihoods if they chose to vote the wrong way on the big issues of the day.

Montrose was one such politician. In some ways, he was more principled than many of his contemporaries, but he was nonetheless a man who stood first on one side and then on the other and who paid the ultimate price for failing to square the circle of a deeply divided kingdom. His reputation was built up after his death for much the same political reasons as he was pilloried while he was alive.

Despite Christine Grahame’s good intentions of raising awareness, her motion and, to a degree, her speech underplay the single most important fact about the Marquis of Montrose, which is that he fought and triumphed and finally died in the name of his king, Charles Stuart—“that man of blood”, as he was described by his enemies—who was one of the most determined absolute monarchs in modern Scottish or English history and who faced his executioner rather than countenance any sharing of sovereignty between a king and his subjects. It is little wonder that some members of the Tory party of today who know their Scottish history have signed the motion.

Christine Grahame: I think that the member is endorsing the part of my speech in which I said that we each have our own view of that part of history.

Lewis Macdonald: Indeed.

Montrose was not above a bit of political spin himself. His military reputation was built on battles won, mainly in the north and mainly by Gaelic-speaking clansmen led by Alasdair MacCholla Ciotach 'ic Gilleaspic Fiacal, Alasdair Macdonald of Colonsay, the pioneer of the Highland charge and the scourge of clan Campbell. Montrose did not hesitate to claim the credit for those triumphs or to present Alasdair Macdonald as his deputy rather than his equal, but he was not so quick to take responsibility when things went wrong. To be fair, most of the blame for that lies more with Montrose's hagiographers rather than with the man himself, but it is an important point.

Christine Grahame's motion talks of the "relevance to the current constitutional debate in Scotland" of Montrose's life and times. He was alternately a reluctant covenanter and a moderate royalist, whose aim was to restore Charles Stuart to power in Scotland, England and Ireland and to convince his king to govern by consent. His best efforts were not enough to save Scotland from the civil wars that simultaneously engulfed all three kingdoms in the 1640s. There was only one winner in those wars, and the upshot was that Scotland was forced into an incorporating union or commonwealth imposed by the English Parliament and the English republican army, a much less equal union than that which was negotiated two generations later.

By all means, let us mark the anniversary of Montrose's birth, but let us also remember all the ordinary people who suffered and died on both sides because Scotland's political leadership in his time failed to resolve their differences peacefully and failed to put the people first.

17:23

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing the debate. I refer members to the motion that I lodged on the same subject over a year ago, which attracted cross-party support.

On 22 February 1638, a huge crowd assembled in Edinburgh's Greyfriars kirk to hear King Charles's proclamation brought from London by the Earl of Traquair. A young man jumped on to an upturned barrel to get a better view as Archibald Johnston of Wariston, black-robed in his lawyer's gown, delivered the ultimatum that the new prayer book must be used in every Scottish kirk. Standing beside the barrel, John Leslie, the Earl of Rothes, said:

"James Graham, you will never be at rest 'til you are lifted up above the rest in three fathoms of a rope."

Those proved to be prophetic words.

James Graham stands out as one of Scotland's famous heroes. He was part heroic and part notorious but, in my view, more a hero. Christine Grahame talked about his great poem, which is an allegory of Scotland. As well as being a military genius, he was an inspired poet. I will not repeat all that Christine Grahame said, but the last two lines state:

"That dares not put it to the touch,
To win or lose it all."

Those are immortal words. I am told that they may well have inspired Rudyard Kipling's poem "If", in which the first two lines of verse 3 state:

"If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss".

Graham demonstrated promise and, indeed, notoriety at an early age. He was the only boy among six girls, his mother apparently having consulted witches to get the much wanted male heir. I just drank lots of port. He swallowed a toad whole, and a neighbour told his father that

"this child will trouble all of Scotland."

Graham spent part of his childhood at Rosdhu on Loch Lomond—his sister Liliass having married into the Colquoun family—where he became fit climbing the hills to hunt the red deer. While living at the Graham family seat of Mugdock Castle in Milngavie, he would ride to Glasgow University on his white pony. Later, while studying Greek at St Salvador's College in St Andrews, he won a silver medal for archery.

Graham defeated six armies of covenanters. For people who want to know more about that, I recommend that they read the forthcoming thriller written by my friend Murdo Fraser, who is sitting next to me. The book will shortly be available in bookshops.

Graham was an unconventional commander, invading Argyll in winter when traditionally the fighting season was closed. However, in December 1645, he took the advice of an Irish priest in his army, who pointed out that, as the wind was from the east, the weather in Argyll would be good. For the assault, Montrose was joined by Irish troops under the leadership of Alasdair MacColla MacDonald—probably a relation of Lewis Macdonald—who was son of the legendary Colkitto, and often called Colkitto himself. Incidentally, kitto means ambidextrous. Colkitto was a giant of a man and wielded a sword with a sliding ball weight of 10 pounds. On the way to Inveraray, he got the MacNabs of Barachastlain to sharpen his great weapon and those of his men. Colkitto and Montrose made a three-pronged attack on Inveraray and roundly defeated the Campbells. Argyll himself only escaped on a boat over Loch Fyne because of the east wind which

blew him up the loch, otherwise he probably would have lost his life.

At the battle of Inverlochy, Montrose led his men from the front in one of the greatest flanking marches in British military history, and surprised the Campbells by coming from the back of Ben Nevis. The ambidextrous Colkitto reputedly beheaded Campbell of Auchinbreck with one blow of his mighty sword. History does not relate whether that was a left-handed forward drive or a right-handed haymaker.

The combination of the brain of Montrose and the brawn of MacColla was unstoppable.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid I have to ask you to conclude.

Jamie McGrigor: Oh, right.

When MacColla left, Montrose was greatly weakened and was caught unprepared at Philiphaugh. It was dreadful that he was hanged as a common criminal rather than executed as a nobleman. The final words of that loyal and highly principled man were:

“God have mercy on this afflicted land”,

his beloved Scotland.

17:27

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I am grateful to Christine Grahame for bringing the motion before us. The moment we talk about history, we all have our different scripts. It is interesting that several hundred years on we have different slants on what happened. Where does the truth lie?

Like many aristocrats at the time, the first Marquis of Montrose did the grand tour of Europe. It is reported that he studied at a military academy in Angers in France and returned as a brilliant military tactician and a poet, which is an interesting combination that we take for granted, but was not entirely obvious.

Montrose perhaps also demonstrated that it is possible to swap sides in a conflict and still be regarded as an honest and honourable man. Nothing is ever simple, of course, and we should remember that Montrose was a key figure in a bitter and bloody civil war at a time when politics and religion were intertwined and the reformation was relatively recent.

It was the time when Charles I attempted to dilute the hard-won independence of the Scottish Presbyterian church by introducing, among other measures—as we have heard—the book of common prayer. The National Library of Scotland contains a lively contemporary account of what happened next: a mob of women rioted in the high

kirk of St Giles and threw a stool at the dean, who luckily managed to duck.

Montrose was one of the leading figures behind the national covenant, which demanded continued independence for the Scottish kirk. Although he fought the armies of the king, he never sought to depose him and apparently was later appalled when the king was beheaded. The covenant expressed loyalty to the king, which was crucial for Montrose.

When Montrose began to suspect that other covenanters, such as Archibald Campbell, the Earl of Argyll, were willing to sacrifice the king for their own political ambitions, Montrose demurred, came out for the king and led an army of Irishmen and Highlanders through the north-east, as we have heard. He also sacked Aberdeen. I suspect that the Aberdonians have never forgotten him, for it was a brutal sacking according to contemporary accounts. He then won a string of victories culminating in the battle of Kilsyth, where he destroyed the last covenanting army in Scotland and was in effect, albeit briefly, master of the nation.

Montrose may have won Scotland but, in the meantime, the royalists in England were beaten. What lay ahead for him was defeat and the slaughter of his army at the battle of Philiphaugh, as we have heard; an ill-fated attempt to raise the Highlands for Charles II, who later dropped him; defeat at the battle of Carbisdale; and betrayal for money by the Macleods of Assynt.

How do we remember Montrose? I suggest that we might remember him as a cultured, principled soldier with an unbending devotion to both the reformed Calvinist church of the time and the king. There are, understandably, people in the sacked city of Aberdeen who have a different view. A local history website records that

“there was some good news in 1650 when the Marquis of Montrose was captured and executed. His arm was sent to Aberdeen and put on public display.”

One wonders how they told one arm from another, but that was the fate of Montrose—hanged and quartered, with his head and limbs scattered around Scotland.

As we have heard, he was executed on 21 May at the market cross in Edinburgh. Eyewitnesses recorded the dignity and grace of his bearing and the generosity of his last words, as I have them—we perhaps do not know the correct order:

“I leave my soul to God, my service to my prince, my goodwill to my friends, my love and charity to you all.”

I commend Christine Grahame for giving us the chance to remember the life of her most eminent clan chief, whose statue stands to this day at the end of the High Street in Montrose, in my

constituency. I also commend the excellent Montrose museum, which holds James Graham's sword.

17:32

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I, too, offer my congratulations to Christine Grahame on securing the debate. I was struck by Nigel Don's comment about Montrose's arm being sent to Aberdeen. Apparently, there was great disappointment because they had been promised a leg. It is just another example of the inadequacy of the powers that be at the time that things got a bit mixed up.

As the motion and the debate have reflected, this year is the 400th anniversary of the birth of James Graham, the fifth earl and first Marquis of Montrose—a fact that will be celebrated next Monday at St Giles's Cathedral. The motion tells us that Montrose was rated one of the finest battlefield commanders of his day. It is undoubtedly true that that is how he was rated at the time, but I would not disagree with my colleague Lewis Macdonald, who perhaps has a slightly different slant on his military capabilities. Montrose was celebrated across Europe largely on account of the history of his exploits that was written not long after his first activities by his chaplain, George Wishart, in Latin, which was the academic language of the day. That led to Montrose being offered an appointment as lieutenant general in the French army and the award of the rank of field marshal by the Emperor Ferdinand III.

The motion also tells us that he was a poet, a philosopher and a political thinker, all of which points can be and have been argued both during his life and in the centuries that have followed. The motion does not tell us that he was a contradiction: a man who fought with the covenanters and then became a loyal supporter of the king; a man who was sometimes distrusted by the covenanters with whom he fought and who was later disavowed by the king whom he had served and sentenced to death by the Parliament in which he had served. It seems to me that his career very much reflects the turmoil of the time and the fast pace of the politics of the day. Perhaps he was fairly typical of his class and his time. His efforts as a covenanter, which culminated in the signing of the Cumbernauld bond because of his distrust of some of his fellow covenanters, also show that he had something in common with today's politicians—but perhaps we should not look into that too seriously.

The motion also asserts that we should be more aware of our distinct history because of the effect that it has on the present. If this period of history teaches us anything, it must be that the peoples of

these islands are inextricably linked and that political agendas are framed not only by high principle and deep conviction but by other motivations, too.

Having perhaps injected a slight element of dissent or controversy, something that I am sure James Graham would have been familiar with, I end by saying that he deserves to be remembered as an important Scot with allegiances that were perhaps framed more by religion than by geography, but also as a poet whose works should be more widely read. His best known poem, which has already been mentioned this evening, "My Dear and Only Love", stands the test of time. I thoroughly recommend to colleagues the version by the Corries, which adds beautiful music to moving words. It is not the only legacy of James Graham's short life, but if it was, it would be legacy enough.

17:35

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I commend Christine Grahame for lodging her motion and congratulate her on securing the debate and on her excellent speech. Indeed, all the speeches in the debate have been excellent. They demonstrate that history is never simple, because there are so many different perspectives. We do not spend enough time in the chamber discussing the history of Scotland. It is important that we do so, for what happened in our past will surely shape our future as a nation. I am therefore all the more pleased to contribute to the debate.

I should declare an interest. As Jamie McGrigor kindly pointed out, I am writing a book based on the rivalry between James Graham, first Marquis of Montrose, and his great adversary, Archibald Campbell, the Marquis of Argyll. I am hoping to have it published next year, at which point I am sure it will be available in all good bookshops at a reasonable price.

As Christine Grahame and other members pointed out, the first Marquis of Montrose was undoubtedly one of Scotland's great heroes. He is best remembered for championing the cause of Charles I during the Scottish civil war of 1644-45. In the course of a year, which is often referred to as the year of miracles, Montrose defeated no fewer than six armies of the covenanters and made himself the military master of the kingdom. On the battlefield, he displayed genius as a general, ably assisted by his loyal lieutenant the Ulsterman Alastair Macdonald, or Mac Colla, or Colkitto as he is sometimes known. Their partnership swept all before it in a military campaign that is probably unsurpassed by any in Scottish history.

Although Montrose was an outstanding success on the battlefield, it is worth remembering that he was a failure in the field of politics, at least in his lifetime. The cause that he championed was not a popular one with the majority of the Scottish people, particularly in the lowlands, who remained loyal to the covenanting cause. Indeed, Montrose's employment of Irish Catholic troops and the barbarities for which they were responsible, including the horrific sacking of the city of Aberdeen, which other members have mentioned, served to decrease sympathy for the king among the populace. By the time of Montrose's eventual defeat by the covenanting General David Leslie at Philiphaugh in September 1645, far from being regarded as a hero, he was undoubtedly viewed as a villain and his defeat was a cause of celebration.

There is always a tendency for us to view history in black and white terms. Every story must have a hero and a villain. Montrose was both a hero and, on occasion, a villain, just as his rival the Marquis of Argyll fulfilled both roles.

After Charles I's defeat and subsequent execution at the hands of the English parliamentarians, Montrose pledged his sword to his son, who was crowned Charles II. While negotiating with the covenanters, Charles II licensed Montrose to make war against them in his name as a means of cynically enhancing his negotiating position. Montrose was defeated at Carbisdale in Sutherland, betrayed by Neil Macleod of Assynt, delivered to his enemies and then taken to Edinburgh for execution. He received no support from the king to whom he had been so loyal.

Having been stripped of his titles, Montrose was not even allowed the benefit of being beheaded by the maiden, but rather was hanged as a commoner. His head was cut off and put on a spike on the Tolbooth outside St Giles and his limbs were cut off and distributed to four parts of the kingdom by way of a warning to others. It was only on the restoration to the throne of Charles II, 11 years later, that he was given a proper burial, on 11 May 1661. By that point, his great rival the Marquis of Argyll had been imprisoned by Charles in Edinburgh castle for treason and would soon face his own execution by the maiden. His severed head was placed on the very spike that was recently vacated by Montrose's.

Right or wrong, winner or loser, Montrose was undoubtedly a great Scottish hero who should be celebrated today. I look forward to joining Christine Grahame and others at the memorial service in St Giles on Monday, which will be hosted by the 1st Marquis of Montrose Society, and I hope that future generations will learn more about our great history as a nation.

17:40

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Chief Whip (Brian Adam): The debate has been interesting and challenging in some ways. I was intrigued by the references to the sword by Christine Grahame and Murdo Fraser and to principles. Whether there were or were not principles, Jamie McGrigor even managed to get in gambling. Lewis Macdonald and other members quite properly referred to the civil war.

This is a debate about one of Scotland's best and most impressive figures. I will leave others to judge whether we might think of him as a hero or villain at various times, but perhaps we should take pride in our history.

Some of what has been said has almost been on the basis of, "I'm a Macdonald," or, "I'm a McGrigor." I did not quite hear, "I'm a Fraser," but I certainly heard, "I'm a Grahame." Mr Don did not make any such claim, of course, but he did refer to a lady who threw a stool in St Giles cathedral, although he did not name her. Her name was Jenny Geddes and, on my maternal side, I come from a long line of Geddeses. I have investigated my family history, and questions have been asked about whether it was the Protestant or Catholic Geddeses. That fits neatly into the debate, which is about the difficult circumstances in Scotland in the 17th century.

In particular, I commend the hard work of the 1st Marquis of Montrose Society. I believe that some members of that society have joined us in the public gallery.

The life of the Marquis of Montrose is incredibly local for all of us who are sitting in the chamber. Indeed, we have heard virtually personal testimonies of involvement. It is well known that the Macdonalds did not get on with the Campbells and, of course, neither did the MacGregors or the McGrigors—one does not know which. I assume that that is also true of the Grahames, whether or not there was an "e" in the name.

In Parliament Square, we can still see the bronze markers in the cobbles where the 30ft-high gallows were, and we can still see the mercat cross where the severed head of Montrose was displayed for many years—it was followed by the severed head of the Marquis of Argyll. The National Archives of Scotland still holds the various invoices relating to the task and cost of gathering his separated limbs from Glasgow, Perth, Stirling and Aberdeen, where they had been sent after his execution. Eleven years after his death, his severed limbs were returned and interred in the tomb in St Giles. We do not know, of course, whether there was a public audit committee in the Parliament that would have pursued to the last degree the public pound that

was spent in extracting revenge for the perceived mistakes and errors that Montrose made. Rather appropriately, his heart was eventually placed in a reliquary that was made from one of his own swords—only for it to go missing during the French revolution.

My colleague Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, will attend the formal commemorative service for the first Marquis of Montrose on Monday, which is the anniversary of his execution. I know that several members will attend that service—indeed, some have said in the debate that they will do so. I also understand that an exhibition is planned for October to celebrate the 400th anniversary of his birth in 1612.

Montrose contributed to Scotland on two levels. He contributed at a personal level and he contributed to our view of politics and society. As Mr Macdonald pointed out, views on politics are often seen through the prism of the spin doctors of the day and are analysed much later by commentators, some of whom even masquerade as historians—I am not sure whether that is the role that Mr Fraser sees for himself in the future, but one never knows.

Montrose undoubtedly had impressive multiple skills as a writer, a charismatic leader and—rarely for the time—a trained soldier. The physical feats of battle and marching over 2,500 miles in one year of campaigning speak of the man's personal endurance.

The words “wisdom”, “justice”, “compassion” and “integrity” are woven into the thistles at the head of the mace. We aspire to those principles. As for whether Montrose worked towards them, we will have to await the commentaries. Perhaps even Mr Fraser might wish to consider that as he debates the rivalry between Argyll and Montrose.

The words on the mace at the front of the chamber certainly represent the Scottish people's aspirations for their members of the current Parliament. We can see that, in some ways, those qualities were abundant in the first marquis. He retained those qualities even at the end of his life. When paraded through the streets of Edinburgh in a tumbrel in front of an angry mob, he maintained his dignity. The mob eventually fell quiet and, as Mr Don told the Parliament, Montrose still found the grace at the end of his life to utter:

“I leave my soul to God, my service to my prince, my goodwill to my friends, my love and charity to you all”.

In his second role, as a political philosopher, Montrose's contribution was arguably more remarkable. Another great Scottish figure, John Buchan, recognised that in his 1913 biography “The Marquis of Montrose”. Montrose wrestled with the concept of sovereignty and the need for

the consent of the governed. He did not subscribe to the divine right of kings and argued for an inclusiveness in society that was centuries ahead of his time and dangerously heretical for him during the time that the covenanters held sway in Scotland. He argued that there certainly had to be a body that exercises sovereignty but, unusually for the time, he said that sovereignty must be moderate in application and exercised for the benefit of all.

Education Scotland and Historic Scotland have developed resources to support teaching and learning on James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, and on clan Graham. The curriculum encourages practitioners to work in partnership with partners, such as the 1st Marquis of Montrose Society, to further support such learning.

All children and young people should have the opportunity to learn about Scotland's history, heritage and culture. That has been strengthened by the Scottish Government's manifesto commitment to Scottish studies, and we are taking forward the recommendations of the Scottish studies working group. Some excellent resources have been produced, including the Scotland's history website, which is now part of a one-stop shop—the studying Scotland resource. We have also enabled access to a wide range of heritage education through the school visits travel subsidy scheme, which covers all Historic Scotland properties, a number of National Trust for Scotland sites and the New Lanark world heritage site.

Meeting closed at 17:48.

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