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Official Report

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Wednesday 2 December 2015

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 2 December 2015

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

Portfolio Question Time

Education and Lifelong Learning

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio questions. As ever, in order to get as many members in as possible, short and succinct questions with answers to match would be appreciated.

Attainment Gap (Mid Scotland and Fife)

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

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its progress in closing the educational attainment gap in the Mid Scotland and Fife region. (S4O-04874)

This is my eighth parliamentary question on the subject in as many weeks, and now we all know why. This might be my last opportunity for a while.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): The leaver attainment data for the Clackmannanshire, Fife, Perth and Kinross and Stirling local authority areas, which are within the Mid Scotland and Fife region, show a mixed picture regarding their progress in closing the educational attainment gap. On some indicators, in some areas, there is evidence of good progress in narrowing the gap over the past three years, whereas in relation to other indicators the gap has increased slightly.

Any widening of the gap is unacceptable, which is why everyone who is involved in Scottish education needs to relentlessly focus their efforts on reducing the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes. The Government has made clear its commitment to eradicating the gap through the launch of the Scottish attainment challenge, which is backed by the £100 million attainment Scotland fund.

Claire Baker: This week, the fairer Fife commission published its report, which sets out a plan for tackling inequality and providing more opportunities in Fife. It contains specific proposals on addressing the educational attainment gap. Although six Fife primary schools are receiving support from the attainment Scotland fund, that is not enough to meet the challenge. Will the cabinet secretary commit to fully considering the fairer Fife commission's report, and will she work with Fife

Council to ensure that it has the resources to make the positive changes that the report outlines?

Angela Constance: As the member correctly identifies, six schools in Fife will benefit from the attainment Scotland fund. The Scottish Government is working closely with Fife Council and the attainment adviser with regard to the bids that have come from those schools in and around the improvement plans. The improvement plans that have come from Fife are interesting. There is a huge focus on parental engagement, which is good. I will look with great interest at the specific proposals from Fife that are contained in the recent report

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful to be called to ask a supplementary question—I thought that my name might just be lucky today.

Can the cabinet secretary tell the chamber what criteria will be used to measure the progress that is being made by the seven schools in Mid Scotland and Fife that will receive money from the attainment Scotland fund over the next four years and whether those criteria will be different from those that will be used in relation to schools that are not receiving that financial assistance?

Angela Constance: There will be broad similarities in the criteria but, as the member would expect, there will be differences as well, given that the seven attainment challenge local authorities and the attainment challenge schools are all working on individual, bespoke improvement plans. There will be similarities but there will be differences.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): In her answer to Claire Baker, the cabinet secretary mentioned attainment advisers. Can she give us an update on the situation with attainment advisers nationally?

Angela Constance: The full team of 32 attainment advisers has now been identified and put in place, with each local authority having a named adviser.

Ayrshire College (Kilmarnock Campus Project)

2. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress with Ayrshire College's Kilmarnock campus project. (S4O-04875)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): The £53 million project is progressing well and is scheduled to be delivered on time and to be operational by the summer of 2016. To date, the project has

created more than 550 employment opportunities and eight apprenticeships.

Willie Coffey: Does the cabinet secretary agree that that level of investment in the new college campus will be a massive boost not only for students and staff but for the town of Kilmarnock? Will she outline the impact that the campus can have in providing better opportunities for employment in the area?

Angela Constance: As I said, the project has created hundreds of employment opportunities so far. I also understand that a number of training opportunities have been provided for those who are working on the project, with employees securing further qualifications in areas such as advanced health and safety and leadership and management. Once the new campus is complete, it will accommodate approximately 5,000 students, providing the sector with facilities across the curriculum. In considering the benefits for the town of Kilmarnock, it is worth noting that the project was awarded the Building Research Establishment environmental assessment methodology “excellent” rating at the design stage, which is the highest award that is given under that scheme.

Universities (Risk of Reclassification)

3. Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to publish its full analysis of the risk of Office for National Statistics reclassification for universities for the proposed Higher Education Governance (Scotland) Bill. (S4O-04876)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): As Gavin Brown will recall, at the Finance Committee’s meeting on 16 September he asked, in relation to the analysis conducted by the Scottish Government on this matter,

“can the committee please see some of that work?”—
[*Official Report, Finance Committee*, 16 September 2015; c 50.]

I subsequently provided that to the committee in a letter on 5 October.

In a report to the Education and Culture Committee dated 8 October, the Finance Committee recommended that

“the full analysis is published in advance of the Parliament being asked to vote on the Bill at Stage 1.”

As I noted at the Education and Culture Committee meeting on 10 November, the Scottish Government will write to both committees on the matter prior to the stage 1 debate in January.

Gavin Brown: If all the analysis has been done—I was told in September that it had been

done months previously—what is the delay in publishing the full analysis?

Angela Constance: There is absolutely no delay in publishing the full analysis. The commitment that I have given to both committees is compliant with the request that was made of me as cabinet secretary to publish the information prior to the stage 1 debate. That will happen.

Gavin Brown will be aware that we have received lengthy correspondence from Universities Scotland, which is an important stakeholder, and that I gave the Education and Culture Committee a commitment to respond to that. My officials will respond to the committee on my behalf on a broad range of matters, encapsulating the analysis that we have done. Classification issues have been central to our consideration of the bill throughout its development. We also have to consider and respond to other detailed matters that have been raised by important stakeholders and MSPs.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): When the bill has been discussed and debated previously, the cabinet secretary has undertaken to amend it in order to reduce the risk of ONS reclassification. When will she provide us with some detail on exactly how she intends to do that?

Angela Constance: I would expect to be in a position to do that at the turn of the year, as we progress to the next stage of the bill. It is important to stress that the Government’s position remains that there is nothing in the bill that increases the risk of reclassification, but we are collegiate and intend to work in partnership with members across the chamber and stakeholders to reassure them on any concerns that they have.

Medication and Medical Assistance (Schools)

4. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it will ensure that all children and young people requiring regular medication and medical assistance at school have these needs met. (S4O-04877)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland’s Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): National health service boards are responsible for securing the medical inspection, medical supervision and treatment of pupils in schools. In practice, local authorities help NHS boards to discharge those responsibilities. Guidance on the administration of medicines was published in 2001 to support NHS boards, local authorities and schools to develop policies on managing healthcare in schools.

Malcolm Chisholm: Is the minister aware that the current guidance, to which he referred, has been extensively ignored, according to recent research from the office of the Children and Young

People's Commissioner Scotland? Is it not time that the right to essential medication and medical assistance in schools is put on a statutory footing?

Dr Allan: The existing guidance dates from 2001 and there is an acceptance that it needs to be refreshed. A group has been looking at that. I accept that there has been some delay, or that it has taken longer than anticipated for the group to reach its conclusions. However, it reconvened on 25 November to consider the plans for revised guidance. The expectation is that the new guidance, which will be informed by a broad range of opinion and expert knowledge from across the sector, will be in place and ready for publication in the summer of next year.

Named Persons (Children with Autism)

5. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it considers the named person provision in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 will assist families with children with autism. (S4O-04878)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): The named person policy will have a key role in supporting families with children with autism. As the single point of contact, the named person will be well placed to, where necessary, provide direct advice and support to the child and family or help them to access other services. The named person policy was originally developed so that families would not have to repeat their stories unnecessarily to professionals and to ensure better co-ordination across services to support the needs of their children. That is the kind of assistance that we know families with children with autism need.

The same principles—encouraging early intervention, working with children, young people and families and considering the child's whole wellbeing—underlie the Scottish strategy for autism, which was launched in November 2011. It is our framework for improving autism service provision and access to those services across Scotland.

Graeme Dey: As the minister is aware, Angus Council is one of several councils in Scotland that already operate a single point of contact scheme for parents. If my experience earlier this year of listening to parents of autistic children proactively extol the virtues of that set-up is anything to go by, it obviously finds favour with those who have direct experience of it. That being the case, who does the minister think we should listen to on the named person issue: parents who know what they are talking about or scaremongering Tories who have shamefully twisted the issue in pursuit of party-political gain?

Aileen Campbell: I am glad that the member has taken the chance to flag up the positive benefits of the named person and to relay to the Parliament that the message came from parents themselves. The policy was developed in response to what parents told us that they needed. Angus Council is to be applauded on its implementation of the getting it right for every child approach. In response to Mr Dey's question whether I will listen to parents whom he has met or the Tories, it will be the parents every time.

College Learning Environment (West Scotland)

6. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve the learning environment for college students in the West Scotland region. (S4O-04879)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): The Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council has provided West College Scotland with £70,000 to help it to develop a business case outlining options for the Greenock campus. The college is also working on a broader estates strategy, which will include the Paisley campus.

Neil Bibby: Although other areas might have had their fair share of capital funding for colleges, West Scotland has not. There has been no significant investment in either the Paisley or Greenock campuses at West College Scotland for a number of years. I have spoken to students at the college who believe that new or refurbished buildings are badly needed, and I know that the college has made it clear that it requires additional investment in the estate. Given that, and given what the cabinet secretary said, will she give a commitment to consider the compelling case for more capital investment at West College Scotland?

Angela Constance: It is of course the funding council, rather than ministers, that considers those matters. However, the Scottish Government is committed to supporting all colleges, including those in the West Scotland region, to invest in their estates. As I mentioned in my original answer, the funding council has been in discussion with West College Scotland and has provided funding of about £70,000 to help it to develop a business case outlining options for the Greenock campus. As I also said, the college is working on a broader estates strategy, which will include the Paisley campus. I am assured that Greenock and Paisley are given high priority by the funding council in its capital plans.

Children in Kinship Care

7. Clare Adamson (Central Scotland) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support children in kinship care. (S4O-04880)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government recognises the important and selfless role that kinship carers play in providing secure, stable and nurturing homes for children and young people when they are no longer able to live with their birth parents. We believe that kinship carers who take on that responsibility are providing a valuable service and should be supported in carrying out the role.

That is why we introduced new kinship care support provisions in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 to support eligible kinship carers of non-looked-after children who hold a kinship care order. Those children are not in care and, by supporting families in that way, many children will avoid formal care completely. The new legislative provisions build on the existing provisions for looked-after children who are in kinship care, as set out in the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

In agreement with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we have invested £10.1 million and met our commitment to kinship care families by delivering parity of allowances with those in foster care. Our policies are delivering real benefits for some of Scotland's most vulnerable children and families.

Clare Adamson: The investment of £10.1 million is most welcome, particularly in local authorities in my area—North Lanarkshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council and Falkirk Council—where families will see a real benefit. In light of the roll-out of universal credit, will any of that fund go to income maximisation for kinship carers?

Aileen Campbell: In addition to the points that I raised in response to her original question, I can tell Clare Adamson that we continue to fund Citizens Advice Scotland to provide support and welfare benefit checks to ensure that kinship carers are receiving all that they are entitled to. We have also provided them with extra funding to assist local authorities and kinship carers with the implementation of the revised allowances in the initial stages of the implementation of the new policy. In addition, to support all kinship carers, we also fund the national advice and support service and we have awarded, via the strategic funding partnership grant, finances to Mentor at United Kingdom level, to deliver projects that help to break the intergenerational cycle of children becoming looked after and having poorer outcomes.

Ms Adamson will want to note that I met kinship carers from South Lanarkshire in my constituency, and that that group included kinship carers from North Lanarkshire and Glasgow who are also finding ways in which they can support one another. I certainly recommend to Clare Adamson that she visit that group, which is inspirational in what it does to provide security for vulnerable children.

Looked-after Children

8. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support looked-after children. (S4O-04881)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): Outcomes are improving for looked-after children—in education, in positive destinations on leaving school and in numbers adopted—but we need to accelerate progress. That is why I launched the Scottish Government's looked-after children and young people strategy at the improving outcomes for looked-after children conference last week.

The strategy builds on provisions in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Through the act, the Scottish Government has increased support to kinship care families and to families on the edge of care, increased the number of corporate parents and put Scotland's adoption register on a statutory basis. We have also enabled young people to remain in their care setting up to the age of 21 and have extended support for care leavers.

The strategy calls on the sector to build on that and accelerate progress. It sets out a range of actions that are clear and specific to support families early to prevent children becoming looked after, to help children have a safe, secure, nurturing, permanent home and to make sure that every child receives the best possible care and support. The strategy has been welcomed by the sector. Who Cares? Scotland said:

"The Scottish Government has continued to listen to care experienced young people and their views have been represented within the Strategy."

The strategy is available on the Scottish Government website and copies are available in the Scottish Parliament information centre.

James Dornan: I thank the minister for that lengthy answer. Could she tell me whether there is any more that could be done in regard to raising the attainment of looked-after children?

Aileen Campbell: We are starting to see attainment improving and the gap between looked-after school leavers and other school leavers narrowing. The proportion of looked-after school

leavers with at least one qualification at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 5 or better has increased from 28 per cent in 2011-12 to 40 per cent in 2013-14, and the proportion going into positive destinations nine months after leaving school has also increased, from 67 per cent in 2012-13 to 73 per cent in 2013-14. However, the most important thing that we can do to raise the attainment of looked-after children is to ensure that they are safe and secure and that people care for and support them.

Our looked-after strategy sets out how we aim to do that. For example, through the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, we have extended the age to which young people can remain in their care setting, and we know that people who leave care at age 17 or 18 achieve far higher attainment than those who leave care at age 16. I hope that that provides reassurance that, among all the policies and initiatives, we are doing our best and are working hard to ensure that those children attain the same level as their non-looked-after peers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call a supplementary question, I have been asked to request that all members speak clearly into their microphones, as some members are having difficulty in hearing.

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): The minister referred to figures on educational outcomes for looked-after school leavers. I am concerned that just 8 per cent of looked-after children at home with parents are achieving at least one qualification at SCQF level 5 or better. I am concerned, too, about the figure for looked-after children in local authority accommodation, which is not much better at just 21 per cent. That compares with 84 per cent of all school leavers. I take on board what the minister said, but what additional steps will the Scottish Government take to address the wide gap between looked-after children and the rest of our country's school leavers?

Aileen Campbell: I absolutely share Cara Hilton's concerns. That is why the looked-after children and young people strategy that we published last week has a clear aspiration to do better by the children who are looked after at home. I would certainly recommend that Cara Hilton, because she has expressed those concerns, reads the strategy—oh, good, she has a copy with her.

One of the things that we need to do—one of our aims—is to provide a mentor and operate a national mentoring scheme. A mentor will not be paid to look after a child or look out for the needs of a child but will take an interest in that child's life because we know that although we can have processes and policies, ultimately it is relationships that make a difference for these

children. That is why we are shining a real spotlight on what is happening, to ensure that people do not park children in those settings but make sure that there is a meaning to having a child looked after at home. We will bolster their support by rolling out the national mentoring scheme. I am happy to continue that dialogue with Cara Hilton, who I recognise has an interest in the topic.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Next week, we will move amendments to the Education (Scotland) Bill that will place a duty on the inspection regime to look in particular at how schools are tackling the attainment gap for looked-after children. Does the minister support that increased focus on looked-after children by the school inspection regime and will the Scottish Government support those amendments at committee next week?

Aileen Campbell: Within our looked-after children refreshed strategy, it has been made clear that we will strain every sinew to ensure that we do our best by these children whom we have a corporate parenting responsibility for. We will certainly look at any of the amendments that come our way, but make no mistake: these are our bairns. We have improved the corporate parenting responsibilities and increased the number of people who have a responsibility for these children and we will take cognisance of Mark Griffin's points when the amendments come.

Autism Strategy (Monitoring)

9. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its education directorate monitors the implementation of the educational aspects of the autism strategy. (S4O-04882)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): The education directorate monitors the implementation of the strategy through educational developments. The Scottish Government funded the autism toolbox website, which was launched on 29 April 2014. The toolbox provides a resource for education staff in schools.

Under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, education authorities are required to identify, meet and keep under review the additional support needs of all their pupils and to tailor provision according to their individual circumstances. To help teachers and education support staff meet the needs of pupils with autism, the autism toolbox website identifies best practice for all education staff in schools to support pupils with autism.

Linda Fabiani: A concern among parents in my constituency is that, although in theory the autism

strategy is welcome, the practice is not always as good as it should be. Can the minister give some comfort that the training aspect of the strategy is being monitored, recorded and assessed by the Government and that the theory can be translated into front-line action?

Dr Allan: Education Scotland monitors issues of practice, which I am sure involves training. Education Scotland takes seriously the need to ensure that this is not merely a strategy but something that works on the ground. I am happy to hear from the member if she wishes to raise particular issues about the local operation of the strategy.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): This week, I met parents who told me that the key problem for them is a lack of access to children's mental health services. How will the minister address the fact that many children cannot attend school at all because there is no educational support until a child has received a diagnosis, which can take up to two years?

Dr Allan: I liaise closely with health colleagues—with whom some of the statutory responsibility lies—on such issues. The Government is determined that everyone who needs access or a referral to mental health specialists should enjoy that access or referral, and we work with local authorities and health boards to achieve that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Questions 10 and 11 have been withdrawn, both with satisfactory explanations, so we move to question 12.

Movement of Non-European Union Students and Researchers

12. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the possible implementation of a new EU directive on the movement of non-EU students and researchers. (S4O-04885)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): The UK Government has not opted into the directive. The Scottish Government values the contribution that non-European Union students and researchers make and will continue to press for an immigration system that meets Scotland's needs.

Roderick Campbell: The minister will be aware that the European Parliament informally approved the new directive recently. Does he agree that the increased movement of non-EU-national students and researchers would benefit Scotland's higher and further education institutions and the interests of Scotland as a whole?

Dr Allan: I fully agree with the member that the flow of international students benefits Scotland. We have raised the issue with the UK Government on numerous occasions, with specific respect to the post-study work visa. There is pretty much unanimous agreement from the Scottish Government and across the education sector that the UK Government is wrong on the matter.

Higher Education (United Kingdom Government Green Paper)

13. Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the implications are for Scottish universities of proposals in the UK Government's higher education green paper. (S4O-04886)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): We are considering the proposals and assessing the implications for the higher education sector in Scotland, to ensure that there are no adverse consequences for our students or universities.

Christian Allard: The proposals in the UK green paper include establishing a new office for students to work with providers in England. How will that proposal impact on Scotland? Does the Scottish Government have plans to replicate the proposal?

Dr Allan: The green paper proposes that the office for students would take on the majority of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's responsibilities, including running the teaching excellence framework. Part of the proposal suggests opening up the higher education sector in England to new providers by widening the range of providers that have degree-awarding powers.

The approach in Scotland is rather different from that proposed in England. We have to be aware of the changes that are proposed for the higher education sector in England because of their potential direct impact on Scotland. I emphasise that the Scottish Government does not support the marketisation of higher education. We firmly believe that access to higher education for all students should be based on the ability to learn rather than on the ability to pay.

Further Education Governance

14. Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what monitoring and evaluation it has carried out of the reforms to the sector following the 2012 "Report of the Review of Further Education Governance in Scotland". (S4O-04887)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): In addition to routine monitoring and evaluation of

college delivery through outcome agreements and Education Scotland reviews, the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council is carrying out two-year post-merger evaluations, which will be complete by next summer.

Chic Brodie: The review indicated that the changes to funding and the move to outcome-driven measures meant a fundamental change to the collection and auditing of data. Will the cabinet secretary update Parliament on the development and implementation of the new national information technology system for management information that was proposed when the new college structure was created?

Angela Constance: The development of outcome agreements for the sector has shifted the focus to monitoring outcomes that are consistent with our reform priorities. Rather than introducing a new national management information system to support the regional college structure, as was recommended by Professor Griggs in his review of governance, the priority has been to integrate existing systems in regions in which colleges have merged.

The funding council will evaluate progress on system integration as part of its forthcoming post-merger evaluations. In line with Audit Scotland's 2015 report, the funding council is also looking to improve how it reports on colleges' progress against outcomes, to support effective scrutiny of performance.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The report that Chic Brodie mentioned said that the national harmonisation of pay and conditions of service would be completed by August 2014. Given that teachers are paid the same salary wherever they work in Scotland, why should lecturers elsewhere in Scotland be paid over £5,000 a year more than lecturers in the Highlands and Islands? What is being done to address that disparity?

Angela Constance: I reassure Ms Scanlon by saying that the Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to national bargaining in our education sector. However, we have always recognised that moving towards that approach would be challenging, given the level of change that is required. For that reason, we consider this year to be a transitional year in which we expect both sides to demonstrate a willingness to move things forward. Not everything can be achieved quickly or at once, but the Government remains committed to the process.

Rehabilitation of Offenders (Educational Opportunities)

15. Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what

resources its education directorate provides to ensure that appropriate educational opportunities are put in place for offenders at the time of their release to ensure effective rehabilitation. (S4O-04888)

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): The Scottish Prison Service has put in place a contract to deliver learning services across all public prisons. That is delivered by Fife College and New College Lanarkshire and includes onward referrals, on request, for individuals who wish to continue their learning engagement in the post-liberation period through community-based learning services. Education Scotland continues to work closely with the SPS to focus on improved community links for throughcare as part of a focus on improving outcomes.

Nigel Don: What is being done to encourage the uptake of that service and is there any evidence of it improving outcomes?

Dr Allan: I assure the member that there is a great deal of active effort to encourage uptake. The SPS has established a clear vision for its new throughcare support officers, who will work directly with individuals to support them on their journey to life in the community, in order to ensure that that life is a productive one.

Student Support (Further Education)

16. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the president of the National Union of Students Scotland's evidence to the Education and Culture Committee that further education student support in Scotland is "not fit for purpose". (S4O-04889)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): We have increased the student support budget by 29 per cent in real terms since 2006-07. Support is now at a record high of more than £105 million in college bursaries and childcare and discretionary funds. In 2016-17, we are removing the variance rule to ensure that all eligible students who are awarded a bursary are paid at the full rate. That addresses one of NUS Scotland's key concerns. However, we note the Education and Culture Committee's review of student support; it makes sense to see the committee's conclusions before we decide on the next steps.

Sarah Boyack: Every year, colleges are underfunded for bursaries and the Government has to provide additional funds during the year. Will the minister commit to fully fund student support in this year's budget right from the start?

Angela Constance: As the member might be aware, as she represents Lothian, over this Government's term of office, in cash terms, the

student support funds that are available to, for example, Edinburgh College have increased by 66 per cent, and the cash-terms increase to West Lothian College has been 112 per cent. We always act to put the interests of students first and have made serious commitments to student support in the FE sector.

The member is right to acknowledge that, at this time every year, we conduct an in-year redistribution process. That is on-going at the moment. However, as is the case every year, the Government is working hard with Colleges Scotland and the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council to plug any gaps that exist.

Looking to the future, we recognise that, although some of the solutions that we have adopted to date are fine for now, we want to address student support in the longer term and ensure that it is more sustainable. We will do that as part of the 2016-17 budget discussions.

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): Could the cabinet secretary outline what outcomes this SNP Scottish Government has delivered for college students?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please be brief, cabinet secretary.

Angela Constance: The college reform programme has been of great benefit to students. For example, the average number hours of learning per student has increased by 59 per cent, and 14,000 more students are successfully completing full-time courses leading to recognised qualifications. I firmly believe that our focus on skills for learning and skills for work that meet the needs of the local economy is the right approach.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): In her evidence, the president of NUS Scotland also pointed out that the Government's extension of eligibility for the education maintenance allowance meant that some FE students would receive only £30 per week, whereas previously they would have received £90 per week in a bursary. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is perverse, and will she correct it?

Angela Constance: I am taking that piece of evidence very seriously. At present, colleges have the discretion to offer an EMA payment or a college bursary. I expect colleges to be making the right decisions for every young person, particularly those young people who are parents themselves, estranged from their own parents or in receipt of welfare benefits. It is important to remember that the substantial majority of young people in college receive the higher, bursary rate as opposed to the EMA, but I will nonetheless be looking at the matter carefully and looking at all the evidence that is presented to the Education and Culture

Committee's review of student support. We have always acted in the best interests of students and made improvements where we can. Nothing is going to change that for the future, and we will continue to look for further improvements, in partnership with NUS Scotland.

Energy Skills Partnership

17. Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support and develop the energy skills partnership and a shift to a low-carbon economy. (S4O-04890)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): Making the transition to a low-carbon economy remains of significant importance to Scotland's economy, and that has been reflected consistently in the Government's economic strategies. Specific funding levels for the energy skills partnership are a matter for the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council.

Claudia Beamish: I well understand what those arrangements are. The energy skills partnership is a bridge between the college sector and Government and industry bodies, working with key partners in renewables, enterprise and skills development. In South Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway College, Ayr College and others are developing adventurous courses in initial and on-the-job training. Will the Scottish Government make a commitment to ensure that there is an assessment of the impact of those courses and how they are helping to move forward the new skills?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, please be as brief as possible, as I would like to call the next question.

Angela Constance: Yes I would certainly like to see the Scottish funding council look at that impact. The member is right to state that the energy skills partnership is a very important bridge between our economy and our education system. One example of that is how Skills Development Scotland has supported the energy skills partnership to develop further wind turbine training hubs right across Scotland, including the development and delivery of wind turbine technician training at Forth Valley College. The member makes good points.

Standardised Assessment

18. Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how standardised assessment will be used in classrooms. (S4O-04891)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): The new standardised assessments will provide a

diagnostic child-level assessment, focusing on aspects of literacy and numeracy. They will be used alongside other sources of evidence to inform the professional judgment of teachers.

Bruce Crawford: I am interested in the practice that is already taking place in classrooms. What information do teachers already have available in classrooms to enable them to identify low-achieving pupils?

Angela Constance: We have always been very clear that the national improvement framework is not about additional burden; it is about supporting a clear, consistent and robust picture of progress across schools in Scotland. To answer Mr Crawford's question directly, we know that standardised assessments are used in different forms in schools. Unlike many of the current tools, the new assessments will be aligned to the curriculum for excellence, making them more meaningful to learners, teachers and parents. We are working closely with unions, local authorities, teachers and parents as we progress with that work.

Named Persons

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Before we start the debate, I need to remind members that legal proceedings are on-going in relation to the legislative competence of the named persons provision. The matter is therefore sub judice for the purposes of standing orders. I will allow general debate on the issues that are set out in the motion. However, no specific reference should be made to the merits of the precise legal arguments that are being considered, other than in factual terms.

The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-14999, in the name of Liz Smith, on named persons. Ms Smith, you have no more than 14 minutes. We are incredibly tight for time.

14:40

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Three years ago, when Parliament first debated in earnest the SNP's plans to introduce named persons, concerns were raised across the chamber not just about the principles of the policy but about how workable it would be. Ken Macintosh, Hugh Henry, Tavish Scott and John Mason all expressed their concerns—specifically about the strains that would be placed on local authorities if the policy was to be made mandatory for all young people from birth to 18.

Mike Russell, the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, acknowledged in the Scottish Government's debate on its programme for government on 4 September 2013 that he understood some of those concerns, and the concern that had been expressed by critics that the policy perhaps represented state intervention. However, he went on to say that he had eventually been persuaded of the need for the policy on account of the track record of what it could do to help our most vulnerable children, and gave examples of children in Forfar who had, in his opinion, benefited greatly from a named person type of service.

Maggie Mellon, the highly respected former social worker, former leader of School Leaders Scotland Carole Ford, Trisha Hall of the Scottish Association of Social Workers, and Jenny Cunningham, who is an experienced paediatrician all raised their concerns, but we were told that named persons are essential if we are to avoid a repeat of the Daniel Pelka case, the Baby P case or any other horrific child-abuse case. Everyone in Parliament agrees that the serious issues in such cases need to be tackled urgently.

If we examine all the supportive evidence on named persons that was submitted to the Education and Culture Committee at the time of

the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, we see that it came almost exclusively from groups that are tasked with looking after our most vulnerable children. I do not think that any members doubts the sincerity with which that case was made, but that is precisely the reason why the universal aspect of the policy is so wrong-headed.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): Will Liz Smith give way?

Liz Smith: I ask Mr Chisholm to let me make a bit of progress.

Of course those children need help, and of course every effort must be made to assist local authorities, teachers, social workers, the police and so on to address the most vulnerable sectors of our society. However, as Assistant Chief Constable Malcolm Graham said in the summer, that is exactly why the resources should be directed towards our most vulnerable children. Some of his police colleagues fear that making the policy compulsory for every child will mean that it is much less possible to direct sufficient attention to the children who need it most.

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Liz Smith will be aware of the pathfinder project in Highland Council's area, the outcomes of which were a 75 per cent time saving for professionals, a 50 per cent reduction in case load for social workers, a 70 per cent fall in unnecessary referrals to the reporter and a 50 per cent reduction in the number of children who are regarded as being at risk of significant harm. Surely that demonstrates that the policy works.

Liz Smith: Mark McDonald will be aware that the conclusion of the pathfinder study was that there is no proof that those outcomes were due to the named person policy or to the getting it right for every child policy. There is no conclusive evidence of that whatsoever. That is exactly what the Education and Culture Committee said.

The police are not alone in raising concerns about workload. Greg Dempster of the Association of Heads and Deputies in Scotland said at the Education and Culture Committee only two weeks ago that the policy is probably the single biggest paperwork burden that is placed on headteachers in our schools, and here is why. When they assess children, teachers have to deal with no fewer than 306 different criteria in the safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included—or SHANARRI—indices. That is one of the essential problems with the policy.

When the Finance Committee scrutinised the financial burdens, it made it clear that despite Aileen Campbell's assurances in a parliamentary answer on 27 June 2014 that the financial memorandum sets out the full costs of the policy, it did not believe that the policy had been properly

costed. That is also clearly set out in the Scottish Parliament information centre's briefing. My colleague Gavin Brown will say more about this, but the Finance Committee was not persuaded by the Scottish Government's assertion that the £26 million cost to schools, local authorities and health boards for 2016-17 would diminish much year on year, given that there has to be on-going training and that there must be paperwork for every child in the system. That is exactly what yesterday's guidance from the Scottish Government said, and what has been confirmed today by the Royal College of Nursing.

In recent months, the Scottish Government has gone on a major charm offensive to persuade parents that all is well and that the named person policy is really in the best interests of everyone. First, there was the Hampden initiative, at which parents could turn up for a family day out, with a £25 gift voucher thrown in, to persuade them of the policy's merit and so that they could find out all that they wanted to know. Then we had the SHANARRI wheel of wellbeing diagrams, which were a vain exercise and an example of just exactly what is wrong with the named person policy. Now we have a Hopscotch Theatre Company play starring Mr SHANARRI and Miss GIRFEC being taken around primary schools.

Every time someone criticises the initiatives, the Scottish Government goes on the defensive and argues that there is actually no compulsion on parents to accept any advice from named persons—it says that despite its having persistently refused all amendments to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill that would have permitted an opt-out. The Government knows full well, though, that the professionals are not permitted to opt out. Common sense tells us that if the professionals cannot opt out, neither can the parents because they are inextricably linked, when it comes to the adoption of a named person policy. That was admitted by an Inverness primary school headteacher who was asked on "The Kaye Adams Programme" on the BBC what she would do if parents said that they do not want a named person. She replied that it would be her job to persuade them otherwise.

The requirement for full co-operation and positive engagement with the professionals' viewpoint is further illustrated with the inclusion in the risk indicators of whether a parent is resisting or limiting engagement, or whether a parent has a completely different perception of the problem. Clearly, parents can choose not to engage and not to accept the advice of a named person, but the consequences of doing that are that they will—let us be honest—be seen as endangering the wellbeing of their child, because they will be picked upon as being parents who are not worthy. *[Interruption.]*

The Minister for Learning, Science and Scotland's Languages (Dr Alasdair Allan): That assertion is disgraceful.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. We cannot have sedentary interventions.

Liz Smith: No, it is not disgraceful. That is exactly what is happening in our schools.

At the end of the day, and despite all the protestations that we are hearing just now from Scottish National Party members, families are being judged by subjective assessments of the wellbeing of their child. "Not at all", says the Scottish Government. "That is only scaremongering", which is what we heard at portfolio question time. The Government tells us that no intervention would ever take place without consultation of the parents. However, the Government is wrong.

Dr Allan: We have already heard about the example from Highland Council, which of course was using a system similar to the named person system prior to the pilot. Has Liz Smith any evidence that either parents or children in Highland were "picked upon", to use her words, as a result of that system?

Liz Smith: I have every kind of evidence. We have seen in the newspapers that many parents are fed up with being told what they have to agree to. The Scottish Government seems to think that that is not an issue, but it is a huge issue, because the named person system is not being introduced by consent but is being imposed. The Scottish Government keeps telling us that the named person system is a right, but the fact of the matter is that parents cannot opt out of it. That is the issue.

I listened very carefully to the instructions about what we legally can and cannot say in the debate. I know that the Scottish Government has to answer some other questions when it comes to the legal proceedings and that we cannot talk about that. However, I ask the Scottish Government to consider the fact that the Information Commissioner's Office has admitted that, as a result of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, practitioners can share information, including confidential information, without parental consent.

The ICO has also acknowledged that the bar of intervention has altered from "at risk of significant harm" to merely "wellbeing". I cannot comment any further on that at this time, because it is part of legal proceedings. However, what is really at issue, of course, is the problem about the definition of "wellbeing". That problem runs through the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, and it is an increasing problem in the

Education (Scotland) Bill, which is currently at stage 2 in committee.

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): What element of SHANARRI does Liz Smith disagree with?

Liz Smith: How on earth can the minister accept that SHANARRI is an acceptable way of assessing a child? [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please. Minister, please stop shouting from a sedentary position.

Liz Smith: The minister is perhaps getting a little uptight. Perhaps that is exactly what many parents feel.

The practice of the policy is flawed, but that is as nothing when we assess its fundamental principles. I choose my words carefully again in the light of the ruling that has been made. What is implicit in the proposal to have a named person for every child is the insistence that the state, rather than parents and families, has the primary obligation to look after children. That is entirely the wrong way round, because there are thousands of parents across Scotland who are doing a thoroughly good job. What right does the Scottish Government have to tell them that the state knows better? What on earth is the point of insisting that those families must have a named person on exactly the same basis as families who face genuine problems? The logic of that is completely lost.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning (Angela Constance): Will Liz Smith take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I will continue for a minute, if I may. Perhaps the cabinet secretary can answer this point.

The essential trust that is the crucial ingredient on which to build a successful relationship between parent and child and between the family and teacher, health visitor or social worker is, by definition, under threat if there is a third party who is deemed to have more authority than either party.

Angela Constance: How do we assess the needs of a child? Do we assess all children in a fair and professional manner or do we make some lazy assumptions about which children are deserving and which are undeserving? Do we base that assessment on facts and professionalism or do we, as Liz Smith does, base it on ideology and the assumption that some children will, of course, need intervention whereas others will never need it?

Liz Smith: I think that some teachers in our schools might take great exception to what the

cabinet secretary has just said. They are professionals who are trained to do their job.

The Scottish National Party is very quick to tell us that it whole-heartedly espouses a liberal democratic tradition and that it wants to do more to increase our personal freedoms by promoting greater equality and social justice, but its policies on young people have become increasingly paternalistic and oriented towards the role of the state. The named person policy is the prime example of pushing the boundaries of the state too far.

The rights of children do not stand in isolation—that point was made by Alasdair Allan at the Education and Culture Committee meeting yesterday—but should be seen in the context of the rights of parents and families. The responsibilities of those families must articulate with the needs of all the individuals in those families. Expecting all children to have a named person is an assault on the responsibility of families and parents for whom there are no problems—which is exactly why 74 per cent of parents who were surveyed by the Scottish Parent Teacher Council argued that there is no need for a named person.

Last year, the Scottish Government made huge play of the fact that 16 and 17-year-olds should have the right to vote. We entirely agree with that. If they are old enough and mature enough to vote, and old enough to marry and fight for their country, why must they also have a named person, and why must a young 17 or 18-year-old couple with a child have three named persons for that family?

I rest my case on the fact that the policy has two fundamental problems: it will take resources away from our most vulnerable children, which is inexcusable, and it is completely against the trust and responsibility that parents and families deserve.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the growing opposition to the Scottish Government's named person policy reflects the strong criticism that has been levelled at the policy by professionals who will be at the front line of delivery when named persons for all 0 to 18-year-olds become part of statutory legislation from August 2016; is specifically concerned about the criticism from groups of parents who fear that named persons will undermine the trust between parent and child and between families and key professionals, from other groups, such as teachers and social workers, that believe that extensive costs and bureaucracy will be involved in the implementation of the policy, and within bodies such as the police, who stated in summer 2015 that the policy could potentially divert resources away from the most vulnerable children, and calls on the Scottish Government to publish all the advice that it received from the committee that was set up to oversee the implementation stages.

14:54

The Minister for Children and Young People (Aileen Campbell): I am proud that this Parliament took the groundbreaking Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill through the Parliament last year. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 act was a huge milestone for the Parliament. For the first time, we gave comprehensive legislative substance to our ambition of giving Scotland's children the best start in life.

I am proud of that because I know that at the heart of the 2014 act is a commitment to improve the wellbeing of all our nation's children and young people. Every child has only one shot at childhood, so it is incumbent on us all—parents, practitioners and policy makers—to do our best to realise that commitment.

It is the Parliament's right and duty to scrutinise our legislation, influence change and improve policy and laws. I uphold that right and have always sought to engage constructively with members of the Scottish Parliament, regardless of their party-political beliefs, because the wellbeing of our children and young people transcends party politics.

Indeed, that philosophy, which is shared across this Parliament, led members to unite behind the GIRFEC principles under the previous Administration and over the years that followed, up to the passage of the 2014 act.

We should reflect on how we got to where we are. The named person approach was developed on the ground through the GIRFEC Highland pathfinder, which has interested and inspired this Parliament for many years. Parliamentarians were impressed by the project. Six years ago, almost to the day, an MSP said:

"a key success of the Highland pathfinder project has been the reduction in bureaucracy, which has ... freed up more time for direct work with children. Another outcome is better information sharing ... That has also reduced the burden on staff."

He went on to say:

"I very much welcome the minister's commitment to implement the GIRFEC programme throughout Scotland on the back of the successful pilot in the Highlands."

I find Murdo Fraser's words reassuring. He also said:

"That contact with families in the home enables those health professionals to identify, at an early stage, likely problem areas and potentially vulnerable groups."

Mary Scanlon is another Conservative MSP who has acknowledged the policy's benefits. During the same debate, she said:

"for too long children and others have suffered as agencies work in their silos, refusing to share information

that would lead to a holistic approach to addressing a child's needs. I commend the work done in Highland to address that issue".—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2009; c 21924-5 and 21910.]

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): Will the minister simply specify what, at the moment, precludes authorities from intervening where they believe a child to be at risk?

Aileen Campbell: We have child protection laws in place, but the system that we are talking about has been proven to demonstrate good, positive outcomes for children, which Mark McDonald set out in his intervention during Liz Smith's speech.

I draw attention to what members on the Conservative benches said in a previous debate for no reason other than to show the party's direction of travel on GIRFEC—from urging us to roll the approach out nationally to Ruth Davidson's *Mail on Sunday* article, which was as distasteful as it was hyperbolic. In her article, Ruth Davidson used the tragic deaths of Victoria Climbié and Baby P in an effort—one can only assume—to scare people for her own cynical political ends.

No one can guarantee that no child will slip through the net, but Ruth Davidson well knows that the consensus across Scotland's children's organisations and charities—the people who best know and understand the issues—is that the named person will help to make the holes in the net smaller.

Ruth Davidson (Glasgow) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Aileen Campbell: Of course, if the member wants to talk about her article.

Ruth Davidson: Does the minister acknowledge that in that article I referred to the testimony of senior members of Scotland's police force, which was that the approach will take the focus away from the children who most need support and might leave such children more at risk?

Aileen Campbell: Police Scotland has been a full and constructive member of the GIRFEC programme board and has been supportive of the named person approach, as it said many times during the progress of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill through the Parliament.

For the avoidance of doubt, the heartbreaking cases in London that Ruth Davidson cited in her article had absolutely nothing to do with named persons or any similar provision for protecting children. I hope that Ruth Davidson will reflect on the parallels that she sought to draw and hang her head in shame.

Here are the facts. The getting it right for every child approach puts the best interests of the child

at the heart of decision making, to ensure the child's wellbeing. It works with—and not around or against—children, young people and their families. It embeds early intervention and prevention, and it stipulates that professionals must work together across professional boundaries in the child's best interests.

GIRFEC has been developed in response to families' needs. Parents do not want to have to tell or even shout their stories over and over again to a crowd of services; they just want appropriate support if and when they need it. Any one of us might need support with parenting—however much or little—at one time or another.

Early intervention means tackling the small, persistent issues in a child's life—the ones that are not easy for a family alone to resolve—before they escalate into a crisis. We hear a lot—particularly from Liz Smith—about vulnerable children and families, as though they walk around with signs on their heads. We cannot predict which children or young people will be the ones whom our services need to support.

Liz Smith: Will the minister take an intervention?

Aileen Campbell: I have taken two already; I must make progress.

We cannot predict which mum might suffer post-natal depression or which family might suffer bereavement, and that is where the real issue of workloads comes from. If we want to ensure that resources are concentrated on those who really need it, we need to do what we can to help children and families at the earliest possible stage. That is not diverting resources—it is directing them.

GIRFEC and the named person approach are supported by professionals, too. We know that they have a more positive impact on children's and families' lives when they work together. We hear that regularly—we hear it loudly in those tragic cases in which children have come to harm, and quietly but no less powerfully when it comes to helping children and families with the ordinary stresses and strains of everyday life.

Members should not take my word for it. Parenting across Scotland, Aberlour, Barnardo's Scotland, Children 1st, One Parent Families Scotland and Action for Children are just some of the professional organisations that back the legislation. They back it because they know that the named person does not replace parents or professionals—of course it does not—but helps to make links between them if and when they need to be made. The named person is not someone new or unknown but a trusted person who is already working with the child and the family. The

legislation simply builds on that trust and strong relationship.

The inner house of the Court of Session recently threw out the legal challenge to the named person; such a challenge has now been defeated twice. It found that

“The legislation does not involve the state taking over any functions currently carried out by parents”;

that

“The mere creation of a named person, available to assist a child or parent, no more confuses or diminishes the legal role, duties and responsibilities of parents in relation to their children than the provision of social services or education generally”;

and that

“It has no effect whatsoever on the legal, moral or social relationships within the family.”

Lord Carloway also said that the campaign narrative against the named person had “the appearance of hyperbole”.

I would suggest that the same description be applied to Ruth Davidson’s article and her party’s new approach on the issue. I stress the word “new”, because the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 was a long time in the making; it was not a bolt from the blue. However, it is being introduced at a time when we are seeing an assault from the blue—an assault by the UK Tory Government that will remove a staggering £960 million from the incomes of families with children in Scotland. If the Conservative Party wants to know what threatens family life in Scotland, it need look no further than itself.

The Conservative motion talks about the named person policy diverting resources away from the most vulnerable children. I remind the Scottish Conservatives that 36,000 children in Scotland now rely on food banks thanks to Tory austerity, and that the UK Government’s welfare reforms will push 100,000 additional children into poverty by 2020. If we wanted to divert resources away from the most vulnerable children, we would not have to look very far for ideas, but I am proud that this Government seeks to invest in our children rather than to deprive them.

The GIRFEC policy has been shaped over many years in partnership with professionals and parents. It has been supported and praised by parties across the chamber and by children’s organisations, and it has been tested twice in the courts. I have every confidence that the legislation is making a difference by making life better for children right across the country.

Challenges remain, and Parliament has a duty to scrutinise, but there is constructive scrutiny and there is politicking. Children should not be treated as political footballs, and I am afraid to say that

that is what the Scottish Conservatives have done on this issue. I hope that they will reflect on that and return to taking a constructive approach to GIRFEC, as they once did.

I move amendment S4M-14999.2, to leave out from “believes” to end and insert:

“recognises the continuing cross-Parliament support that enabled the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 to be passed, which included putting Scotland’s national approach to improving children’s wellbeing, Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), on a statutory footing; acknowledges that the named person service is an important component of this approach, developed in response to parental demand during the piloting of GIRFEC in Highland to provide a single point of contact for all children and families to go to should they need support and advice; notes that the legal challenge to these provisions has now been rejected by the Scottish courts twice; welcomes the powerful collective effort by the public sector, third sector and parent/family organisations to make the duties drive improvements in the lives of children and young people, and calls on all members to support implementation of all the GIRFEC provisions of the Act as part of a shared ambition to ensure that all children in Scotland get the best start in life.”

15:04

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): We often begin such debates by congratulating the relevant party on bringing it forward. I cannot do that today because this is a calculatedly unhelpful debate brought by the Tories in their efforts to whip up concern—even fear—among parents and others about the named person policy passed by the Parliament some time ago. The Tory motion may not do that explicitly, but Ruth Davidson’s disgraceful remarks at the weekend suggesting that the policy will lead to deaths like those of Baby P and Victoria Climbié give the game away, and the minister was right to take her to task for that.

The Tories are shamelessly allying themselves for perceived party advantage with completely untrue and hyperbolic headlines, which have variously described named persons as state guardians, shadow parents, replacements for parents and spies on parents, and talked about the politicisation of parents. The stories have suggested that named persons will invade the family home to check what television programmes children are watching, while indoctrinating the same children with a named person sing-a-long, which Liz Smith referred to.

Liz Smith: Does Iain Gray approve of the Hopscotch play that has been taken around our primary schools?

Iain Gray: I confess that I have not seen it, but given that it is a play about rights and respect in schools and is an initiative that schools in my constituency support with great success, I probably would approve of it. I also note from the

coverage that, when asked, Hopscotch said not only that the play was not about the named person policy but that it did not even know what the policy was.

All of it is complete nonsense. It is the equivalent of the old stories that Europe will straighten bananas, rename the British banger and ban the fireman's pole. None of that will happen, and we know that none of it will happen, because the named person system operates, albeit on a non-statutory basis, in Highland, Edinburgh, Fife and in other local authority areas. Parents remain unsurpassed by named persons—big brothers snooping on family life. Of course they do, because the named person is not a new official imposed on the family; rather, they are an existing professional who works with that family, usually a teacher or a health visitor.

The experience in Highland shows that most parents will have no reason to contact their named person in that capacity at all. The idea of the named person system came, after all, from parents who wanted a single point of contact if needed. It also came from the fact that when tragedies happen, subsequent reviews always point to services not being good enough at sharing information. We have only to think about the Declan Hainey tragedy to remember what happens when no single service takes responsibility for a child's welfare. As for diluting the attention on vulnerable children, surely those most at risk are those not yet identified as vulnerable? As Martin Crewe of Barnardo's said:

"Children are not born with an 'at risk' label on their forehead."

We need to get better at recognising the warning signs, because even one failure is unforgivable.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Surely it would be better to use the resources that are going to the named person scheme to fund a proper universal system of health visitors? Would that not be better at identifying the children most in need?

Iain Gray: Let me get to resources. We cannot support the Tory motion, which, indeed, is code for opposition in principle to the policy. The Government cannot pat itself on the back either. When we supported the named person policy, we raised serious concerns: we opposed its extension to 18; we asked about guidance and how it would allay people's fears; and we demanded assurances on resourcing and complained that a proper financial memorandum was not available at the time. We were right to do so, but the Government simply banked our support for the principle and squandered the goodwill behind it. It has utterly failed to defend the policy against the wildest of scare stories. It has allowed the stories

to gain credence and create real and sincere concerns among some parents. Indeed, it has done nothing to respect or respond to those concerns.

The draft guidance is heavy-handed, and 90 per cent of respondents thought that sections were not clear. If the Government thinks that cunningly getting out a redraft late yesterday gets it off the hook, it is kidding itself.

Meanwhile, those on whom the actual work of the new system will fall have seen resources squeezed, not provided. On that I agree with Mr Fraser. The national health service budget has not been protected; councils have seen cuts doubled and passed on to them; Police Scotland has shed 2,500 staff and faces a multimillion-pound shortfall; and teachers are balloting for industrial action because the Government has increased their workload to a point that they cannot accept.

We cannot support the Government amendment, which simply fails yet again to give any guarantee whatever on resources to support the policy. Like the national improvement framework or higher education governance, this is just another case of the Government perhaps doing the right thing in principle, but the implementation being utterly incompetent.

They say that one campaigns in poetry and governs in prose; this Government spends so much time reciting the self-love poetry of its own poll numbers that it repeatedly lets the prose of government go to hell in a handcart.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close now, Mr Gray.

Iain Gray: Yes, we must support the policy, because it is right, but we must also support the means to make it happen, too.

I move amendment S4M-14999.1, to leave out from "the growing opposition" to end and insert:

"the named person policy was and is supported by most child welfare organisations, including Barnardo's, Children 1st, Save the Children, the NSPCC and Children in Scotland, but considers that the Scottish Government has failed to properly implement, resource or defend its own policy or recognise from the outset concerns that were expressed by organisations such as the Royal College of Nursing and the Educational Institute of Scotland over additional burdens being placed on staff without additional resourcing; believes that the Scottish Government has also failed to address concerns of parents regarding the intentions of the policy, which does not seek to provide a social worker for every child or replace the role of the parent, and calls on the Scottish Government to now ensure that the necessary resources are made available to make the policy work".

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to the open debate. At this point, members may have up to six minutes for speeches, but that might have to be reviewed later.

15:11

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): At one point during Iain Gray's speech, I thought that I was going to agree with him and repeat what he had said when I got up to speak. However, I did not agree with any of the second half of his speech.

It is an honour to be part of the debate.

Iain Gray: In the second half of my speech, I simply asked the Government to commit to providing adequate resources for the policy to happen. Surely even Mr Adam can agree with that.

George Adam: That was not what the second half of Mr Gray's speech was about.

Many of us, regardless of our political parties, became involved in politics to change our communities and people's lives. I do not doubt anyone's reasons for getting involved in politics, no matter what political party they are in, but on this occasion, the Tories have got the tone of the debate completely and utterly wrong. I found the Tory leader Ruth Davidson's column on the issue inexcusable, because what she said is not what the issue is about.

I am even more disappointed with Liz Smith. I have worked with her over the past number of years and I have found that, although I might disagree with her, I can still reach a compromise with her. I was very disappointed by some of the things that she came out with today. She has previously said:

"I am particularly pleased to welcome ... the results of the Highland pathfinder GIRFEC project, especially the progress that has been made on measuring outcomes much more effectively, making improvements in professional practice with better multi-agency working, and developing a more holistic approach to the needs of the child—something that we all agree is one of the most important issues."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2009; c 21897.]

That was what she said. Has Liz Smith changed her mind?

Liz Smith: Liz Smith has definitely not changed her mind. Can the member explain where the evidence is on the named person in the Highland pathfinder? That is not the conclusion that was set out.

George Adam: By welcoming the pathfinder project, Liz Smith welcomed the named person, too, because it was part of that project.

GIRFEC is the way forward for all our children and meets the basic human need of making sure that everything is okay for them. In no way does the named person replace a parent or carer, and nor does it undermine families; in fact, a named person might provide much-needed support in difficult times. No family or individual can deal with

challenging circumstances on their own. Despite what was said earlier, children and parents are under no obligation to use the service or to take up the advice or help that is offered. That alone dispels one of the many myths that have been created about the issue.

This is the right policy and the right way forward. Every child should be able to grow up in a safe and stable environment. I was lucky to be brought up by a loving and caring family, and I am sure that most people in the chamber benefited from a stable family life, too. However, not every child has a safe and secure home and not every child in the real world gets that love and support. When the difficult times come, it is down to the named person to help.

Much has been said about the Declan Hainey case—I think that Mr Gray brought it up—the events of which took place in Paisley. I do not believe that any legislation, regardless of what it does, will stop bad people doing bad things, which is inevitable. Nevertheless, we must do everything that we can to ensure that those things do not happen.

When I read the reports of the Declan Hainey case, both when I was a councillor and later, it became apparent that no one took responsibility for that child. Both health and social care services were to blame at various points in the case. I read the reports from cover to cover, and no one was technically to blame; the problem was that no individual was responsible for making sure that the child was okay. That shows the need for the named person.

The named person's role is to respond to requests to help a child that are made by a young person or a parent and to provide support. I do not believe that the role will be about deciding what television shows the child is going to watch—that was among the scare stories that have come out.

I was recently contacted by my local newspaper, the *Paisley Daily Express*. I know that the debate is not about foster parents, but the paper was starting a campaign with Renfrewshire Council to get more foster parents. It is important that we address the needs of every child, which is why I believe totally in the GIRFEC policies and was happy to give the paper a quote and to support Renfrewshire Council, which supports 712 children, in promoting the campaign further.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are in your final minute.

George Adam: We have to get away from the scare stories and the myth that a named person will replace or change the role of a parent. The named person approach is not new and did not come out of the blue; it has been part of a concentrated project that Liz Smith previously

supported, although she does not appear to do so now. For me, it is an important part of GIRFEC and is part of ensuring that we never again have young children left in such situations or the tragic circumstances that have sometimes happened.

I have been disgusted by the tone that the Tories have brought to the debate, but I am not surprised by it. They are appealing to the lowest common denominator, which is very disappointing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

George Adam: I finish by saying that this is the way forward in ensuring that we make Scotland the best place for all children to grow up in.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I make it clear that members cannot go over six minutes. Even at that, some members' speeches may have to be reduced to five minutes.

15:17

John Pentland (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab): The idea of having a named person is basically good. In principle, it is hard to see a good argument against having someone who is a link between children, their parents and professionals and who brings together those who are involved in a child's life. Crucially, that is someone who can look out for vulnerable children and ensure that they do not fall through society's safety net.

Of course, my support for the principle is subject to its being properly put into practice. It needs to be adequately resourced, and those who undertake the role need to be well trained. It also needs trust. At every stage of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, Scottish Labour argued that the system must work in practice and be properly resourced, without placing an additional burden on staff or taking support away from the children who need it most. Those were not just Scottish Labour's concerns; they were shared by the RCN, the Educational Institute of Scotland and others. If done badly, the scheme could add a burden of bureaucracy while providing little help to those who should benefit. If done very badly, it would be counterproductive.

Nevertheless, the pilot scheme showed that the approach could be done well, which has led to its broadly being welcomed by local authorities, health boards and children's organisations and to its roll-out across the country. Children's organisations such as Barnardo's, Children 1st, Save the Children, Children in Scotland and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Scotland were and remain very supportive of the legislation and recognise the importance of the named person to GIRFEC.

Scottish Labour argued that the provision should apply only to young people up to the age of 16. I still do not understand why a named person is needed for someone who is old enough to decide the future of their country, but consistency is not a strong point of nationalism. Suffice it to say that the Scottish Government ignored those calls and failed to address parents' concerns.

On the question of trust, the Scottish Government is doing extremely badly. Perhaps that is because it has already given people reasons to mistrust it, such as its centralising tendencies, its avoidance of scrutiny and its riding roughshod over civil liberties, with spying on journalists, stop and search and the introduction of the super identity database by the back door. Its Big Brother reputation has fed the intense dislike that some feel for the named person proposals. In reality, the public do not trust the named person proposals in the hands of the SNP.

To be fair, that dislike is compounded by misunderstanding about the purpose of the named person. In most cases, the named person will be a health visitor or a teacher who already fulfils, at least in part, the named person role. The legislation formalises that role. It does not seek to provide a social worker for every child—the named person is not a state guardian and does not replace the role of parents in any way. We are assured that, in most cases, communication will primarily be between parents and the named person, and parents will control the relationship with the named person.

The named person will allow problems to be identified and support to be provided earlier. That should reduce the need for costly interventions later, which will allow the better use of resources for those who need them most.

Dr Allan: I have been listening carefully to John Pentland. My reading is that he agrees with the Scottish Government on the issue. Can he not bring himself to say that?

John Pentland: I have already said, minister, that I agree with the named person proposals, but there are a lot of faults behind them, and you need to listen to concerns about those faults.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Talk through the chair, please.

John Pentland: The named person proposals should reduce the need for costly interventions later, which will allow the better use of resources for those who need them most, yet, rather than address people's misconceptions and fears, the Conservatives are today cynically playing on them. Part of the Conservatives' scaremongering is to suggest that information will be withheld from parents and that they will be excluded from important decisions in their children's lives. As a

rule, that will not be the case. If it is, there should be a good reason.

Contrary to what some believe, good reasons exist. For starters, children have rights to privacy. If they choose to tell a professional something in confidence, they have a right to expect that to be respected. That might be necessary to enable children to disclose abuse. We would fail in our duty to the most vulnerable children if they did not have that right.

We have had too many such failures. If it is done right, the named person scheme can be part of the safety net to help to prevent such cases. The scheme is there for an admirable and valuable purpose. We should not try to undermine it; we should ensure that it is fit for purpose.

15:23

Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): A couple of weeks ago, my colleague Rod Campbell led a members' business debate to mark universal children's day, which is a day that the United Nations chose to promote children's welfare around the world. Although I was not able to participate in that debate, I was interested to hear the contributions from MSPs across the chamber on our obligation to ensure that every child is given the opportunity to enjoy their childhood with freedom and dignity. In his opening speech, Rod Campbell quoted UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and it is worth doing that again:

"The one thing all children have in common is their rights. Every child has the right to survive and thrive, to be educated, to be free from violence and abuse, to participate and to be heard."

Those are fundamental rights but, sadly, we know that for some children they are not always protected.

I was fortunate to be invited by Barnardo's to visit one of its local services in East Renfrewshire to highlight universal children's day. I met volunteers who work tirelessly to support the excellent work that Barnardo's does for Scotland's most vulnerable children and young people.

As we have heard, Barnardo's is just one of a broad coalition of children's charities that are advocates of the named person provisions in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. Aberlour, which last night held a reception to mark 140 years of supporting Scotland's young people, and Action for Children, which recently celebrated its 60th year of supporting Scotland's young people, are two other well-established children's charities that back the measures.

As we have heard, other supporters include Quarriers, Children in Scotland, the NSPCC, Who Cares? Scotland, Mentor, One Parent Families

Scotland and Children 1st. Those are all charities that are dedicated to improving the lives of Scotland's children and young people. The fact that they are all advocates of the named person policy is strong evidence that implementing the policy is the right thing to do.

Nonetheless, like many in the chamber, I have been contacted by constituents who have raised concerns about the named person, so I am prepared to listen to the arguments on why the Scottish Government needs to look again at the policy. However, many of the criticisms that have been made seem to be based on misinformation and misunderstanding of what the policy is actually about. For example, one constituent who contacted me was worried about the impact that the policy would have on parents who choose not to have their children vaccinated. Of course, there are no provisions in the 2014 act that would permit a named person to forcibly vaccinate a child; indeed, the named person has no powers to compel parents or children to do anything without their consent.

We have also heard parents express concerns that the named person will meddle with how their child's bedroom is decorated or what television programmes their child watches. Those concerns are not based in fact. The policy is not about introducing a snoopers charter that undermines the role of parents.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member tell me what he understands by the word "wellbeing"?

Stewart Maxwell: To be frank, that is a ridiculous intervention. If you do not understand what we are trying to achieve on the wellbeing of children in this country, you should go and have a serious look at yourself. That is an incredible intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Maxwell, speak through the chair, please.

Stewart Maxwell: I apologise, Presiding Officer, but the member should have a serious look at himself if that is the level of intervention that he wants to make in a serious debate such as this.

The cabinet secretary and the minister have been clear that the role of the named person is to advise and support, and those who do not wish to engage with the named person will be under no obligation to do so. The Conservatives have described the policy as a

"monstrous' invasion into family life",

yet Lord Pentland, in his judgment following the court challenge, was clear in refuting that assertion.

I was extremely disappointed to read Ruth Davidson's comments in the Sunday press, which appeared to be an attempt to scare people into believing that the named person policy is not fit for purpose. To cite the murders of Baby P and Victoria Climbié—two harrowing and tragic cases of child abuse—and suggest that the named person policy could lead to such tragedies being more likely in Scotland is seriously misguided and is not borne out by the evidence. Ruth Davidson should seriously consider what she said and withdraw those remarks.

Martin Crewe, director of Barnardo's Scotland, has said that many of the criticisms that have been directed towards the named person provisions are not justified. In the briefing paper that was provided ahead of today's debate, Barnardo's offered a strong rebuttal to the concerns that the Conservatives have raised in pointing out the importance of having in place an early-warning system to identify children who are most at risk. Children are not conveniently divided into groups that identify them as either vulnerable or not at risk. Barnardo's makes the important point that the child who is most at risk is the one who has not yet been identified as being at risk, and Ruth Davidson and her colleagues would do well to reflect on that.

The Highland pathfinder project found that the named person does not waste resources or put at risk the safety of children. In fact, the pathfinder demonstrated a reduction in the workload of the professionals who were involved, because support was given before problems developed into crises.

The named person provisions in the 2014 act have been endorsed by Parliament, and the subsequent legal challenges to the legislation have been rejected in their entirety by the Court of Session. However, that is not to say that there is not still work to be done. There is clearly a degree of misunderstanding about the named person, which is leading to anxiety among some parents. More must be done to address that, so I welcome the assurances of the cabinet secretary and the minister that the Scottish Government will continue to work with parent groups and others to address any legitimate concerns ahead of implementation of the measures next year.

I am proud of the work that the Parliament undertook in introducing the 2014 act. It is unfortunate that many of the excellent provisions in the act are being overshadowed to an extent by the misinformation about the named person. When I spoke during the stage 3 debate on the legislation, I said that the implementation of GIRFEC across Scotland would go a long way towards ensuring that no child is left without support. I have heard no compelling evidence to make me change that view.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you must close.

Stewart Maxwell: I am disgusted that the Conservatives are continuing with their misinformation and creating more misunderstanding about the legislation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I give fair warning that members might have to be cut off at six minutes.

15:29

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I appreciate that the role of the named person is one to which both Liz Smith and her colleagues are implacably opposed. I respect that position, although I disagree with it, but some of the language used to convey that opposition has been neither accurate nor helpful and is only likely to spread undue alarm among parents and the wider public. In that sense, I agree absolutely with the criticisms levelled by Iain Gray, if not with everything in his amendment.

That is not to say that there are not genuine concerns. Last week at topical questions, I highlighted the Government's decision to abolish the board of experts tasked with overseeing the introduction of the named person. Ministers did not see fit to inform the Parliament of their intention, or even to tell us that they had done it, and I think that that was both high handed and disrespectful.

Practically, of course, the way in which the named person policy is introduced and resourced matters greatly. During the passage of the bill, like others, I highlighted the need to ensure that focus is not diverted away from those cases where there are genuine welfare concerns at stake. The deputy chief constable raised that in the now-abolished programme board and it is probably the area where most work is needed to reassure the public, as well as those more directly involved in the process.

The key to avoiding a diversion of focus is for the Government to ensure that the policy is properly resourced. In that respect, the criticism in Labour's amendment has merit, reflecting the concerns of the RCN, teaching unions and local authorities, which were reiterated yesterday at the Education and Culture Committee meeting. Moreover, the Government was wrong not to limit the scope of the named person provision to those 16 and under or to introduce a presumption in favour of explicit consent for information sharing. Both decisions have made implementing the measure, as well as reassuring the public, more problematic.

Notwithstanding those concerns, I simply do not buy the argument about so-called state-sponsored

guardians. Initially, I, like the former cabinet secretary, viewed those proposals with a little scepticism. However, based on the evidence that we heard in committee and discussions that I had with those involved in working with children, I have been persuaded that the named person can be made to work effectively and deliver benefits. We will need to keep a close eye on resourcing and ensure that a ruthless focus is maintained on those in greatest need, but that is entirely possible and is certainly not justification for the more dire predictions made by some.

Personally, I found the experience of those in Highland particularly helpful in coming to a view on the issue. The GIRFEC pilot taken forward by Highland Council and its partners in the health, police and other services saw the idea of a named person first emerge at the behest, it would appear, of parents keen to have a single point of contact.

We would all subscribe to the need for joined-up working between agencies when supporting our children and young people, whatever that support might be. If everyone is responsible, however, there is always a risk that no one actually takes responsibility, and I think that the measure helps to address that risk.

In terms of the practicalities, the arguments that were made by Aberlour and others in their briefing are interesting. As well as illustrating how senior teachers will simply not have time to meddle where there is no need, they point out that most parents would expect senior staff to look out for their children. In effect, the proposals will codify best practice, albeit, as I acknowledged, with a need for adequate resources.

It is also expected that the communication will be dramatically more in the direction of parent to named person rather than the other way round. That may offer reassurance to those worried about the effect on the role of parents, reinforced by statutory guidance that makes it clear that parents will retain control of the relationship. Parents will be able to complain about their named person and, in some circumstances, have a new named person assigned, where the relationship breaks down or there is a conflict of interest. That seems to be a reasonable safeguard and one that I think was sought by Liz Smith in committee during the passage of the bill.

It is also helpful that the guidance sets out strict rules on what information, if any, is collected and shared by the named person. As I said earlier, I think that ministers were wrong to reject my amendments on introducing a presumption in favour of explicit consent for information sharing. Obviously, there will be instances where that is not practical, but those would be rare. The principle of explicit consent, meantime, seemed to me to be one worth enshrining.

However, as the briefing from the coalition of charities makes clear, named persons will rarely proactively collect information about a child, except when there are serious existing concerns. They will receive information from other professionals only when there is a particular concern about a child and will then decide whether action needs to be taken. Again, that rather mirrors what we would expect to be happening already.

There are legitimate anxieties about how the named person will work in practice. We in this Parliament and those most directly affected by the act's implementation will need to be alive to those. However, some of the intemperate language being used and some of the characterisations being made about what the named person approach is and what it will mean for children, young people and their parents in Scotland are wide of the mark and irresponsible.

For the vast majority, the truth is that they may notice very little difference at all. Where it should deliver most benefit, however, is in directing vulnerable families to the help and support that they need, and more particularly—as Iain Gray rightly pointed out—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Can you draw to a close, please?

Liam McArthur: —in allowing early identification of potential problems for those who may be at risk, ensuring that help is provided that may well prevent more long-lasting problems emerging over time.

The roll-out of the named person role must be proportionate and sensitive but I believe that it can be an effective means of underpinning children's rights in Scotland, which is something that I very much support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. We are very tight for time; speeches of up to six minutes, please.

15:35

Chic Brodie (South Scotland) (SNP): I have some experience as a parent and step-parent of five children and 10 grandchildren and because of my soft nature, they receive the fiercest of protection and the best of guidance.

When I spoke in the child sexual exploitation and abuse debate two years ago, I said that nothing could be more important than the welfare and protection of every child, and especially those who are the most vulnerable in our society—children who need the greatest of care and support—which is something on which we can all agree. I can assure members that the Public

Petitions Committee inquiry covered in that debate burns a hole in me to this day.

It is, of course, not unusual that when new legislation is introduced there are inevitably differing opinions across parties, across the political spectrum and across ideals. In this case, that is so. Just as in the debate that I mentioned, there are the overriding issues of children and the attendant emotions, all of which I thought were embraced by Liz Smith. I am sure that that is how she feels but, unusually, her motion and her speech were wrapped in unnecessary scaremongering.

Because of those compelling emotions, some may have had concerns, but the basis of the policy of any new proposal, service, or change can only be validated by persuasion, by implementation and above all by evidence. Perhaps it is on that paradigm that those who are vehemently opposed to the policy in this chamber and beyond—and recognising the basis for the emotion that is involved—might have worked out how they might work more constructively and eventually accept the intent and the evidence.

Let us put down a marker and progress from there. Let us make it clear from the start that the named person role does not replace or change the role of a parent or carer; nor does it undermine families. Fundamentally, children and parents have no obligation to use the service but, where applicable—

Liz Smith: Will the member give way?

Chic Brodie: No, I am sorry, time is limited.

Where applicable, the service can be used by children and parents who wish to take up the advice if offered.

On 16 February this year, Liz Smith asked the following:

“To ask the Scottish Government whether parents will have a legal right to withdraw their children from the provisions of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 in relation to named persons.”

The answer was:

“There will be no legal obligation for families to engage with the named person if they choose not to, but we hope that because the named person will already be someone the family knows and trusts, that they will want to seek their advice and support if they need it.”—[*Written Answers*, 26 February 2015; S4W-24445.]

Liz Smith: Will the member give way?

Chic Brodie: No, I am sorry, I cannot.

I personally would demur should it be otherwise. When the motion speaks about the “growing opposition” to the named person policy and says that

“strong criticism ... has been levelled at the policy by professionals”,

where is that significant, growing opposition, apart from in pages 8 or 10 of the right-wing press? Are we honestly saying that organisations that have been mentioned before, from Aberlour to Barnardo's to Who Cares? Scotland are not professional when it comes to the care of those children who need it? Are we honestly saying that? When the judicial review appeal was upheld in regard to the legality of the policy, Lord Carloway said:

“The legislation was informed by the views of experts in child welfare, health and education. Its policy is to put the best interests of every child at the centre of decision-making.”

Experts are the same as professionals. He went on to say:

“The mere creation of a named person, available”

if needed

“to assist a child or parent, no more confuses or diminishes the legal role, duties and responsibilities of parents”.

Until she spoke, I believed that the motion lodged by Liz Smith was driven by the best of motives. Given what I have said, we need to let the professionals work together to secure early intervention in child welfare to prevent tragedies.

It is relevant that non-statutory versions of the named person role are already evident in areas such as Edinburgh, Angus, Falkirk, Fife and Ayrshire. At the time, Liz Smith and Mary Scanlon welcomed Highland Council's 2010 implementation of the named person provision and in an earlier debate on GIRFEC, Liz Smith said:

“I am particularly pleased to welcome the report on the results of the Highland pathfinder GIRFEC project ... developing a more holistic approach to the needs of the child”.—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2009; c 21897.]

It is inevitable that the motion states that

“extensive costs and bureaucracy will be involved in the implementation of the policy.”

It would not be a Tory motion otherwise. As the Highland Council experience points out, it need not be so. Martin Crewe of Barnardo's has averred:

“Neither of these criticisms is justified.”

The protection of the most vulnerable, particularly vulnerable children, is the responsibility of the Parliament. We should secure that and base it on evidence and respect for the child.

15:41

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am mindful of the instruction that we got at the start of the debate not to refer directly to the

current court proceedings. However, I notice that the Scottish Government's amendment says that it "notes that the legal challenge to these provisions has now been rejected by the Scottish courts twice".

I say gently to the Scottish Government that, just because a policy is not illegal does not make it sensible.

I do not think there is anyone in the debate who has a problem with the principle that children in a vulnerable situation need additional support. That principle underlines GIRFEC and it is supported by every party that is represented in the chamber.

The issue that divides us is whether that approach should be extended to all children, or simply to those who are in a vulnerable situation. It is the universality of the named person policy that makes it controversial, and precisely why we have brought the debate to the Parliament this afternoon.

Aileen Campbell: How do you define a vulnerable child? Is it someone who is of the deserving poor, the undeserving poor, the scroungers or the skivers, according to the rhetoric and language that you so often use?

Murdo Fraser: I really think that that intervention is beneath the minister. When she reflects on that after the debate, she will realise that that sort of language is entirely unhelpful to the debate.

I will talk a little bit about resources and develop the argument, because it is important. Liz Smith spoke about the additional burden that will be put on the public authorities through making the policy universal. The EIS has expressed concern about the impact on education, saying in July:

"Teachers are becoming increasingly concerned about the demands likely to be made of them which will have implications for workload and potentially for conditions of service."

Carole Ford, the former president of School Leaders Scotland, said in October that the policy will

"diminish the time and attention paid to those children who need it the most"

and that

"By spreading the named person resource across all children, most of whom have absolutely no need of it, rather than just those identified as vulnerable, the impact will be so thin as to be negligible. A named person should be identified only for those children who need it."

Just today, in a press release, the Royal College of Nursing in Scotland, continued to express its

"concerns about the resources in some areas to support the introduction of the Named Person".

That is the crux of the issue. For years, we on this side of the chamber have been calling for

proper resources for a universal health visiting service. If we want to identify the people who need support, we have to fund health visitors. Instead of putting the money into a named person policy that has received all this criticism because of the diversion of resources, the money should be put into health visitors.

Aileen Campbell: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: If the minister will be slightly more careful about her choice of language, I will give way to her.

Aileen Campbell: I still do not think that Mr Fraser ever gave us an answer to the question of how he was going to determine who a vulnerable person is. However, will he welcome the announcement of 500 additional health visitors?

Murdo Fraser: As the minister knows, we are on the record as welcoming that. However, of course, that is precisely how we identify the vulnerable children: by having the health visitors. That is why we want resources that are going into the named person policy to be rolled out in that much more useful direction.

More concerning than the implication for resources is the fear that this legislation undermines parental rights. We have heard today lots of assertion from SNP members that that will not happen, so I want to quote to them the words of a number of bodies that take a contrary view. The Scottish Parent Teacher Council said:

"We believe the concept of a named person for every child is ill thought through and offers no benefit to the majority of children, whose 'named person' is already in place—their parent or carer.

For most children in receipt of universal services, their parent or carer is the person who has most interest in their wellbeing, knows them best, is committed, has staying power and is most motivated to ensure the health, education and other services they come into contact with deliver for them. This proposal completely fails to recognise that significant relationship and effectively seeks to usurp the role of the parent."

Those are not the words of Conservative members of this Parliament; they are the words of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council.

Similar concerns have been raised by Maggie Mellon, who the minister will well know. She has been a social worker for more than 35 years and is the vice chair of the British Association of Social Workers. She said:

"The exclusion of parents and families seems to be based on a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what is meant by 'child centred' practice which assumes that government can and should have a direct relationship with children, bypassing or ignoring their parents and families ... But children live in families. Not idealised families, and not demonised families, just families with all their complexities and their occasional failings and crises, but for most

children the best place for them to be, with the people who care most about them in the world.”

Who could disagree with that? Those are not the words of the Conservatives, by any stretch of the imagination; they are the words of an expert in the field.

As the parent of two young children at primary school, I can identify with those remarks. If there is to be somebody responsible for my children’s welfare, then it should be me, or at least their mother. It should be us as parents who have those responsibilities, not someone nominated by the state. Indeed, it is an intrusion into family life, and the primary responsibility of parents, for the state to seek to usurp the parental role.

On the Scottish Government’s website, there is a page entitled, “Top ten Named Person Facts”, which aims to dispel what it describes as myths around the policy. It states:

“Children and parents have no obligation to use this service or take up the advice or help offered”.

However, as Elizabeth Smith has pointed out, that is not the case. We know that professionals believe that their position should be to take an interventionist approach and that it will be flagged as a risk indicator if there is parental resistance to, or even limited engagement with, the role of the named person.

This is a misguided policy at best. It is dangerous and will have a negative impact on resources that are better spent elsewhere. The Government should think again.

15:48

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): It is an occupational hazard of politics that we occasionally lapse into hyperbolic statements and over-the-top narrative. However, I have to say, first and foremost, that, as someone who has known Ruth Davidson for close to 17 years, I was extremely disappointed by her remarks in the press at the weekend.

It is always disappointing when someone with whom one gets on says something outrageous, but there was another reason why I was disappointed with Ruth Davidson, which I will illustrate with reference to the review into the death of Daniel Pelka, which said that some of the failings in the case related to systems not working effectively rather than simply to individual errors because opportunities to intervene more effectively or to apply a greater child focus to interventions were sometimes missed by practitioners. Further, Anne Houston, the former chief executive of Children 1st—who most people in the chamber would accept speaks with a great deal of authority on these matters—stated:

“Deaths like Daniel’s remind us why the principle behind the named person ... in the Children and Young People Bill is a sound one as it aims to prevent children slipping through the net.”

Nobody in this chamber would suggest in any way that we can absolutely and categorically legislate to prevent a tragedy from occurring in the future. However, what we can do is legislate to make that less likely and to remove the gaps that exist that prevent services communicating effectively and prevent a round-table approach to the protection of children being taken.

I looked at the briefing that was sent to us and the organisations that chose to write to us and put their organisations’ names to a briefing in support of named persons. Liz Smith cited some of them: Aberlour Action for Children, Barnardo’s Scotland, CELCIS, Children 1st, Children in Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland. They have all come forward in favour of the named person approach.

Liz Smith said in her opening remarks that, because those organisations work with the most vulnerable children in Scotland, that somehow renders the universal application of the named person policy wrong-headed. I say to Liz Smith that it is her analysis that is wrong-headed. If those organisations that wrote in support of the policy thought for one second that the introduction of the policy would result in resources being diverted from the most vulnerable children in society or would lead to those children becoming more at risk, they would oppose it in a heartbeat; you can be guaranteed of that.

The fact that those organisations have taken the time to write to us and express their support for the policy shows that they recognise the benefits that it will bring, and they understand that the named person policy is about supporting children. As Barnardo’s Scotland said in its briefing to us,

“In many ways, the child at most risk is the one who has not yet been identified as being at risk.”

Liz Smith: If the Scottish Government is saying that in the vast majority of cases the named person will no longer be necessary, or will never be necessary, why do we need them in the first place?

Mark McDonald: If the member had listened to the first two and a half minutes of my speech, when I outlined the point in relation to the Daniel Pelka case, which could be equally applied to many other cases of tragic circumstances where there was not the required communication between the relevant organisations, and quoted the supportive remarks of Anne Houston of Children 1st, she would have known better than to offer me such a specious intervention at this stage of the debate.

I will go beyond that, to the nub of this. I think that the reality was highlighted in Murdo Fraser's speech when he spoke of the idea of parents being usurped. I am a parent of a child with a disability and of a child without a disability. I see no threat to my role as a parent from the named person policy. Maybe I just have a different view of that from Murdo Fraser.

The most interesting thing was when Murdo Fraser said that the way to deal with the matter is through investment in health visiting and health visiting alone. I welcome the announcement from the minister about funding for additional health visitors. I also accept that there is a role for health visitors in the named person provision, up to a point. However, the idea that Murdo Fraser is propagating when he speaks about health visitors being the sole solution is that a child can be identified as being at risk at the point of birth and that at no point during that child's transition through childhood into adolescence can they go from not being at risk to being at risk—that there are no circumstances that could lead to that.

To me, that is fundamentally misguided. There is a range of external factors that can influence what happens in a child's life. If the only eggs in the basket are those that are put there at the very beginning of a child's existence, we run the risk of missing things later on. It is not so simple as being able to point to an individual child and say that that child is at risk.

A child from a financially comfortable background is just as likely as any other to be in a household where the mother has post-natal depression, as happened in my own household where my wife went through a period of post-natal depression. Someone might have looked at us and not identified us as a household in which that might arise, but it did nonetheless. We can never categorically say that a child will never require a named person, simply on the basis of some arbitrary factor—it cannot be determined so easily. That is why the policy is correct and why the Conservatives are so wide of the mark.

15:54

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): The Government has our considered support in this debate, but there are perils ahead as the policy process turns from sweeping objectives to tangible delivery. I thank the Scottish Government for publishing the revised draft statutory guidance yesterday, as it has helped to clear up some—if not all—of the confusion surrounding the proposals.

I think that we can all agree that it is a positive step for children and families to have an easily identifiable person to advocate on their behalf.

Indeed, as has been widely stated by the broad coalition within civic Scotland that supports the aims, a large number of the functions of named persons are already being carried out. Teachers, guidance counsellors and health visitors are working tirelessly to support families as we debate today, and they will continue to do so under the new legislation.

The rhetoric from the Government is difficult to disagree with. Getting it right for every child is a venerable ideal. We all want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up in, and every child and young person in Scotland has the right to play, to be healthy and happy, to learn new things and to be looked after and nurtured. The challenge for the Government lies in realising those laudable aims and bridging the gap between broad sweeping statements of intent and delivery of the necessary infrastructure, resources and support.

One of the last major policy initiatives that began with a similar level of support was curriculum for excellence. There was broad support for the aims and objectives of that policy, which commanded support across the board in public life in Scotland but, unfortunately, that support faded and problems grew as the implementation date approached and difficulties with delivery became apparent.

Ever the optimist, though, I am sure that the Scottish Government has listened to the concerns that have been raised regarding the draft guidance and will address them thoroughly.

Aileen Campbell: I have a point about support that we are providing for parents that I genuinely think the member will welcome: we have launched guidance in British Sign Language.

Mark Griffin: That is the subject of a personal campaign of mine and I thank the minister for taking the needs of BSL-using parents into account.

The guidance is crucial because it will directly impact on local implementation of the policy, which could be a defining factor in whether it aids families. It will be helpful if the minister can reassure us about some of the weaknesses that persist in the Government's approach and say how she intends to tackle them. However, it is not just members whom she must reassure. It is also the thousands of education and health workers who will be required to implement the new scheme.

Three main areas of concern remain. First, the Royal College of Nursing has highlighted that there is a shortage of health visitors. Teachers and health visitors will be expected to carry out their named person role on top of their usual duties, with no extra resources, and headteachers in particular areas could easily end up being the

named person to several hundred pupils. Any suggestion that the changes do not add to existing workloads is simply untenable. The practical challenges of availability given teaching commitments, time pressures, recruitment difficulties and the resources to provide training will all fall on local authorities and health boards, with no extra financial support.

Secondly, and at the heart of the changes, the definition of wellbeing is vague and is open to a wide range of interpretations. That remains the case despite yesterday's attempt to add clarity. Even though the definition is a key tenet of the new approach, we are still without clear and unambiguous guidance. The Government has tried to flesh that out with the SHANARRI acronym—safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. However, as the EIS has pointed out, the approach

“may lead to a skewed and overly simplistic impression that the wellbeing of children from more affluent backgrounds is secure while children who are from less affluent backgrounds are likely to present with wellbeing concerns.”

It is hard to disagree with that and, unfortunately, we have to view the test in the wider context of pockets of poverty. It might be that, should a named person be the headteacher of a school in an area with higher levels of deprivation, we cannot help but find a blanket failure to meet the test.

Thirdly, there remains an issue around children's services plans, which will be provided by local authorities and health boards. It is my understanding that those will be signed off by ministers, but is that the end of the role that the Scottish Government will play? If the children's services plans state that there is a lack of resourcing, will there be support available? How do those plans interact with the individual child's plan?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must draw to a close, please.

Mark Griffin: How are local authorities meant to meet the conflicting demands of the individual and the collective availability of support?

I think that there is a lot of work to be done between now and the end of August next year to convince families, health and educational professionals and all those who support the aims of the policy that the Government is capable of steering it—and, crucially, resourcing it—to a successful outcome.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are very tight for time.

16:00

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I have not spoken in an education and childcare debate in the chamber for over a year. I have not done so—I checked this—since 20 November last year, when I answered a question from my friend David Stewart on the training of educational psychologists. Not having spoken in such debates since then is not evidence of a lack of interest, because I remain passionately interested in all aspects of education and childcare. Indeed, I remain fascinated, as ex-ministers do, about almost all the subjects that I dealt with in government.

It is always best to let one's successors act and be heard without noises off from the past, but I am speaking today with the agreement of my successor and the Minister for Children and Young People, with whom I had the pleasure of working on the issue of the named person. I am speaking because I want to publicly and clearly raise my voice against the Tory motion and the highly regrettable and utterly misplaced Tory campaign against the named person policy.

I have some admiration for Liz Smith. She knows a great deal about education, although my saying so will probably not help her street cred in Tory streets, at least. However, I believe that she is profoundly wrong about the named person issue. I have to regret the way in which she is raising it, which will encourage the worst of responses from some people and has already done so through her party leader, whose publicity at the weekend on the matter was misleading and misinformed and will—most alarmingly of all—be maliciously misused by others.

I want to speak about principle and practice this afternoon. First, I pay tribute to the three ministers who have made this positive policy possible: the current minister, Aileen Campbell; her maternity-leave cover, Fiona McLeod; and her predecessor, Adam Ingram. All three are highly thought of in the sector and all three have passionately believed in and implemented this important innovation. They have done so hand in hand with all the main children's charities, local authorities, health, social work and justice professionals, the police and countless others, including Labour—I commend at least three quarters of the speech by Iain Gray this afternoon.

All that proves—this is a central point—that the named person initiative, as part of GIRFEC, is not an extreme or experimental policy but a mainstream, respected and effective approach to supporting and helping children, parents and families, and by so doing helping and supporting our whole society. The policy has also been supported by a judgment and an appeal judgment in the courts. The principle is clear and positive:

the named person is intended to act as a point of contact—that is what the role is. The named person role absolutely does not supplant or replace parental concern, love, affection, support, responsibility or guidance.

Liz Smith: It is good to hear the member speak again on this subject. What was it that made him change his mind, given that he said in the chamber that he was rather nervous about the named person policy?

Michael Russell: If Liz Smith will wait, that information will come in a moment. I want to address that point because I became a strong convert to the named person policy.

The named person policy does not produce a state guardian in any recognisable use or meaning of the term. Liam McArthur confirmed that understanding earlier, and he sat through all the committee evidence on the issue. There will be no state guardian, no usurping of the parental role and no demonisation of parents. The facts demonstrate that all such language is untrue spin that is designed to undermine the delivery of necessary and appropriate support to children. I believe that no MSP should be complicit in that spin.

Jackie Brock put it well when she defined the named person in much simpler language as

“a primary point of contact available to all children”.

She went on to observe that it is often merely

“the formalisation of practice that already exists”.

She also noted that the policy and the legislation have

“grown from a sincere commitment to improving children’s welfare and protecting families.”

It is light-touch, appropriate assistance. It is assistance where and when it is needed and assistance that can be crucial, sometimes because it is light touch.

I will give two examples, the first of which is from my very first week in office, almost six years ago. I went to Fort William to see the GIRFEC pilot in operation. It was working because it co-ordinated the work of others, it was light touch, and it meant that children and young people who were often from very chaotic backgrounds were able to be helped and guided in a supportive way through the named person programme. No wonder Mary Scanlon spoke warmly of the named person programme in the Highland region. The pilot programme worked spectacularly.

Later, I went to see how the approach was working in a school in Liz Smith’s area—it was not in Forfar; it was somewhere else—as there were noises off and I remained concerned. I met a young boy, and that meeting has stayed with me

ever since. His mother had died and his father had gone to pieces. The child was in real difficulty, but he had a named person. He was able to go to that named person and, with the lightest of touches, get the support that he needed to support his father and the family and to keep the family together without the intervention of social workers or others. That worked for him. That is the boy whom we should think about today. That young man persuaded me finally that the approach was right. It is right, and it is wrong to take the issue and attempt to play to a political gallery.

I understand that the Tories want to be the second party in Scotland. That is their business. I want to ensure that the first party in Scotland is delivering for Scotland’s children. By all means divide the chamber on matters of genuine principle, but do not divide us on our shared concern and support for children and our shared desire to encourage good family life in Scotland. The named person approach helps that; it does not hinder it.

16:06

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): At this stage in the process, we ought to be concentrating on implementation of the named person policy. I welcome what Iain Gray said about that at the beginning of the debate, but the sad reality is that we still have to address the myths and the scaremongering that have stirred up a great deal of anxiety and misunderstanding among certain people.

I suppose that I should acknowledge the relatively measured tone of the motion and the relatively restrained tone of Liz Smith’s opening speech, but they are measured and restrained only relative to the disgraceful weekend hyperbole of her leader, which stood truth on its head. For me, the killer question in the debate is this: if the fundamental critique that Ruth Davidson made, and which Liz Smith has repeated today, is that the policy puts some vulnerable children at risk, why on earth does every single organisation in Scotland that works for vulnerable children support the policy? I have such a long list of those organisations with me that it would take the rest of my speech to read it out.

We have to address the anxieties and misunderstandings with simple and clear messages about the policy. I will give just five of those messages. The idea for the named person policy originally came from parents, so that there could be a clear point of contact for support services. The policy involves a stronger role for an existing member of staff, not for a new person—far less, for a state guardian. There are no powers in the named person legislation to force a child or a family to do anything. The policy is based on

existing practice—I will mention Edinburgh and Highland briefly later, if I have time. Finally, social work as a targeted service is involved only when it is needed.

I have a long quotation from Alistair Gaw, who is the president of Social Work Scotland, but I will read only the last sentence of it. His conclusion is that

“The named person role will reduce not increase the involvement of social work in the lives of families, protecting resources for our most vulnerable children.”

I hope that Ruth Davidson will read that particular quotation.

Liz Smith expressed concern about the universal nature of services. As Barnardo's said in the briefing that it sent to us yesterday:

“It is essential to have a universal early warning system to identify the children who are most vulnerable.”

It also said that

“In many ways, the child at most risk is the one who has not yet been identified as being at risk.”

This is about supporting and safeguarding, and about enhancing the rights of children while respecting the rights of parents. In the vast majority of cases—as the more general briefing that we received today from a wide range of children's organisations pointed out—the traffic will flow from the named person to a parent. The briefing also pointed out that there are strict rules about what information is collected or shared.

We just have to keep repeating those basic facts about the named person approach. Politicians are sometimes criticised for saying things over and over again, but there can be good reasons for doing so. In this context, the facts about the named person approach have not been taken in by a lot of people, due to distortion and vilification of the policy on a massive scale. I have never read so many ridiculous and absurd articles on a subject as I have read on the named person policy in recent times. I printed off a whole collection for the debate and I despaired, but then I decided that we will just have to challenge what is being said.

One reason why I feel so strongly about the issue is that we have had the policy in Edinburgh since 2009. Has a parent ever come to me to complain about it? In November 2009, the City of Edinburgh Council said in a policy document:

“One aim of GIRFEC is to move towards earlier intervention and quicker identification of needs. We will achieve this by introducing the role of the Named Person.”

That was happening in Edinburgh in 2009.

As is even better known, the approach was also being taken in Highland, as part of the pathfinder project. Liz Smith asked where the evidence is

that the named person approach had anything to do with the pathfinder project's success. I refer her to the post-pathfinder submission that Bill Alexander, Highland Council's director of health and social care, completed on 13 September 2013. I cannot read out the whole submission in the time that I have left, but I will pick out some sentences. He said:

“Critically, the Named Person is a point of contact for families ... If the family wish, the Named Person can request help from other agencies ... If other professionals have concerns about a child's wellbeing, rather than rushing to Social Work or Police, or a host of other agencies, the concern can be passed to the Named Person”.

I am skipping a bit of my speech, because I have no time. It is interesting that Bill Alexander went on to say that prior to implementation of the named person approach,

“the Children's Hearing system was becoming deluged and swamped by inappropriate referrals and unnecessary processes, preventing and delaying the system from responding to those children who may actually have been in need of compulsory measures.

The development of the Named Person role was widely welcomed in Highland and has been fully implemented since 2010. Families prefer having contact with someone they already know, and who knows the child”—

and so it goes on, in a lot more detail.

Those who oppose the policy have been standing truth on its head. The policy enables us to better identify vulnerable children and to spend more time on them, contrary to what Ruth Davidson said.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will Malcolm Chisholm take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must finish now.

Malcolm Chisholm: I cannot accept an intervention. I am sorry.

We should be concentrating on implementation. It is clear that there are issues to do with getting the message across and with providing the resources that are needed, but we still have the fundamental task of supporting the policy and challenging its misrepresentation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Malcolm Chisholm: As Mike Russell does, I have high regard for Liz Smith, but I regret the speech that she made today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are completely out of time. I must reduce the time for the last four speakers to five and a half minutes.

16:13

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I want to take members back to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, as passed. Section 19(5) of the 2014 act sets out the functions of the named person. I will pick them out from several different lines in subsection (5). They include:

“advising, informing or supporting the child or young person, or a parent ... helping the child ... to access a service or support ... discussing, or raising, a matter about the child or young person with a service provider or relevant authority”.

Section 20 provides that the health board is to appoint the named person for a pre-school child; the local authority takes over when the child goes to school.

Sections 21 to 23 helpfully talk about communication in different circumstances. The whole point is that information about vulnerable children should not get lost. Members should note that section 23(4) provides that

“In considering ... whether information ought to be provided, the outgoing service provider”—

that is, the person who is passing information to someone who is taking over—

“is so far as reasonably practicable to ascertain and have regard to the views of the child or young person.”

That approach is mirrored in section 26(5), and members should note that section 26(7) stipulates that

“information ought to be provided only if the likely benefit to the wellbeing of the child or young person arising in consequence of doing so outweighs any likely adverse effect on that wellbeing arising from doing so.”

Under section 28, a named person must act according to the Scottish ministers’ guidance and, under section 29, they must act according to the Scottish ministers’ directions. The practice briefing note of December 2010, which provides guidance, is very clear about the purpose of the named person. It says:

“it is the Named Person’s responsibility to take action to provide help or arrange for the right help to be provided to promote the child’s development and well-being.”

All the questions to be considered are about wellbeing and what can be done to help, while respecting confidentiality.

In addition,

“children and families must always give permission for information to be shared”.

During pregnancy and immediately after birth, the named person should be a midwife, thereafter a health visitor and, in time, a member of school staff.

I have drawn members back to the original documents to put everything back in the original guiding context. I make the point that, whatever the Scottish ministers might put in guidance and directions, they cannot exceed what is in the original act, and certainly cannot push the boundaries of that act.

Furthermore, the guidance says, in relation to taking action in different circumstances, that

“In every circumstance, it is critical that children and families are involved in discussions, the gathering of information and decision-making.”

The essential point is that the legislation must be looked at overall. The legal point is that powers that are conferred by statute can be lawfully used only for the purposes for which they are conferred and within the constraints that are placed on them.

I am grateful to Mark McDonald for picking up on some of the issues that Murdo Fraser raised. I can understand why Murdo Fraser—who, sadly, is not here—and many other members and parents find it difficult to understand why parents might be regarded as any kind of problem. The Scottish Parent Teacher Council is probably made up of parents who would not be a problem. Forgive me—I see that Murdo Fraser is here. Those are precisely the kind of parents who I suspect would not be a problem and who feel that they might be usurped, but I make it absolutely clear that there are occasions on which parents are a problem.

Mark McDonald also helpfully made the point that it is not just in the very early years that vulnerability arises or could conceivably be identified, so I suggest that it is unreasonable to expect health visitors to be the only ones to have the role of identifying such vulnerability. Fundamentally, the named person is based on the idea that there should be somebody who can see the wider picture, regardless of the age of the child or young person—somebody to whom everybody who has a concern can turn and somebody who has a chance of making sure that such dreadful, albeit rare, cases as we have seen are not repeated.

On that basis, I think that the named person policy will turn out to be a very good thing, and I have very little doubt that it will stand the test of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. I appreciate your brevity.

16:18

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): There can be no higher priority for all of us than ensuring that our child protection systems work and protect vulnerable children from abuse or neglect. Sadly, we all know that, over the years, there have been

far too many high-profile cases of child neglect that have not been identified or acted on by the authorities until it was too late. Serious case reviews of cases such as the tragic Declan Hainey case have demonstrated major failings and blame when no one person or agency has taken responsibility for a child's welfare.

I have said in previous debates that I do not believe that it is the state's job to bring up all children but, as Iain Gray and others have said, I do not believe that that is the intention of the policy. Therefore, I support in principle the named person role, to ensure that children are protected from neglect or abuse.

My son is five months old and, since he was born, my wife and I have received important support and advice from our health visitor. We have found the health visitor to be helpful, not intrusive, and I do not fear that health visitor becoming the named person.

However, we must recognise that parents have genuine concerns about the named person role that have not been addressed. I believe that, as Iain Gray said, the minister and the Government are trying to do the right thing, but if parents' concerns had been acted on and responded to properly when the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill was being considered, I do not think that we would be in the situation that we are now in, in which there is an impression that the policy seeks to provide a social worker for every child, or to replace the role of parents.

One area in particular in which the legislation is still deeply flawed is the named person provision for 16 to 18-year-olds. During the bill's passage, Labour and others supported amendments on reducing from 18 to 16 the upper age limit for having a named person. We did that because we listened to what experts including Bill Alexander, the director of care and learning at Highland Council—he has been cited this afternoon—said at the time. I remember when Bill Alexander gave evidence to the Education and Culture Committee. Many of us were concerned when he questioned why a named person would be needed for most children who have left school. He said:

"I do not understand how my daughter, who is 17 and doing performing arts in Manchester, could have a named person; she will not need or want one."—[*Official Report, Education and Culture Committee*, 24 September 2013; c 2858.]

There is no doubt that some young people will require additional support after leaving school. However, the vast majority of those young people will neither need nor want a named person. As members have said, the Highland Council was the national pathfinder for implementing GIRFEC, and Bill Alexander is highly respected by Parliament.

During the stage 1 debate of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, Mike Russell said:

"Bill Alexander knows more about the subject than almost anybody else, and I have found what he says to be true".—[*Official Report*, 21 November 2013; c 24832.]

Mary Scanlon: I appreciate that, having been a Highlands and Islands MSP since 1999. I add that members cannot look just at GIRFEC. NHS Highland and the Highland Council also pioneered the lead agency model for health and social care. Highland Council is fully responsible for all aspects of all care and education of children under 16. That has nothing to do with the named person.

Neil Bibby: We need to revisit the issue of the named person for 16 to 18-year-olds. I still find it astonishing that the Scottish Government proceeded without listening to what people including Bill Alexander and opposition parties said about that issue. I have to say that the SNP Government's failure to listen and instead to insist that 16 to 18-year-olds will have a named person, is a ridiculous position to take. It is ludicrous that a young person can join the Army and still have a named person. We cannot logically say that 16 to 18-year-olds can have the vote but still need a named person.

The issue unfortunately detracts from the whole named person policy—even for those who support it in principle. Even now I would advise the minister to rethink that aspect of the legislation. I am sure that such a move would be welcomed and show that the Government and the minister are listening.

Professionals still have major concerns about the policy's implementation, resources and additional burdens of staff—concerns that I and others raised during the bill's passage. Our position on resources is the same as that of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. It said:

"NSPCC Scotland supports the intention behind the Named Person approach which, if ... properly resourced, could improve the likelihood of early intervention for children and young people; and thus improve their outcomes."

The key phrase there, of course is "properly resourced". That is clear to anyone; we must acknowledge that the named person policy will not work properly unless it is properly resourced.

We need to listen to people such as Theresa Fyffe, who is the director of the Royal College of Nursing in Scotland. She gave a warning earlier this year, and said:

"We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to recruiting more health visitors, but with the named person responsibility coming on top of recent changes to the workload of health visitors, many of our health visitor members have deep concerns that even with the planned

boost in numbers there just won't be enough hours in the day to fulfil this important role."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to draw to a close, please.

Neil Bibby: We need to listen to what the RCN, the EIS and other professionals are saying.

Nearly all the points that I have raised today, I also raised in a speech nearly two years ago during the Children and Young People Bill's passage. I hope the Government and minister will respond swiftly and positively to the concerns that have been raised.

16:23

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): Some may argue that, as the named persons policy is enshrined in statute, the train has left the station and is now clattering down the rails. However, it is a controversial measure, and it is the duty of this Parliament to monitor the progress of the train and, indeed, consider whether it should slow down, take a different route or pause in a siding.

That assessment requires constant questioning of the Government about progress. For example, it has come to light that the Scottish Government had abolished the expert programme board that had been advising it on GIRFEC. I appreciate that the national implementation support group remains, but there is a lack of transparency about what advice the Government has been receiving, because none of it has been published—although late yesterday afternoon, we had a flurry of Scottish Government activity, with the publication of final draft guidance. It is quite amazing what an Opposition debate can trigger.

We know that at the penultimate meeting of the programme board in May 2014 an assistant chief constable raised the issue of ensuring that high-risk children remained a focus when the legislation took effect. That is why an absence of transparency with regard to where we are is very troubling. The debate is therefore timely and has presented a useful opportunity both to remind Parliament of and allow Parliament to discuss the strong criticism that the policy faces from professionals. That criticism might be unwelcome to the Scottish Government, but nevertheless it needs to listen to it, because these are the people who are likely to be on the front line of delivery as the date of implementation edges closer.

The principle of GIRFEC has, of course, found support across the chamber, but the universality of the named person legislation has raised both philosophical and practical challenges. In that respect, I want to highlight concerns that have been articulated neither by me nor by my party, but independently by other groups.

The executive director of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, Eileen Prior, said in an interview with *Holyrood* magazine only last month:

"Named person, in my view, is a red herring which will undermine trust and cause issues between families, schools or other professionals, divert resources from those families most in need, add to professionals' workload and lead to more families being drawn into the system unnecessarily."

If that is so, there is a risk that children will be hesitant to access confidential services. That point has also been argued by the children's legal charity Clan Childlaw, which in May said that the policy

"creates a serious risk that children and young people will not access confidential services when they are in need of help."

Indeed, that undermining of trust in professionals might also affect families, who could become fearful that being open about the problems that they face or the support that they need will lead to that information being shared in a way that is prejudicial to them.

The next problem relates to the extensive costs, the practical consequences and the bureaucracy that is necessary in implementing the policy. Although I did not agree with everything that he said, Iain Gray made some hard-hitting points. The Scottish Government presumes that, for the majority of school-age children, the named person will be a teacher. However, teachers already face substantial workload pressures. The Association of Headteachers and Deputies Scotland warned in February that it was

"very concerned about the workload that this might generate"

and said the matter had to be addressed before commencement. That was echoed in the summer by the EIS, which argued:

"the default position should not be assumed that a school should always be expected to provide the named person irrespective of its capacity and resources."

Those are real concerns, given that we have information for the costs of GIRFEC for 2016-17 that shows that more than a third of those costs—or almost £10 million—will fall on local authorities that are already under budget pressures. In the same year, GIRFEC will cost the national health service more than £16 million, which leads me to quote the director of the Royal College of Nursing, who said earlier this year:

"many of our health visitor members have deep concerns that even with the planned boost in numbers there just won't be enough hours in the day"

to carry out named person duties.

Mark McDonald: Will the member give way?

Annabel Goldie: I am sorry, but I am very tight for time. I planned this as a six-minute speech and I have had my time cut back.

Finally, I want to turn to a very important point. The very nature of the named person legislation is that it floods the system with many children who do not need to be there. Ministers can deny that until the cows come home, but it is an incontrovertible arithmetic fact, and it places vulnerable, at-risk children in a difficult position. That was exactly the point that was made by Assistant Chief Constable Malcolm Graham at the penultimate meeting of the GIRFEC programme board in May 2014, when he said that there was an issue with ensuring that high-risk children remained a focus. If he did not think that that was an issue, why did he make that comment?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must draw to a close, please.

Annabel Goldie: There are concerns and we need more information. In order to address the growing opposition and the deep concerns of many families and professionals, the Scottish Government must provide answers and transparency; it is unacceptable to leave everyone in the dark. Will the Scottish Government, as an immediate priority, at least publish all the advice that it has received from the national implementation support group?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Gordon MacDonald, after which we will move to closing speeches.

16:29

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): The named person policy has been tested across Scotland in a number of local authority areas, including Edinburgh, Fife, Angus, South Lanarkshire and Highland. Highland Council published its GIRFEC implementation plan in June 2006, and between 2006 and 2008 the policy was rolled out across the Highland area and fully implemented by early 2010. As Children in Scotland pointed out last year,

“every child in the Highland area already has a Named Person.”

The education information sheet about the named person that was produced by Highland Council, NHS Highland, Northern Constabulary and others back in 2009 highlighted the five key questions that any person who works with children and who has concerns that they might need additional support will ask themselves:

1. What is getting in the way of this child's well-being?
2. Do I have all the information I need to help this child?
3. What can I do now to help this child?
4. What can my agency do to help this child?

5. What additional help, if any, may be needed from other agencies?”

Fife Council identified that, for each stage of a young person's life, the named person is either the hospital or community midwife, the health visitor, the primary headteacher or the secondary school guidance teacher. All of them are professionals who have had an interest in our children's wellbeing for decades. As Barnardo's Scotland says in its written submission, the named person is

“not a new person in a child's life, but merely a stronger role for an existing member of staff.”

Fife Council has also stated:

“The Named Person role formalises the activities universal agencies are undertaking routinely in their day-to-day work. ... Experience from the pathfinders and learning partners has shown that, in spite of anxieties, the role of the Named Person has not created additional work. Rather, the new processes have sharpened existing roles.”

A review by Highland Council in September 2013, three years after the policy was fully implemented in that local authority area, found that, for those children who need it, there is now a team in place around the child that works and plans together to ensure that the child's needs are addressed appropriately. Professionals, the child and the family work better together to achieve the best possible outcome for the child, resulting in children in the Highland area being better supported to achieve, attain, realise their potential and achieve positive destinations post school. Those positive findings by the Highland Council review have led many organisations that work with children to support the legislation.

In a joint briefing, the 11 leading children's charities highlighted the fact that

“The vast majority of children's charities and professional bodies working with children support the introduction of the named person”.

They also highlighted:

“The idea for the named person originally came from parents, who expressed a desire to see access to support simplified and a single point of contact through which to access that support. The Named Person represents that single point of contact and can effectively sign post ... to support and offer advice in times of difficulty.”

They added that

“the Named Person exists to direct vulnerable families to help and support, they will also have a co-ordinating role and will pull all the threads of information together for a child, about whom a worrying picture has begun to emerge. That's it. GIRFEC exists to ensure that there is always someone looking out for your child. This just standardises something that most parents would hope was happening already.”

Despite the support that the policy has received from children's charities, councils and professionals, campaigners against the named

person legislation raised a legal challenge and lost. An appeal was lodged and a panel of three judges reconsidered the case and refused the appeal, stating that the legislation does not breach human rights or European Union law. As the minister said, in their judgment, which was issued in September, they stated:

“The mere creation of a named person, available to assist a child or parent, no more confuses or diminishes the legal role, duties and responsibilities of parents in relation to their children than the provision of social services or education generally. It has no effect whatsoever on the legal, moral or social relationships within the family. The assertion to the contrary, without any supporting basis, has the appearance of hyperbole.”

When the judgement was announced, Highland Council, which tested the legislation that helped to frame the national guidance on the named person, stated:

“The Named Person Service ensures that families with any concerns about their child’s wellbeing, know where to take that concern, and that they get good advice and support. It is proven in practice, has been welcomed by parents, and I am pleased that the value of the Named Person role is reaffirmed by today’s decision.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:35

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): There is no doubt that the Scottish Government’s named person policy is controversial. That is largely due to the remarks that we have heard from Tory members today and the Tory tabloids, which take great pleasure in whipping up concerns and fear among parents about a policy that, in reality, is about protecting the rights of Scotland’s children and ensuring that we provide our most vulnerable families with the support that they need, when they need it.

Members across the chamber have given examples of the fears that have been expressed and promoted, none of which is grounded in reality. The idea that there will somehow be a spy in every home, checking what we let our kids watch on TV or what we give them for tea, is not only far fetched but, as Iain Gray said, “complete nonsense”.

Iain Gray’s comparison with many of the scare stories that we heard in the early days of the European Union, such as the myths that were circulated about how we would be forced to grow straight bananas and rename British sausages, is a great parallel for much of the debate that we have seen around the named person policy. The reality is, as many members have highlighted today, that the named person policy is not about undermining the role of parents or questioning their authority; neither is it about providing a social

worker for every child, as the *Daily Mail* would have us believe. It is about ensuring that information is properly shared, so that if and when issues appear in a child’s life, teachers or health visitors—who already have a duty of care towards our children and already have a role in our children’s life—are able to better support children and families before problems become severe.

As members across the chamber have said, in many respects, the policy just formalises an approach that is already tried, tested and working well in many local authorities, such as Fife, Edinburgh and Highland. It provides parents with a single point of contact and improves information sharing and multi-agency working. It allows problems to be identified and appropriate support to be provided at the right time, to stop families reaching crisis point.

Barnardo’s Scotland points out that it is

“essential to have a universal early warning system to identify the children who are most vulnerable”.

As Malcolm Chisholm and other members have pointed out, the child who is at most risk is often the one who has not been identified as vulnerable. That is why the named person provisions have the overwhelming support of not only Barnardo’s but almost every child welfare organisation, including Youthlink Scotland, Save the Children, Children 1st, Who Cares? Scotland and parenting across Scotland, which many members have highlighted.

Although Scottish Labour supports the policy in principle, we have concerns about its implementation. We reject the scaremongering that was encapsulated in Ruth Davidson’s newspaper article at the weekend and the political games that the Tories have embarked on with their motion, but we also believe that the Scottish Government has a lot more to do to genuinely get it right for every child and, in particular, to sell the named person policy to parents.

As John Pentland highlighted, we have said at each and every stage that the named person policy must work in practice and be properly resourced. Of real concern is the impact on Scotland’s health visitors, who are already stretched to the limit, as Neil Bibby said. Only yesterday, the Royal College of Nursing warned of staff shortages and highlighted its concern that many of our health visitors are due to retire over the next five to 10 years. When Murdo Fraser raised that issue, the minister’s response was welcome, but the reality is that health boards across Scotland are struggling to recruit and retain health visitors. Many have a large number of vacancies they simply cannot fill. With community nursing staff already working flat out, there is a real danger the extra demands of acting as named persons could increase stress, sickness and staff

turnover levels, unless the policy is properly resourced.

The Scottish Government's named person policy is well intentioned, and Scottish Labour supports it, with qualifications. However, it will only work if it is properly resourced, and right now, as Iain Gray said, we are seeing resources squeezed, not provided. Whether we are talking about our NHS, our councils, our police service or our teachers, our front-line services and staff are under growing pressure. Mark Griffin highlighted many of the challenges to those services and staff, including challenges of delivering and resourcing children's services plans.

We need to ensure that the available resources that are allocated to support the policy are weighted according to need and targeted so that they reach the most vulnerable children and families. That is the approach that Labour puts at the heart of our policies and our plans. We want to ensure that funding always follows the children who are most in need.

If the Scottish Government wants to make the named person policy work and if it wants to gain the support of parents across Scotland as well as that of the professionals on the ground who are expected to take on the additional roles, there is an urgent need to explain much better to parents what the policy is and is not about. I am pleased that members from across the chamber, including Labour members and SNP members such as Stewart Maxwell, have echoed that sentiment.

Scottish Labour wants the best possible protection and support for our children, but there is no denying that, in all our communities, parents have real concerns about the named person provisions. It is time for the Scottish Government to take those concerns on board, to do much more to communicate with parents, children and young people about what the policy means for them and to address the current shortfalls that prevent us from getting it right for every child.

It is no good getting the principles right if we cannot deliver, yet time and again we pass laws only to fail when it comes to ensuring that they are implemented effectively. Therefore, let us not just pass laws to get it right for our children; let us ensure that the laws are backed up with the necessary resources, support and practical guidance to ensure that they really make Scotland better. That is especially important right now, at a time when welfare reform means that more children and families are reaching crisis point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close.

Cara Hilton: We want every child in Scotland to have a fair start and we want our most vulnerable children to be protected, but fine aspirations are

no good unless they are matched with the resources and support that are required to transform lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Cara Hilton: The Government amendment fails to give any guarantee whatsoever on resources for the named person policy and therefore, unfortunately, Scottish Labour will not vote for it at decision time.

16:41

Aileen Campbell: We are always pleased to debate GIRFEC, as it gives us a chance to reaffirm principles that the Parliament has repeatedly endorsed, while debunking the persistent and at times malicious myths that continue to be recycled about the named person. I share the weariness that Malcolm Chisholm and Mike Russell expressed about the fact that, time and again, we have to counter the fears and smears that have again been peddled by the Tories in the debate. However, I am pleased that, aside from the Conservatives, so many members support the principle that the Parliament passed into law 19 months ago.

I want to pick up on some of the points that have been raised. Many members pointed to Lord Carloway's ruling, in which he said:

"The legislation does not involve the state taking over any functions currently carried out by parents in relation to their children."

That has been a constant in the design and development of the policy, which was tried and tested and proven to work through the Highland pathfinder, and which has been tested through the courts, twice.

Alex Johnstone: Before the minister completes her speech, will she deal with the question that was raised earlier about the definition of "wellbeing"? Would a parent who chooses to refuse a vaccination be able to be overruled by a named person?

Aileen Campbell: That is another example of the fears and smears that continually come from the Conservative benches. There is a refusal to acknowledge the clear guidance that we published yesterday or the clear evidence that exists on the approach. I am disappointed that the member continues to go down that incredibly negative and scaremongering route.

Let us remember that the named person entitlement was designed in response to what parents told us they needed. Malcolm Chisholm rightly pleaded for us to remember the origins of the policy, which is about providing a point of contact to avoid the painful telling and retelling of

stories to a crowd of services. It is not about parents being usurped, as Murdo Fraser said, and it has nothing to do with any of the hyperbolic language coming from the Tory benches. The policy is about building on relationships that already exist and working with families. I entirely agreed with Liam McArthur when he described the use of language as “intemperate”, “irresponsible” and deliberately spreading “undue alarm”. I also agree with Michael Russell, who described the approach of Conservative members as simply being “untrue spin”.

It is good that Ruth Davidson is in the chamber, despite having seemingly been quite gallus in the weekend’s press in her distasteful article, which wrongly and pretty irresponsibly cited the tragedy of Victoria Climbié. Other members have spoken about the learning that we can take from some of the tragedies that have unfortunately happened in our country. Sheriff Ruth Anderson, who conducted the fatal accident inquiry into the death of Declan Haïne, said:

“There was no system in place whereby one of the agencies responsible for Declan’s well-being was in overall charge and there was no system whereby one named individual was responsible for coordinating all available information.”

In the case of Victoria Climbié, Lord Laming said:

“Over the years, preventive work with families has been declining. As a result, the absence of a timely supportive intervention has allowed more family problems to deteriorate to the point of crisis. This trend has to be reversed. This can only be achieved if a higher priority is given to services working jointly in supporting families and helping them to overcome their difficulties.”

It is clear that the overwhelming message from child protection case reviews, in England as well as in Scotland, is that the failure of services to share relevant information has resulted in the full picture of a particular child’s vulnerability not being put together in time to allow professionals to take essential action.

As well as listening and responding to some of the points that have been made today, I want to talk about some of the voices that we have heard from outside the chamber—the voices of people who work every day with children and families, those who are vulnerable and those who are not, because theirs are the voices that should be raised in the debate. The Conservatives keep referring to the small number of voices that challenge the named person, but I will quote a handful of the others who are positive about the move.

Alistair Gaw, head of Social Work Scotland, recently wrote that

“there is the myth about this not being needed. Really? How often do we hear about children falling through the net: issues not picked up; early opportunities missed;

families struggling on? ... Children and families can get to crisis point before it is noticed that they need a bit of help. If we can prevent crisis by making one person responsible for ensuring people share information that will go a long way towards helping children and families early on, preventing sometimes devastating consequences.”

It is not just social work professionals either. John Butcher, the director of education and youth employment in North Ayrshire spoke on behalf of his colleagues yesterday when he said:

“The new law and guidance will improve the way services work to support children, young people and families and we welcome the flexible approach to the Named Person role and function that it offers.”

Moreover, parents’ groups have been saying the same thing as well, despite what the Conservatives would have us believe. Implementation of something as important and wide ranging as GIRFEC takes time and close co-operation with those who will experience the changes most. Speaking about the guidance on GIRFEC that was published yesterday, Fiona Nicholson, the co-chair of the National Parent Forum Scotland, said:

“We are pleased that the guidance has received inputs from a range of stakeholders including parents and NPFS, and recognise that the Scottish Government has taken account of the feedback received during the consultation period.”

I could go on about the different people who have responded positively to the named person provision in the act and about how it embeds early intervention and embeds the approach that will help children go on to fulfil their aspirations and hopes and to lead, as Stewart Maxwell noted within the rights agenda, a good and positive childhood. I could go on to quote a huge number of people who have been wanting us to take the measure forward in a positive way, and I have quoted all those individuals to correct the distorted view of the named person that keeps getting bandied about—that professionals do not want it, that parents do not welcome it and that those who work with our most vulnerable do not champion it—because that is simply not true.

Liz Smith: Will the minister give way?

Aileen Campbell: I am sorry.

Of course there are still challenges. As I said in my opening remarks, I will continue to work constructively and proactively with those who want to continue to work with us to take the implementation forward. We have invested £51 million for additional teachers, we have announced 500 additional health visitors to meet the needs of the act, we have supported training and we have published guidance. There is always a need to do more, and we will take on board some of the points that have been made in the debate and outside the chamber.

As the minister with the responsibility to do my best by our children and young people, I will always strain every sinew to do that. We have proof and evidence that the GIRFEC approach works. We have proof that it improves the co-ordination of services and we have proof that it avoids costlier and more traumatic services by embedding early intervention and prevention.

I will continue to be guided by our GIRFEC approach to looking to improve children's wellbeing. I most certainly will not be guided by a party that has shown its true colours today, party politicking over the wellbeing of our children while it systematically punishes them with its harsh welfare reforms. The Conservatives have done a volte-face on their support of GIRFEC for the most cynical of politically opportune reasons. My focus will be to continue to do the best by our children and to ensure that we work towards creating the country that most of us, at least, want our children to grow up in.

16:49

Gavin Brown (Lothian) (Con): This has been a worthwhile debate and I shall endeavour to be as measured and as objective as possible. We have had some pretty valuable contributions from across the chamber. Clearly I did not agree with some of them, but that does not mean that they were not valid or worthwhile, or that they did not cause one to reflect on one or two points.

We have not done a volte-face, as the minister suggests. The Scottish Conservative Party has been uncomfortable with the idea of a statutory, mandatory, universal named person service since day 1 of it being mentioned. We have opposed it from day 1; we have opposed it relentlessly all the way through the bill process; and we oppose it today, even after the bill has been passed.

Aileen Campbell: I am still trying to work out why, in 2009, in a debate about GIRFEC, Conservative Party members implored us to roll this out nationally.

Gavin Brown: I do not know whether the minister was in the chamber at the time, but I think that Mary Scanlon dealt with that point very well in an intervention. She said that she liked the idea of ending silos and the idea of combining services and she was impressed by the leadership of certain individuals within Highland Council but she did not say at any point—and has not said at any point—that she is in favour of the named person legislation.

Of course, in 2006, when the pathfinder project was set up, there was not a named person. That developed years later, so it is not something that the Conservatives have changed our view on at all

and it is not something that we are likely to change our view on any time soon.

It is the universal approach and the mandatory element, which Murdo Fraser talked about, that we have the biggest difficulty with. We do not believe that the policy is as popular as the Scottish Government and others would have us believe. We have only heard reference to one survey of parents, from the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, which suggested that 74 per cent of parents who were interviewed were against the policy. I have not heard about a counter-survey or counter-poll from the Scottish Government at any point during the passage of the legislation or at any point today. It would be interesting to hear whether the Government has plans to conduct a full poll or survey of parents to back up the strong assertions that have been made over the course of the afternoon.

It is fair to say that most children's charities—or certainly most of those that I have heard from—favour the legislation. That is a perfectly fair point to make. However, aside from the children's charities, the position is very mixed. We heard quotations this afternoon of concerns from the police and we heard quotations from the Government of support from the police, so we have a mixed response from the police. We heard strong quotations from both sides of the chamber in relation to social work but we heard from some social workers who were very concerned about the role. We have also heard from parents who are concerned about the role. Purely anecdotally, parents will say that they are in favour of it, "but of course it doesn't apply to me". They take a different view when they realise that it absolutely does apply to them—that it is mandatory and whether they like it, want it or need it, their child too will have a named person. We have heard from the EIS; we have heard from teachers on both sides of the divide.

The position is this: clearly there is not universal support for the policy; clearly there is a mixed response, including some pretty damning quotations from both the Finance Committee and the Education and Culture Committee. That has to be a concern in going forward with a universal policy when those who are expected to implement it and those to whom it applies are not in favour of it and have deep concerns about it.

Mark McDonald: I am sure that the continued propagation of misleading hyperbole by the Tories has absolutely nothing to do with public perceptions around the named person.

Can Gavin Brown answer just one question? We have heard from Conservative members about the fact that it is the universal element of the role that they have difficulty with, yet, on the other hand, we have heard from Conservative members

who believe that the very role of named person in some way usurps the role of parents. Are the Conservatives opposed to the named person role in principle, regardless, or is it simply the universal application that they are opposed to? We seem to have been getting arguments from both sides.

Gavin Brown: I am not sure that we have; and to accuse me of hyperbole is a little unfair, given what I think that I have said over the course of the past four minutes. I will check the record to see whether anything that I have said could be classed as hyperbole.

We have great concerns about the universality element and we have great concerns about the principle. However, there is a myth that somehow we are saying that the role completely replaces parental control. I do not think that that is true and I do not think that we have said that at all today. However, I think that in some circumstances the role has the potential to undermine the relationship between parent and child. I will give one example. The Scottish Government said in its press release yesterday:

“Children and young people will have access to a Named Person service—a single point of contact for help, support and advice for families and those working with children if they need it”.

That makes it sound as though the service is not mandatory in any way—as though it is only there for those who need it and want it, which we know is not true.

Although the Scottish Government has stated today that a parent does not have to listen to what the named person says, and if a parent chooses not to engage, they do not have to do so, we know from the guidance that if a parent, on a point of principle, chooses not to engage with the named person or the process, a negative inference about that parent can be drawn. That is not acceptable. If parents do not want to engage for perfectly valid reasons, the idea that the named person, and the authorities more widely, can draw a negative inference about them is not fair or acceptable.

We have objections in principle, as Liz Smith outlined strongly and as we have outlined throughout the debate. We have equally strong objectives on the pragmatism of the policy. We have heard from previous Labour and Lib Dem speakers that they share some of those concerns, although we have heard less of that today. We know that it is going to be difficult for the NHS and local authorities more widely over the course of the next few years. The reality is that we cannot spend the money twice, and any money that we spend on named persons for children who do not need or want them is money that, by definition, we cannot spend on children who desperately need the support and help. Let us not pretend that creating a giant bureaucracy does not cost money.

Let us look at the financial memorandum and I will give an example. In year 1, the Scottish Government estimate for local authority admin costs is £2 million. That is £2 million being spent on admin by local authorities that, by definition, cannot be spent on teachers or anybody else to help those who actually need it. That £2 million breaks down into 100,000 hours of administration. The bureaucracy is estimated to create 100,000 hours of administration in year 1 of it being set up. That is our point about the diversion of resources.

I will not mention the Labour MSP who spoke in an earlier debate in case I harm their political career, but they said something quite prescient the last time that we debated this. They said:

“time that is spent filling in forms for children who will never need intervention is time that would be better spent on children who are in desperate need of help”—

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: I am hardly going to give way in the middle of a quote.

“Resources that are diverted to children who are loved, nurtured and thriving are resources that are not spent on the neglected and the vulnerable.”—[*Official Report*, 25 September 2013; c 22917.]

I pointed out the £2 million as just one item in that financial memorandum that shows that some money, whether it be millions or tens of millions, could be diverted away from those who need it most and spent on those who neither need nor want the provision.

Another point that has come up a number of times during the debate is the resourcing of the policy as a whole. This is where I have to say that, while it was pushing the bill through, the Scottish Government was living in fantasyland.

Michael Russell: Will the member give way?

Gavin Brown: As it is Mike Russell, who is the former minister, I will give way.

Michael Russell: I take the member back to what he said about 100,000 hours. By my reckoning, that equates to 40 hours per school in Scotland, which is less than an hour a week in each school for the wellbeing and support of children. That does not seem a lot to me.

Gavin Brown: If we are spending 100,000 hours and several million pounds on creating a bureaucracy, my simple view is that it would all be better spent on those who need or want it. Perhaps Mr Russell and I will just have to disagree on that.

I see that time is tight, so I will come to the point that I was trying to make. The Scottish Government has said that implementation of the policy will cost local authorities £8 million in year 1. On the face of it, that does not sound like a huge

amount of money for the help that would be required. Fair enough. However, the Scottish Government's view is that, in year 2, the cost would be nil. The Government thinks that putting in place a policy for one year will mean that suddenly, in the next year, there will be no costs and no extra resources whatsoever required thereafter. That is absurd. Anybody who knows anything about preventative spend knows that it takes time. It can take five years, ten years or even a generation to implement change and to get outcomes and savings. The idea that it can be done on a shoestring budget in a single year is ridiculous. For that reason, along with our reasons of principle and pragmatism, we are very much against the named person policy and will continue to be against it.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-15021, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Tuesday 8 December 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 9 December 2015

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Finance, Constitution and Economy

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 10 December 2015

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Ministerial Statement: Update on
Common Agricultural Policy Payments

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Inquiries into Fatal
Accidents and Sudden Deaths etc.
(Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 15 December 2015

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Wednesday 16 December 2015	
1.15 pm	Members' Business
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions Fair Work, Skills and Training; Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
6.00 pm	Decision Time
Thursday 17 December 2015	
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
12.30 pm	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Stage 3 Proceedings: Smoking Prohibition (Children in Motor Vehicles) (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 3 Proceedings: Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament (Amendment) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
4.30 pm	Decision Time—[<i>Joe FitzPatrick.</i>]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-15022, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a timetable for the Scottish Elections (Dates) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Scottish Elections (Dates) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 8 January 2016.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to the debate on named persons, if the amendment in the name of Aileen Campbell is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Iain Gray falls.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-14999.2, in the name of Aileen Campbell, which seeks to amend motion S4M-14999, in the name of Liz Smith, on named persons, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (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)
Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (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) (Ind)
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
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)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)

McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (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)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 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)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 14, Abstentions 28.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Iain Gray falls.

The next question is, that motion S4M-14999, in the name of Liz Smith, on named persons, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (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)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

Scott, Tavish (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (Ind)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (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)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Abstentions

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 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)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 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)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 14, Abstentions 28.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the continuing cross-Parliament support that enabled the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 to be passed, which included putting Scotland's national approach to improving children's wellbeing, Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), on a statutory footing; acknowledges that the named person service is an important component of this approach, developed in response to parental demand during the piloting of GIRFEC in Highland to provide a single point of contact for all children and families to go to should they

need support and advice; notes that the legal challenge to these provisions has now been rejected by the Scottish courts twice; welcomes the powerful collective effort by the public sector, third sector and parent/family organisations to make the duties drive improvements in the lives of children and young people, and calls on all members to support implementation of all the GIRFEC provisions of the Act as part of a shared ambition to ensure that all children in Scotland get the best start in life.

City Building and Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-14715, in the name of Bob Doris, on commending the employees of City Building and Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I call James Dornan to open the debate on behalf of Bob Doris.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the contribution to Glasgow's finances generated by the 2,200 employees of City Building LLP and Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries (RSBi), who have returned a profit to Glasgow City Council of around £5 million in each financial year, with an over £50 million net gain to Glasgow's finances since 2007; acknowledges the achievements of the workforces and the representatives of the unions, the JTUC and Unite, over the years, supporting around 2,000 people through City Building LLP's supply chain and currently supporting the training of around 400 apprentices across all construction trades, making the company the largest employer of apprentices in Scotland; believes that the scale and flexibility of its multidisciplinary workforce and broad experience allows it to deliver complex projects, winning over £1 billion of contracts in open competition and winning the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise: Sustainable Development; highlights the importance of RSBi in providing opportunities for disabled people, most recently providing an extensive range of furniture for the World Gymnastics Championships at the Hydro, both for the competition and the back-office areas, all constructed at City Building LLP's RSBi factories in Springburn and Queenslie, helping make RSBi, in partnership with City Building LLP, what it considers one of the country's leading examples of social enterprise, combining commercial success with socially responsible practices, and wishes everyone employed at City Building LLP and RSBi every success in the future.

17:05

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):

Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer. As you rightly said, the motion is in the name of Bob Doris, but he is unfortunately unable to be here due to a family bereavement. I am sure that the thoughts of all of us are with him and his family.

Recently, along with my colleagues Bill Kidd and Bob Doris, I had the pleasure of meeting a joint trade union group to discuss their concerns about the future of City Building and RSBi. I welcome to the gallery the trade union officials whom we met, and others including Ronnie Regan, Frank Wallace from the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians, Dave King from Unite, James Bradley from Unison, and Steven McGurk and Robert Mooney from Community. I thank them for their attendance.

Before I turn to their considerable concerns, which we discussed that day, I want to draw

members' attention to the success that the workforce has created since RSBi was brought under the aegis of City Building. Prior to 2007, RSBi was the responsibility of Glasgow City Council's social work department. Many of us will remember Royal Strathclyde Blindcraft Industries as an organisation that was dedicated to making a difference in the community, with its roots as a supported facility for visually impaired people—an ethos that continues to this day.

Even with a motivated and dedicated workforce, RSBi was making a loss of £2 million on a £4 million turnover. That was due mainly to four factors: there was no clear business plan, there was no tangible business strategy, there was a nebulous marketing strategy that was totally unconnected to the incoherent sales plan, and products were being made that ultimately gathered dust due to low sales. The only outcome was an expanding inventory that was going unsold.

Let us compare that with the current position. RSBi contributes £5 million a year to the city coffers. It is included in the Scottish Government framework for supported businesses. The business combines commercial success with socially inclusive policies—50 per cent of the 260 employees have disabilities. Other employees come from closed former Remploi sites and others have armed forces backgrounds—six positions are ring fenced for returning disabled ex-servicemen and women. With 400 apprentices, it is the largest employer of apprentices in Scotland.

I want to draw attention to a newspaper article about a young lady. One of the things that RSBi does in relation to apprenticeships is that, out of the 2200 employees, 98 are female apprentices. In March this year, an article in the *Evening Times* discussed that, and mentioned Tracey Jefferson from Battlefield who is studying for a higher national certificate in construction management. Tracey is a constituent of mine, and I want to congratulate her and wish her well for her future with the company.

The Scottish Government also recognises RSBi as one of Scotland's most successful factories when it is measured against three criteria: turnover, employment and the diversity of the work that it undertakes. RSBi has a range of contracts from across the United Kingdom, including the University of Aberdeen and the University of Cambridge, a number of local authorities and housing departments, and it is providing clients with the largest range of products in the organisation's history.

Those of us who visited RSBi at Springburn were struck by the calibre and professionalism of the workforce. The business adheres to a socially responsible model while being aware of the need for clear commercial objectives. Everyone we

spoke to had the same aims; they all want to grow the business to continue to provide sustainable employment for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

The socially inclusive ethos manifests itself through their social enterprise model, which not only provides employment for people with disabilities, but provides vocational training to schools. It offers training in furniture manufacturing to 35 school pupils from additional support for learning schools every week during term time, and it ring fences job opportunities. It is not only schools that RSBI engages with; it also collaborates with the myriad community organisations across the city that give opportunities to disabled adults.

It is not unreasonable to ask why the workforce is having to endure so much anxiety when we look at the commercial and social success they have made of RSBI. There has been talk of a possible joint venture between City Building and RSBI and Glasgow Housing Association. That proposal brings both opportunities and concerns. The leadership of Glasgow City Council, which plays a pivotal role in the situation, is yet to be forthcoming with answers to a number of questions that RSBI and City Building employees have. They include unanswered questions about the suggestion that a third of the City Building workforce, which is 600 to 900 people, will transfer to the repairs and maintenance team of GHA's parent organisation, the Wheatley Group, and about major concerns about Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 obligations because there has been no clarification of how or by whom the process will be managed.

There is also a fear that there could be a significant impact on the skills profile of the remaining staff, which would potentially reduce City Building's ability to maintain a diverse range of profitable services and possibly compromise the organisation's future resilience. The flexibility of the workforce could be undermined, which could lead to a detrimental impact on training and provision of the high-quality apprenticeships programme that is operating with a guaranteed 12-month-minimum job on qualifying.

There are unanswered questions regarding the potential for competition between City Building and GHA for future repair and maintenance contracts with housing associations, and there are risks to City Building's cash flow. Repair and maintenance contracts are lucrative and generally have quick turnaround times.

There are also a number of unanswered questions about City Building's supply chain. Would there be job losses throughout the supply chain and therefore a loss of money? What impact

would that have on apprenticeships and other training programmes?

City Building has contributed £50 million to the city since 2006, yet it has been suggested that it is unprofitable and that it operates at a loss. What of the remainder of City Building? Will it all be transferred? Should it be sold?

When the Labour administration in Glasgow established arm's-length external organisations, the SNP group in Glasgow City Council was opposed to it from the start. I was there and nobody was more vocal than me, but the one ALEO that I thought had a case to be made for it was City Building, and I think that time has proved me right.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Well done, Glasgow.

James Dornan: You have had your chance, Johann.

If the administration eventually goes ahead with the decision, it could be a short-sighted one, given the financial contribution that City Building makes to Glasgow, and it would be a huge slap in the face to the dedicated workforce and the trade unions.

Let me be clear that I am not attacking GHA or the Labour council, but I make an appeal to them: the workforce deserves answers that address their concerns. The staff and the union officials whom we met made it clear that they are willing to discuss their—or any—proposals and to work their way through them. We need to make any transition an easy process for the staff, and allow the organisation time to recalibrate its business plan. That will ensure that the social and ethical ethos that it practises can continue and it can provide more jobs and opportunities for vulnerable people. The organisation simply has a genuine concern for its staff and the citizens of Glasgow. Will the Labour council please open up a constructive discussion with City Building and RSBI and facilitate discussions between GHA and City Building?

I commend the staff and the unions for their professionalism, their civic pride and their socially responsible ethos. Their achievements and their beliefs deserve our whole-hearted congratulations, our support for the future and the support of Glasgow City Council.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We turn to the open debate. I ask for speeches of four minutes, please.

17:12

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (Lab): I offer my condolences to Bob Doris at this sad time. He and his family are in our thoughts and prayers.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this important debate and I congratulate Bob Doris on securing parliamentary time so that members can acknowledge the tremendous contribution that the employees of City Building and RSBI make to Glasgow. I also congratulate James Dornan on stepping in for him this evening.

I, too, welcome the joint trade union committee members to the gallery and thank them for the helpful briefing that they provided to members.

I am especially pleased to be discussing the issue tonight because the organisation's headquarters is located in my Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituency. City Building, which was set up in 2006 as a wholly owned subsidiary of Glasgow City Council, employs about 2,250 workers across the city. That does not include the 260 staff who are employed at RSBI, half of whom have disabilities. The organisation also supports staff who are employed through the construction apprenticeship programme, which provides 80 apprenticeship places in each year for a four-year course, working in partnership with colleges across the city to ensure that the apprentices receive the best and most up-to-date training.

City Building's record is that of a successful and dynamic organisation that has, since its establishment in 2006, won more than £1 billion-worth of contracts in open competition against stiff opposition from rival firms.

That is a record of which we should all be justifiably proud—as the constituency MSP, I am. The Commonwealth games village, new houses at Maryhill Locks and the work that it has done as part of the council's 4Rs for Glasgow project refurbishing the city's primary school estate are just part of the success story that is City Building. Of course, that success has been built on the commitment, dedication and energy of a workforce that is ready to meet the challenges that are thrown up by an increasingly problematic economic landscape.

As we have heard, RSBI is a particularly important component of that model organisation that provides a supportive manufacturing facility and makes a wide range of products including office furniture, beds, kitchens and windows. It is one of the UK's leading examples of successful social enterprise, and skilfully combines commercial success with socially responsible practices. The importance of RSBI was highlighted by the previous UK coalition Government's

vindictive, unreasonable and—quite frankly—heartless closure of the Remploy factory, which was RSBI's next-door neighbour, ironically.

I am confident that City Building and RSBI will continue to prosper, despite the difficult economic situation that Glasgow City Council faces. However, the company does not stand still: across the business, reviews of processes to identify alternative workstreams, materials, products and vehicles continue. That approach is essential to the future success of the organisation. It is that dynamism that gives great hope for the continued progress of a company that is so vital to the future of Glasgow and thousands of Glaswegians.

Recently, the executive director of City Building, Dr Graham Paterson, stated in a letter to workers that he wants to assure them that the council remains committed not only to the long-term future of City Building but to working with the management and board to safeguard jobs, employees' terms and conditions, and the best interests of the city more generally, which is a position that I certainly support.

I understand that the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities, Keith Brown, will visit City Building tomorrow. I am sorry that I will not be able to be there to greet him, because I will be here in Parliament. However, I sincerely hope that he will take with him information about ways in which the Scottish Government can utilise the skills and talents that City Building's staff undoubtedly have, and that he will discuss with the management and the workers ways in which City Building can be assisted to bid for Scottish Government contracts and not just those that are generated by Glasgow City Council and GHA. That would be a very helpful contribution to the successful future of City Building, which is something that I am sure we all want.

17:17

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I send my condolences and best wishes to Bob Doris. He is a good friend, and I am sure that everyone wishes him and his family well at this difficult time. I join both James and Patricia in welcoming the joint trade union committee members to the public gallery tonight.

When City Building was first mooted as an arm's-length external organisation, I was against the move; at the time, I saw it as a weakening of the democratic accountability of council services and a potential danger to the employment rights of the workforce. Well, I was wrong to worry. City Building, working in close partnership with RSBI, has been an unalloyed success story that I am very grateful has come about.

City Building is an employer with around 400 apprentices, 98 of whom are female; it is firmly committed to equality for disabled people and is open and encouraging to armed forces veterans. It contributes £5 million each financial year to the coffers of Glasgow City Council—that is very welcome at a difficult financial time—with a £50 million net gain since 2007.

If City Building had gone on “Dragon’s Den”, Duncan Bannatyne and Deborah Meaden would have been battling with each other to go into partnership with the management and workforce. City Building is an example of what the new Scotland should be: it has a highly skilled workforce, with equality to the fore, and is financially successful.

Speaking of equalities, in common with all my MSP colleagues, I have been privileged to attend hundreds of disability events over the years. Unfortunately, in doing so, I have met many disabled people who have been desperate for real job satisfaction and a living wage, but who instead have found themselves with enough certificates of competence to paper their living rooms.

At RSBI, the jobs are real and the skill levels are top class. It would be a disaster to threaten the future of those workers, who are of all ages, by breaking up their working links with their colleagues in City Building. That would assuredly happen if 900 of the 2,200 jobs were to be hived off to GHA, no matter its qualities, or to any other possible employer. We have all heard about selling off the family silver. It is crass and stupid to even think of doing that, but that is exactly what Glasgow City Council would be doing if it continued down that path. I therefore urge it to think again and to enter into constructive talks with the employee representatives at City Building and RSBI. I look to them to address the challenges of the future together.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members to use full names, please, because that assists the *Official Report* and those who are watching proceedings.

17:21

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Bob Doris on securing the debate and join other members in sending condolences to him and his family at this time.

While I was conducting research for the debate, I realised that the future of City Building and RSBI was something of a hot potato. I think that we have already heard that it is becoming a political football between Labour and the Scottish National Party in the city of Glasgow. I do not represent Glasgow and I have no detailed knowledge of those matters, so I would rather concentrate on

some of the positives around social enterprises and improving employability, particularly for those with disabilities, on which City Building and RSBI have a track record.

I think that we can all agree that returning profits while providing a positive environment for employees should be the core of any successful business. In Parliament, we rightfully praise co-operatives and social enterprises for their commitment to giving something back. City Building and RSBI are good examples of businesses that have created a model that upholds core social enterprise values while returning benefits to Glasgow City Council. As we have heard, they have delivered high-quality work on high-profile contracts in recent years. In addition to RSBI’s work in providing furniture for the recently held world gymnastics championships, which the motion mentions, it produced goods for the Commonwealth games, and City Building helped to renovate the games headquarters at the Tontine building. Their role in supporting the most successful games on record cannot be overstated.

One of the core elements of the RSBI model is a commitment to providing meaningful employment for disabled people. At present, around 50 per cent of RSBI employees are registered disabled. We know that being in employment has tremendous restorative qualities. Studies have shown that productive work fosters feelings of pride and self-worth. The current UK Government has been determined to return as many long-term unemployed people as possible back to work. Last year, 140,000 disabled people found a route into employment, and many used the Government’s £108 million access to work scheme.

Despite that progress, there is a lot of work still to be done. Only around half of all disabled people are in work compared with 80 per cent of non-disabled people.

Patricia Ferguson: I hear what the member has to say about disabled people not being able to access employment, but I can tell him that disabled people in my constituency have found that much harder since the Remploy building on the same industrial estate that RSBI is on was closed down by his Government. I very much regret that. Does he?

Murdo Fraser: The member will be aware that we have debated those issues in the chamber on many occasions. She will also be aware of the estates review and the recommendations that were made in that report about the type of employment that Remploy provided. We could spend the rest of the evening going over those issues again, and I know that we will have a different view on them. I would rather concentrate on the positives and talk about the good work that

is being done to give disabled people the opportunity to make a contribution to society.

I briefly mention two enterprises in the region that I represent. In Dundee, Dovetail Enterprises recently won the social impact prize at the *Courier* business awards for its social impact in Tayside. In Dalgety Bay, the 45 employees of Matrix Fife, half of whom are registered disabled, produce furniture and soft furnishings.

There are good supported businesses working well across the country, just as City Building and RSBI are leading the way in Glasgow by showing that large businesses can support their employees and deliver benefits to the taxpayer.

17:25

Paul Martin (Glasgow Provan) (Lab): As other members have done, I convey my sincere condolences to Bob Doris and his family during this difficult period.

I also welcome members of the JTUC to the chamber. For Murdo Fraser, who might not be well informed on the issue, I clarify that we are not treating the issue as a political football. Indeed, it is to the credit of members of the JTUC that the issue has not been used as a political football. Such an approach would not benefit the employees in any way.

I want to take a constructive approach, as many other speakers have done, and amplify a number of the points in Bob Doris's motion. First, it is to the credit of everyone at City Building that the company has provided nearly £50 million in profits over the 10 years since its inception, as a result of a partnership between the workforce, the management and elected members of Glasgow City Council.

I am well aware of the history of City Building. I was first elected as a councillor in Glasgow City Council on 16 December 1993—the anniversary is coming shortly; I would like to say that I remember that day well, but it happened so long ago—and the first meeting that I attended was with the direct works department, to hear a presentation on the department's apprenticeship programme.

The programme was effective, because there was a recognition that the council must target deprived areas, to ensure that everyone in Glasgow and beyond had an opportunity to access an apprenticeship in the city. The council should be commended for the excellent work that it has done through the apprenticeship programme over many years. The programme and the workforce have adapted to ensure that apprenticeships can be taken forward.

City Building is an example to employers, particularly in the construction industry, who do not

employ as many apprentices as they should or assume the social responsibility that they should. I commend it for the approach that it has taken.

The motion reminds us that the workforce and management have adapted to the challenges that they face. City Building's success in tendering should be recognised; it has won £1 billion of contracts in open competition. It should be recognised that such an achievement requires not just significant resources but political support, which is why I am delighted that the Labour-led authority in Glasgow has encouraged City Building to add to its success.

Other authorities have tried to do likewise but have been unsuccessful. The success of the business model in Glasgow City Council is a tribute to the elected representatives who made City Building a priority.

As Patricia Ferguson said, City Building has a great future ahead of it. Of course it faces challenges in the tendering process for the GHA repairs contract but, from my experience as an elected representative for nearly 22 years, I have no doubt that the workforce, the elected representatives in Glasgow and the leadership at GHA will ensure that everything possible is done to protect the workforce and their conditions and to move forward with a contract that sustains City Building for many years to come.

17:29

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I, too, offer my condolences and sympathy to Bob Doris and his family at this sad time. I also congratulate him on securing the debate. The motion is comprehensive—it covers many of the things that have been spoken about and explains in great detail the excellent work that City Building carries out. I also welcome the trade union officials in the gallery.

Like my colleagues, I have met members of the joint trade union committee. When I spoke to them, I was very impressed by their commitment and professionalism. I cannot reiterate enough how impressed I was by City Building's business plan, its commitment to its workforce and what it is doing at the moment. It would be a travesty and rather sad if it were to be split up. I also reiterate what Paul Martin said—the issue is not being used as a political football; it is about keeping together and securing the future of City Building and Blindcraft. If they could get contracts from the Scottish Government or Glasgow City Council, I would be supportive of that.

I mentioned how impressed I was. I just want to talk about some of the issues that I noticed when I looked through the papers and spoke to the group. James Dornan and others have mentioned the

work that City Building has done on apprenticeships. I like the work that it has done in encouraging women to go into construction and following through on that. An issue in the back of our minds is the fact that, although we can encourage women to go into construction apprenticeships, the drop-out rates can be high. I was impressed by what City Building was doing on that.

City Building is one of the great examples of social enterprise, as Murdo Fraser said. I think that it is fantastic to have social enterprise on such a scale. We should be very proud of the fact that City Building is a great example of social enterprise. It has not been mentioned that, this year, City Building won a European award for excellence, which is not something that many firms—regardless of whether they are social enterprises—win.

I was also impressed by City Building's commitment to local charities. I will give an example of that. It committed £10,000 to the Prince and Princess of Wales hospice, which is a local charity. It also provided a number of apprentices to help decorate a shop, which I think was in Govan shopping centre. The £10,000 was for the brick-by-brick appeal, and the apprentices did up and painted the shop to get it ready for its launch as the new hospice shop. That is an example of putting something back.

I also want to mention Blindcraft, which I have visited on a number of occasions. I have been to its workshops and seen at first hand the excellent products that it produces. I have also visited the area in the Broomielaw where City Building built some houses that were like kit houses. If I could have bought one and taken it back to where I was, I would have done, because they were fantastic. The workmanship, which was by Blindcraft, was wonderful. Everything was renewable. Fuel poverty-wise, it was fantastic. Everything was very secure. The whole thing was amazing, and I would like to think that it will continue along those lines.

As others have said, the issue is not being used as a political football. We are talking about a great social enterprise that is very successful in providing apprenticeships and encouraging people. It also works locally, and I would like us to make sure that, whatever happens, it can stay together.

17:34

The Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): I was very sorry to hear of Bob Doris's loss of his mother, and my thoughts are with him and his family. I congratulate James Dornan on stepping into the breach to raise this

important topic, and I am grateful to all the members who have contributed to the debate.

City Building will celebrate its 10th birthday in the new year and, as other members have said, it is appropriate for me as the minister responsible for supported businesses to recognise the enormous contribution that the business has brought to the city and, indeed, to the country, in training apprentices, supporting people through the supply chain and delivering revenue to the council over the period.

City Building, with more than 300 apprentices in training, is one of the top five modern apprenticeship employers and the largest in the construction industry. Those are significant figures and an enormous contribution to helping young people. As such, City Building has helped the Scottish Government to deliver more than 101,000 new opportunities and to exceed our target for modern apprenticeship starts in each and every year of this parliamentary session. It is easy for politicians to claim the credit for such work, but it is the people who are running businesses such as City Building who should get the credit, because they are delivering the results, not me. That is a terrific performance.

As Sandra White said, City Building is also helping in our efforts to encourage more women to take up careers in construction. That is long overdue. I am starting to see more females taking on leadership roles in construction. That is an area where City Building is, again, taking a lead.

Reference has been made to reports of difficulties that the business is facing. This evening, I have read some of the press reports about that. I do not propose to go into the matter, other than to say that I trust that it and the council will be able to overcome the difficulties.

The employment rate for people with a disability is around half that of the rest of the population—it is about 43 per cent compared with 81 per cent. Therefore, those with a disability have only a 50 per cent chance of being in work compared with someone without a disability. I am sure we would all agree that that is a shocking statistic and one that cannot continue. However, that position can only not continue if we collectively do something about it. Therefore, I am a supporter of Scotland's supported businesses. Those are, under the current definition, businesses where at least 50 per cent of their employees have a disability. They provide an important part of the mix of support, which is crucial. The RSBI provides a vivid example of just how well that can be done.

Keith Brown's visit to RSBI tomorrow was mentioned. It is celebrating its 30th birthday, and I wish them every success for the next 30 years. RSBI employs 260 people, 50 per cent of whom

have a disability and, with a turnover of £25 million, RSBI is an exemplar of a social enterprise that combines socially responsible practices with commercial success.

Johann Lamont: I am sure that the minister will agree that having supported businesses is about giving people with disabilities a level playing field on which to operate and to get an opportunity for work. A key part of that is the opportunity to get contracts. Will the minister look again at the European Union directive that allows member states to reserve contracts? At one point, Jim Mather, who was the minister's predecessor, agreed that every Government department should explore whether it could reserve one contract. If not now, would the minister be willing to update us later on what would be a critical part of ensuring on-going work for supported businesses?

Fergus Ewing: I support that approach, and I am substantially involved in trying to promote it and to use what is currently termed the article 19 mechanism. We have debated the specific issue in the past. We have a record of seeing public procurement using article 19 or, in some cases, ensuring that work goes to supported businesses simply through normal contractual processes without formally invoking article 19. In a sense it does not matter what contract type it is, as long as the outcomes are there. I will come back to that matter if I may. I entirely support Johann Lamont's sentiments.

Supported businesses play a hugely valuable role. For some people with a disability, they are stepping stones into mainstream employment. In other words, they are not a cul de sac. For many they are not the end but the start, a way in and an opportunity to get into work, upskill and then move on into other opportunities. It is important to make that point.

City Building, which was established in 2006 from the building services department of Glasgow City Council, is currently training more than 300 apprentices. As we have heard from many speakers, it makes an enormous contribution to the economy.

I also had the pleasure of visiting RSBI in October 2013 and April 2014; indeed, I have visited a great many supported businesses. My second visit to RSBI was in support of the award of Commonwealth games-related contracts to supported businesses. The games organising committee awarded around £1 million of such contracts to Scottish supported businesses, and RSBI received around two thirds of that for contracts to fit out the athletes village. As members have pointed out, it has recently won contracts for a range of furniture for the world gymnastics championships at the Hydro, and it has found a new market in student

accommodation, with wins at Aberdeen, Edinburgh Napier and Strathclyde universities as well as at Cambridge, as James Dornan mentioned. In addition, City Building's house-building programme, supported by RSBI manufacturing via timber kits, kitchens, windows and doors, has been undertaken for many housing associations.

I am also proud to chair the supported business advisory group, known by the rather inelegant abbreviation SBAG, which focuses on how we support our supported businesses to become more sustainable. Lesley Quinn of RSBI is a member of the group; a true force of nature, she is a terrific character and member of the group and she provides advice that is invaluable to our work in this field. The same is true of Robert Mooney of the Community trade union, who is trade union convener at RSBI. I do not think that I see him in the public gallery—I would have seen his dug. I gather that he had quite a nasty accident not so long ago. I hope that he is recovering and send him all our wishes. Both Lesley and Robert are invaluable members of the group and provide us with a huge amount of experience and valuable advice.

I guess that I am going on a little bit, but I would like to say that across the chamber we will all want to see what more we can do for supported businesses in Scotland, both through public procurement and by using our influence to persuade private sector companies to do even more. I know that companies such as Standard Life, the Royal Bank of Scotland and Johnson & Johnson are doing really great and exciting things that might be the subject of debate on another occasion.

Supported businesses will be very keen to know what is going to happen to the money that they currently receive from work choice when those responsibilities are devolved in 2017. That is an extremely important matter and we are obviously determined to ensure that supported businesses can continue. I hope that we can come back to the matter as quickly as possible once the finance secretary has had the opportunity to make his finance statement following George Osborne's statement last week.

I am sure that we all agree that disabled people should wherever possible be helped to enter sustained and fulfilling work. RSBI fills such a role and City Building provides another great example with regard to offering employment and training opportunities. I thank all members for taking part in the debate and commend City Building and RSBI for what they are doing for their employees, for people with a disability, for young people, for women and for Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes Bob Doris's debate on commending the employees of City Building and RSBI.

Meeting closed at 17:43.

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