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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 6 January 2016

Session 4

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 6 January 2016

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

Portfolio Question Time

Justice and the Law Officers

Police Call Handling

1. Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on police call handing. (S4O-05204)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland published its final report on call handling on 10 November. I have been assured by Police Scotland that a detailed action plan is currently being developed and will be presented to the Scottish Police Authority audit and risk committee for scrutiny later this month.

Significant steps are being taken to provide further assurance before any decision is made to proceed with the remaining phases of the change programme in Aberdeen, Inverness and Dundee. An independent expert review will be commissioned by the SPA before decisions are made about proceeding with the remaining phases of the change programme. Police Scotland will establish a reference group of senior independent change and call-handling professionals, who will provide on-going oversight and advice as the restructure is progressed. In addition, later this month, HMICS will begin a programme of unannounced visits to call centres until the programme is completed, and its findings will be reported back to Police Scotland, the SPA and the Scottish Government.

Bruce Crawford: I understand that Police Scotland was allocated an additional £1.4 million by the Scottish Government to enable it to better handle the challenges that it faced over call handling. Can the Cabinet Secretary please let us know what impact that additional funding was able to secure and what benefit it brought to police call-handling operations and procedures?

Michael Matheson: At the time of my statement to the Parliament on the interim report from HMICS on call handling, I made £1.4 million immediately available to Police Scotland, which has helped to support and accelerate the recruitment of staff to improve resilience within the call-handling system. Specifically, in the north, Police Scotland has recruited a further 16 staff between the centres in Aberdeen and Inverness

on a temporary basis. In Dundee, a total of 12 successful candidates have been recruited permanently, with 10 starting next month, and an additional 38 staff are being recruited at the Bilston Glen and Govan service centres, where the numbers now stand at 383. The additional funds have supported Police Scotland to enhance information technology support at its call-handling centres in order to deal with any IT issues that may arise during the course of activity.

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): I welcome parts of the cabinet secretary's answer, and I will be interested to know from him how many of the 16 additional staff whom he mentioned have been recruited to the control room and service centre in Aberdeen, what their length of contract is and how much of the £1.4 million has been devoted to that end.

Michael Matheson: Those are specific matters for Police Scotland, which is responsible for the recruitment of staff. Sixteen of those staff members have been recruited between Aberdeen and Inverness. I will ask Police Scotland to provide the member with an exact breakdown of the provision in the Aberdeen control room.

As the member will be aware from having raised the issue with me in the chamber on a number of occasions, we are seeking to ensure that there continues to be resilience in the way in which the call-handling centre in Aberdeen operates as the change process moves forward. As I have outlined to the member in the past, there are now significant safeguards in place before any further changes can occur to the call-handling system such as the moving of the Aberdeen call-handling system to Bilston Glen. Those measures have been put in place to ensure that there is a consistent approach in how Police Scotland handles the matter and that the public continue to receive a high-quality service from Police Scotland.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Can the cabinet secretary clarify how local intelligence that is reported through the 101 number and the centralised call service centres is communicated to local front-line police officers, such as the named ward officers who are allocated to council wards in the Forth Valley division? That new initiative represents an excellent example of local policing.

Michael Matheson: I am very familiar with the approach that is being taken in Forth Valley division, on which the new local commander is keen to see progress. Once intelligence is brought to the attention of 101, it is assessed in terms of its priority, then sent on to the local command area, where it is prioritised in the local system to determine how officers should respond to it. As Margaret Mitchell is aware, it is extremely

important to ensure that information that is provided at the local level is provided in a timely way to allow the police to assess how to respond to matters. Work is going on in Police Scotland to ensure that that happens as effectively as possible.

Police Officers (Civilian Staff Roles)

2. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how many uniformed officers have been deployed to roles previously filled by civilian staff since Police Scotland came into existence. (S4O-05205)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): Deployment of officers and staff is a matter for Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority, which are committed, wherever possible, to use officers and staff in roles that make the best use of their skills, training and powers.

Murdo Fraser: The cabinet secretary will appreciate the concern of many people across the country about backfilling. Derek Penman, Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary, said that the current push to maintain an extra 1,000 police officers is pointless unless they are performing operational roles. A recent investigation by the *Sunday Herald* claimed that fewer than half of Scotland's 17,000 officers were actually operational.

Will the Scottish Government agree to publish proper police strength statistics, breaking down officers by operational role, so that we can have proper public information, parliamentary scrutiny and transparency?

Michael Matheson: On parliamentary scrutiny, Murdo Fraser may be aware that the Justice Committee has recently given attention to this issue. Deputy Chief Constable Neil Richardson gave evidence to the Justice Committee on 1 December, when he made it very clear that there is no policy of backfilling civilian posts with police officers. On occasions when Police Scotland is changing how it provides a particular service, it may move operational police officers into a role because they have the skills to undertake that responsibility. Additionally, on occasions when civilian staff are off on sick leave or training, operational police officers may be used to provide a particular service for that period.

As the deputy chief constable outlined, there is no policy of backfilling civilian staff posts with police officers. However, I am more than happy to give Murdo Fraser a breakdown of the percentage of police officers who cover particular areas. For example, 75 per cent of Police Scotland officers operate on local policing matters. The figures break down into other specialist fields, regional

units and national units. If it would help Murdo Fraser to understand how Police Scotland breaks down the staff grouping of its police officers, I will be more than happy to write to him with the details.

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): DCC Richardson and Sir Stephen House before him reiterated that there is no policy on backfilling, but Unison and the Scottish Police Federation advised that it is happening regularly. We have had media reports of significant numbers of police officers not doing police duties. Does the cabinet secretary not agree that the SPA should measure and monitor regularly whether police officers are fulfilling police officer functions?

Michael Matheson: It is an operational matter for the chief constable to determine how he should configure his staff and how he wishes to use his staff and police officers to fulfil Police Scotland's responsibilities.

Elaine Murray will be aware that the SPA is undertaking a piece of work that is looking at future demands on policing as a result of issues such as cybercrime and the ageing population. As I mentioned to the Justice Committee yesterday, I have no doubt that once that work is complete, the SPA and Police Scotland will look at how policing will be configured in the future, in order to meet the demands that are being placed upon the police service.

Cashback for Communities (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)

3. Adam Ingram (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many projects have been funded by the cashback for communities programme in Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley. (S4O-05206)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Paul Wheelhouse): We are rightly proud of our unique cashback for communities programme, and we have published information by local authority area on the cashback website. That demonstrates that, to the end of March 2015, young people from South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire, which the member's constituency spans, have directly benefited from over £1.95 million of cashback investment.

All cashback projects are required, under the terms of their grants, to focus activity in deprived areas and on disadvantaged young people. Funding for phase 3 of the programme is committed through to the end of March 2017 and phase 4 will commence in April 2017. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice has yet to make decisions on the next tranche of funding, but I can assure the member that it will build on the success of the cashback programme, targeting more deprived

areas, reducing inequalities and obtaining maximum benefit for communities.

Adam Ingram: The minister has anticipated my follow-up question a little, but will he give more detail on the plans that the Scottish Government has to develop the fund further and to implement the recommendations of the evaluation report that was published in 2014? I am particularly concerned that any funding that is available is distributed in a fair and proportionate manner across the country, and I have concerns that my constituency is perhaps getting less than it should from cashback for communities.

Paul Wheelhouse: I certainly note the member's pitch for more funding for East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire.

The recommendations in the evaluation report, which primarily deal with the process, are being implemented. As I stated in my initial response, I can reassure the member that we will build on the success of the cashback programme and we will target more deprived areas, reducing inequalities and obtaining maximum benefit.

For phase 3, which I mentioned, we have to have additional discussions with key partners such as YouthLink Scotland, Youth Scotland, the Prince's Trust and Creative Scotland to finalise details, but I reassure the member that all cashback partners are required under the terms of their grant to focus activity on areas of deprivation and on disadvantaged young people. Cashback funding is rightly focused in communities that are hit by crime and antisocial behaviour. However, we have taken the view that it is also right that all 32 local authority areas in Scotland should benefit from those activities and facilities.

The member might be aware of a number of key projects in the two local authorities in question that are funded through partners. For example, there has been investment of almost £0.5 million through the Scottish Football Association, almost £460,000 through YouthLink, £291,000 through the Scottish Rugby Union and £211,000 through the link up project. There are significant areas of activity. We are working with local and national partners to deliver in East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire. I hope that that benefits young people in Mr Ingram's constituency.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): Question 4, in the name of Graeme Pearson, has been withdrawn, for entirely understandable reasons.

Police Scotland (People with Mental Health Issues)

5. Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Police Scotland regarding how it deals

with incidents involving people with mental health issues. (S4O-05208)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): Over the past three years, the Scottish Government has engaged with a range of partner organisations, including Police Scotland, the national health service, social services and third sector organisations, to consider ways of improving how services respond to people who may have mental health problems and to people who present in distress. That has included several stakeholder engagement events, two of which were hosted by Police Scotland.

A mental health community triage pilot involving local policing and Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board was approved and implemented in January 2015. The new approach provides officers with direct access to mental health professionals, who help to support decision making to improve services to vulnerable members of our community. In August last year, a similar pilot was launched in Edinburgh city in conjunction with Lothian NHS Board.

Jim Hume: I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer, but he did not provide information on the number of incidents that Police Scotland responds to that involve people with potential mental health problems. Has any assessment been carried out of the proportion of incidents that the police attend that involve a person with a potential mental health issue? Does the cabinet secretary agree that there is greater scope for health professionals to be more involved in Police Scotland responses?

Michael Matheson: I will check whether there is central information on the specific point that the member raises, but I can give him information on the impact of the project that we have been running in Glasgow. Over the course of a year, 234 incidents were attended in which the individual appeared to have mental health issues. In 225 cases, which is 96 per cent, the individual was found to be fit and well by a community psychiatric nurse and there was no need for further intervention. Some 86 per cent of the incidents were resolved by telephone consultation between a CPN and the individual concerned.

The evidence shows us the significant impact that it can have on police time and the individual affected, who may have a mental health issue or have been presenting in distress, when we ensure that they get the right support and assistance as and when required. I know from time that I spent with British Transport Police officers that they find that invaluable because of the assistance that it gives them, as there can be issues with vulnerable individuals around train stations and railway lines.

We want to build on that project. That is why it has now been rolled out into Edinburgh. We are

also working with Police Scotland and other health boards on how we can roll it out into other divisions in Scotland to ensure that, if an individual has a mental health issue that is the primary issue, they get the effective support and assistance that they require at that point.

Knife Crime (West Scotland)

6. Stewart Maxwell (West Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to tackle knife crime in the West Scotland region. (S4O-05209)

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Paul Wheelhouse): We are working with various partners to tackle knife crime, including YouthLink Scotland, which supports local authorities to deliver the no knives, better lives programme. That programme encourages young people away from carrying knives and builds their capacity and potential to make positive life choices for themselves and their families.

Violent crime is at its lowest level for 41 years and, since 2006-07, crimes for handling offensive weapons, including knives, have fallen by 67 per cent nationally. The number of crimes of handling offensive weapons, which includes knife crimes, recorded in the seven local authorities that are wholly or partially within the West Scotland region has decreased by 73 per cent since 2006-07.

Stewart Maxwell: I welcome the progress that has been made so far in West Scotland. East Renfrewshire, for example, now has one of the lowest rates of recorded knife crime in Scotland, with an 82 per cent fall in recorded crimes of handling offensive weapons since 2006-07.

Does the minister agree about the importance of educating young people through initiatives such as the no knives, better lives programme, which he mentioned, to ensure that that welcome reduction in crime continues? Will he reassure me that there will be no let-up in tackling the scourge of knife crime?

Paul Wheelhouse: Absolutely. On the latter point, I reassure the member that we will not let up our efforts to tackle knife crime.

We have consistently said that the best way to tackle violence is through education and prevention. Our £2.9 million no knives, better lives campaign has been a great success. The member referred to East Renfrewshire, which has had an 82 per cent fall. In North Ayrshire, the decrease has been even bigger at 85 per cent. The campaign has an opt-in national model of delivery that is flexible to suit local needs. To date, 11 new local authorities have expressed an interest in it, and six of them are now actively involved in delivering the programme.

Through the no knives, better lives campaign, we are reaching out to parents and practitioners as well as to young people to highlight the fact that carrying an offensive weapon is completely unacceptable, that it can have devastating consequences and that there is never an excuse for carrying a knife. We will continue to work tirelessly with all our partners to get that message across.

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): Given the fact that the Scottish Government's data confirms a continuing reliance by judges on short and medium-term sentences for persons who are convicted of carrying offensive weapons and that that clearly has a deterrent effect, will the minister confirm that such sentences will continue to be available to judges for such crimes?

Paul Wheelhouse: I am happy to confirm to Ms Goldie that those sentences will still be available. In the measures against short sentences, we are considering where it is appropriate to use an alternative to a short sentence—one that produces a more effective outcome in terms of reducing reoffending. However, violence and a serious risk to the public are clearly matters that would be taken into consideration.

Short-term Sentences (Consultation)

7. Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it will publish its response to the consultation on the presumption against short-term sentences. (S4O-05210)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Michael Matheson): The consultation on proposals to strengthen the presumption against short sentences closed on 16 December. We received 63 responses in total, and I record my thanks to everyone who took the time to submit their views on that important issue.

We are carefully considering those responses and will publish a formal analysis in the coming weeks. That analysis will inform our approach to strengthening the current presumption against short sentences, and I intend to set out our plans in due course.

The consultation forms part of our wider commitment to shifting the emphasis of penal policy from ineffective short sentences to a greater use of robust community sentences. That commitment is backed by an additional £4 million for community justice services in the 2016-17 draft Scottish budget.

Annabel Goldie: The nub of the issue is that Governments must neither obstruct nor compromise the freedom of judges to impose a custodial sentence of any length where the judge considers that that is how best to serve the

interests of justice and the victim. Will the cabinet secretary guarantee with the same welcome clarity as his colleague Mr Wheelhouse the continuing protection of that freedom?

Michael Matheson: A presumption is exactly that: it is a presumption. It will be open to sheriffs to determine these matters when the issue is laid before the court. That is the case with the presumption against short sentences of three months. If a sheriff at a particular point believes that a custodial sentence is the most appropriate action that should be taken, that action remains open to them. Any extension of that presumption would mean that sheriffs would continue to have the powers to choose to do so.

I reassure the member that a presumption is exactly that—it is nothing more than a presumption—and sheriffs will continue to have the powers to determine whether to send someone on a custodial sentence should they see fit to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the justice and the law officers portfolio. My apologies to those members I have not been able to call.

Rural Affairs, Food and Environment

NFU Scotland (Meetings)

1. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of NFU Scotland. (S4O-05214)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (Richard Lochhead): Representatives of the Scottish Government meet NFU Scotland regularly to discuss a wide variety of topics. The most recent meeting took place on Monday 21 December 2015.

Margaret Mitchell: Is the cabinet secretary aware that dog fouling on agricultural land, which affects the quality of crops and the health of animals, is a major issue for farmers and that the NFU Scotland's pilot poster campaign in Dumbarton, the Pentlands and Motherwell, which illustrated by the use of fluorescent light the extent of dog dirt on agricultural land, has halved the incidence of dog fouling where the posters were displayed? However, does he agree that, ultimately, legislative change is required in the form of removing section 2(2) of the Dog Fouling (Scotland) Act 2003, which exempts agricultural land from the provisions of the act?

Richard Lochhead: I appreciate that this is a serious issue for Scotland's agricultural sector and I know that NFU Scotland and others issue regular warnings to dog owners to behave responsibly throughout the year.

I am not familiar with the initiative that Margaret Mitchell mentioned, and I would be interested in hearing more about it. With regard to the law, I would be happy to look into the issue that she raises and get back to her in writing, as I would be interested in learning more about the potential options to address the issue.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I have a supplementary question that relates to when the cabinet secretary last met NFU Scotland. Has he met it to talk about the impact of flooding? I am conscious that many farms have lost topsoil; the flooding has had a huge impact. Will he put in place special measures to ensure that our farmers are able to get off to a decent start in 2016?

Richard Lochhead: I thank Sarah Boyack for raising that issue in the chamber. Like other members, I am sure, I have been staggered and amazed by some of the sights that I have seen on Scotland's farmlands. Yesterday, as I drove from my home in Elgin to Parliament via Inverurie, Brechin and Perth, looking at the farmland on the way was an eye-opener as to the level of devastation across the country, including to farmland. I used the opportunity to visit Kincaird farm, just outside Brechin, where I met the Sims and viewed their fields, including their arable field, where spring barley will—hopefully—be sown in a few months. It looked like part of the river, which was jaw-dropping to see.

I am in discussion with NFU Scotland and I will initiate further discussions with the wider sector this week to understand both the scale of the impact on farmland and what measures we can take, if any, to mitigate the impact and to work with the farmers. I have given a commitment to have those discussions.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

Is the Scottish Government able to look at the question of prioritising delayed common agricultural policy payments to those farmers who have been most badly affected by the flooding?

Richard Lochhead: On the question of expediting applications for CAP payments from farmers who have been most affected by the flooding, I said following the spate of flooding—forgive the pun—just a few weeks ago that any farmers with specific issues because of flooding should contact their local offices and notify us of their predicament and we will see what we can do. I cannot make any guarantees, because every case will be different across the country, but I am conscious that that may be one option, so I ask farmers to contact their local offices.

Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 (Review)

2. Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its current position is on a review of the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002. (S4O-05215)

The Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Aileen McLeod): I announced on 26 December that the review of the act will be led by Lord Bonomy and will begin taking evidence at the beginning of February. The review will investigate the operation of the act to ascertain whether it is providing a sufficient level of protection for wild mammals while at the same time allowing the effective and humane control of mammals such as foxes, where necessary.

Roderick Campbell: I thank the minister for her answer and welcome the Scottish Government's review of the current law. I hope that the review will take evidence from Police Scotland on the difficulties on enforcing current legislation, particularly considering the role of hunt monitors and practices such as cubbing. Can she reassure us further on some of those points?

Aileen McLeod: Lord Bonomy will decide how to carry out his review, but I am sure that Police Scotland evidence will be an important part of the process. Legislation must be enforceable to be effective and it will be for Lord Bonomy to take a view on whether the activities of hunt monitors are a factor in the enforceability of the legislation.

I understand that cubbing involves the hunting of fox cubs and therefore lies squarely in the scope of the review. I am sure that everyone who has an interest in the protection of wild mammals will want to engage with Lord Bonomy and I encourage them to do so.

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): Is the minister concerned about the evidence presented by the League Against Cruel Sports that suggests that fox hunting is still going on? What extra resources will the Scottish Government commit to ensure that current and future legislation in this area is effective and that we see a genuine end to a cruel and outdated practice?

Aileen McLeod: As I said in my answer to Roderick Campbell, the review will look at whether the current legislation is providing the necessary level of protection for foxes and other wild mammals while allowing for the effective and humane control of those animals when it is required. That review will begin this month. Written evidence will be accepted from 1 February until the end of March. We in Scotland led the way in addressing animal welfare concerns with the 2002 legislation and we remain absolutely committed to ensuring the highest level of welfare for our wild mammals.

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): We did indeed lead the way with that legislation, as the minister rightly says, but given the minute number of investigations into breaches of the 2002 act that have resulted in a successful prosecution, what justification does she have for initiating the review in the first place?

Aileen McLeod: As I said before, we have led the way in addressing animal welfare concerns, but we have to make sure that the current legislation is providing the necessary level of protection for foxes. Numerous concerns have been raised with us and we have to make sure that the 2002 act is delivering the necessary level of protection for our foxes and other wild animals.

European Commission (Agriculture and Rural Development)

3. Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it will next meet the agricultural and rural development department of the European Commission. (S4O-05216)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with the European Commission's directorate general for agriculture and rural development on a wide range of issues. Indeed, I met it last month to discuss the impact of the Commission's greening measures on Scottish agriculture.

Gil Paterson: I understand that the cabinet secretary met with his counterparts ahead of the discard ban, which prevents dead fish from being thrown back into the sea. Can he provide an update on any discussions he has had with the agricultural and rural development department of the European Commission about the discard ban and the possible delivery of increased fishing quotas?

Richard Lochhead: Gil Paterson highlights the fact that new discard bans will come into force in Scotland's waters in 2016. They will relate to the discarding of good-quality dead fish by throwing them overboard, which is a complete waste. For the first year, the ban will affect the demersal sector—the whitefish and shellfish sector—in Scotland.

The issue featured as part of the annual fisheries negotiations a few weeks ago, with regard to 2016 fishing opportunities. I recall that, a few years ago, I said to the European Commission that, for the discard bans to work, there has to be a reward for the fishermen to make it practically possible for them to fish all their quotas and that there must be an increase in their quotas to reflect the fact that there were discard bans in place. I am, therefore, pleased that that was part of the

outcome of last month's negotiations. For example, we managed to secure the proposed 30 per cent increase in North Sea haddock, and that was topped up by a further 17 per cent increase in quota to account for the discard bans. It is good that we are seeing a rise in fish quotas to take account of the fact that we now have discard bans in place in Scottish waters.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): Can the cabinet secretary give us a brief update on the greening discussions and say whether there were any positive outcomes for us in Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: I regret that, in my conversations with the European Commission about greening measures, we made little headway in persuading the European Commission to accept our equivalence schemes or to allow us to escape the straitjacket of the three-crop rule, which is affecting Scotland's arable sector because it is inappropriate for Scotland. The European Commission attached conditions to the equivalence measures that have made them unattractive to Scottish farmers. Therefore, we have no option but to seek further changes later this year. We welcome the fact that the European Commission has agreed to review the greening measures in the common agricultural policy, and we will take full advantage of that opportunity to get them changed in Scotland's favour.

Common Agricultural Policy Basic Payment

4. Tavish Scott (Shetland Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government how many eligible crofters and farmers had not received any common agricultural policy basic payment by 6 January 2016. (S4O-05217)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (Richard Lochhead): Last week, I confirmed that the Scottish Government had issued basic payment and greening payment to around 3,500 farmers and crofters, totalling around £33 million of direct support. That first instalment equated to 75 per cent of farmers' and crofters' basic payment value, and 90 per cent of their greening value.

It remains our intention to pay the first instalment to the majority of farmers and crofters this month, with the final balance to be paid in April, and—of course—the rest of the first payments will be paid in February and March.

Tavish Scott: Does that mean that 80 per cent of Scotland's farmers and crofters have yet to receive any CAP payments, which the Government promised they would get before Christmas, even though the Government has spent £178 million on a new computer system?

How many payment region reviews are still outstanding for Shetland alone? What are the implications for less favoured areas support scheme and ewe and beef scheme payments? Will they be late, too? Does the cabinet secretary understand that farmers and crofters from Shetland to Stranraer are fed up, annoyed and worried about their cash flow because of their need to pay feed bills in the flood-ridden winter that Scotland is enduring?

Richard Lochhead: I very much appreciate the challenges that face crofters and people in the rest of the agriculture sector at the moment, but I know that Parliament is familiar with the complexity of the new common agricultural policy and with how we have, for good reasons, chosen to implement it in Scotland.

I said that we would begin to make payments to crofters and farmers in Scotland before the end of last year, and we have fulfilled that commitment. I accept that a fair number of farmers and crofters are still to receive their payments.

The £178 million business case that was cited by Tavish Scott relates to the whole futures programme. Most of it is for the information technology system that is designed to serve the common agricultural policy, which will deliver a huge amount of investment to the sector in the coming years and equates to 4 per cent of the payments that will go out the door to Scotland's agricultural and rural sectors. The investment is necessary in order to get those payments out the door.

I am paying close attention to the impact on other payments. We have said all along that there might be an impact on other payments—they might be delayed for a few weeks—and that we would seek to minimise that as far as possible. With regard to the voluntary coupled support payments to beef and sheep farmers, we are aiming for roughly the same timescale as last year.

Margaret McDougall (West Scotland) (Lab): Farmers are suffering from adverse weather conditions and their crop yields will be affected. In answers to previous questions, the cabinet secretary said that he will see what he can do. Will he expand on what the options are, and say whether they include acceleration of CAP payments?

Richard Lochhead: On the impact of flooding on agriculture, the first thing that we have to do is understand the scale of the impacts on Scottish farmland of the atrocious conditions of the past few weeks, and the consequences. That is what we are doing now and over the next few days.

However, as I have said to the farmers whom I have met, and will say to the official organisations

in the next few days, there are issues with regard to how we will repair the flood damage, including regulatory issues. We need to consider how to make it easier for farmers to deal with the aftermath of flooding, which will involve discussions with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Until we have had those discussions, it is difficult to say what options are available, but I have pledged that we will have those discussions in order to help.

Common Agricultural Policy Convergence Uplift Negotiations

5. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in the common agricultural policy convergence uplift negotiations with the United Kingdom Government. (S4O-05218)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment (Richard Lochhead): Despite qualifying for the convergence uplift only as a result of Scotland's low payment rate, the United Kingdom Government refused to pass on the full allocation to Scotland, which was a bitter blow to Scotland's farmers and crofters.

The then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs promised to review the UK's allocation of common agricultural policy funding in 2016. It is now 2016, and so I have today written to the current secretary of state urging her to set out the timetable for the review as a matter of the utmost urgency, and seeking an early discussion on its terms.

Stewart Stevenson: I very much welcome the news that the cabinet secretary is seeking to hold the UK Government to account for its previous promises. Has the Scottish Government estimated the financial loss to the Scottish economy from loss of those funds—which came to the UK only because of Scotland—and, if possible, of any multiplier effects that the funds would have had on our economy?

Richard Lochhead: It is complete larceny that that money, which was sent to the UK Government because Scotland's low payment rates allowed the UK Government to qualify for the uplift from the European Commission's common agricultural funding, has been denied to Scotland's farmers, crofters and rural communities. At the time, the payment was worth £190 million over the course of the current CAP. That is a substantial resource, given the number of questions that I have just received from members who are arguing for more investment in the agriculture sector. That money is Scotland's money: it belongs to Scotland, but we got only a small percentage of it, whereas the whole £190 million should have come to Scotland. As Stewart Stevenson rightly said,

that would have had a multiplier effect across our rural and food economies.

It is essential that the UK Government live up to its words and that it undertake the review immediately on a very short timescale, with a view to delivering Scotland's money to Scotland's farmers, crofters and rural communities.

Climate Change Obligations

6. James Kelly (Rutherglen) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that its obligations under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 are being met. (S4O-05219)

The Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Aileen McLeod): We are ensuring that our obligations under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 are met through a range of actions. We have put in place a comprehensive package of measures to meet our world-leading emissions-reductions targets, and Scotland is now more than three quarters of the way towards achieving our 42 per cent emissions reduction target in 2020.

Our cabinet sub-committee on climate change underpins our commitment, and through our rural affairs, food and environment delivery board we are leading and co-ordinating action on climate change by our public sector partners, including on peatland restoration and forestry, in order to protect and conserve the environment.

James Kelly: The minister will understand that improving energy efficiency in homes is vital to tackling climate change and to reducing fuel poverty. It is therefore somewhat bewildering, in the light of the Paris climate change summit, that the Government is proposing to cut fuel poverty projects and energy efficiency projects by 13 per cent. What impact assessment was carried out on that budget proposal and its effect on meeting climate change targets and tackling fuel poverty?

Aileen McLeod: Energy efficiency is a priority for the Scottish Government and has been designated as a national infrastructure priority in recognition of its importance. As we have set out before, the cornerstone of that policy will be Scotland's energy efficiency programme, which will provide an offer of support to all buildings—domestic and non-domestic—in Scotland to improve their energy efficiency ratings over a 15-year to 20-year period. Improving the energy efficiency of our buildings is key to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, to tackling fuel poverty, to improving our energy security and to making our economy more competitive.

The detail of the energy efficiency programme still needs to be developed. We will be working with stakeholders over the next couple of years

because we need to do further modelling and analysis so that we understand what is possible before we launch the new programme in 2017-18, once the powers that the Smith commission recommended are in place.

Allotment Sites

7. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it encourages the development of new allotment sites. (S4O-05220)

The Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Aileen McLeod): The Scottish Government strongly supports the development of allotments for food growing and recognises the range of benefits that they bring to individuals and communities. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 places new duties on local authorities in respect of allotments, including a requirement to take steps to limit waiting lists and waiting times for those who are on such lists. We believe that the provisions will strongly encourage the development of new allotment sites and will, thereby, increase access to allotments for people throughout Scotland.

Mark Griffin: I have been approached by constituents in Cumbernauld who have said that demand for allotment sites is far outstripping supply. Funding was to be made available to local authorities for their new responsibilities under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, which the minister mentioned, for developing allotment sites. Can the minister say how much money the Government has made available to local authorities to increase the number of allotments in the Central Scotland region?

Aileen McLeod: I thank Mark Griffin for his question and I appreciate the sentiments behind it. If he wants to write to me for further detailed information on that, I will be very happy to take that on board.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to the members whom I have been unable to call, but we have to move on to the next item of business.

Age and Social Isolation

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-15198, in the name of Margaret McCulloch, on the Equal Opportunities Committee's report on age and social isolation. I call Margaret McCulloch to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Equal Opportunities Committee.

14:42

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): This is a good time for us to talk about social isolation and loneliness. During the festive period, many people will have been alone and thinking about what the year ahead holds, and given what we heard during our inquiry into age and social isolation, we know that, for many people, there will be nothing to put in the calendar for 2016. We also know about the terrible impact that that will have on their physical and mental health.

The Equal Opportunities Committee agreed to launch its inquiry into age and social isolation because we had already heard about the isolation that is experienced by both younger and older people in Scotland. We had an idea of who might be at risk of social isolation, but we had not expected to hear about the extent of the problem or the terrible health impacts.

Our inquiry led us into communities where people are working hard to combat isolation in both urban and rural settings. We visited Easterhouse and Islay, and I thank those communities for their valuable input to the inquiry. We realised as a committee that, for all the people who are in touch with projects and services, there are many who are not being reached. For those people, loneliness is a long-term issue that has no end in sight, and they also have to contend with the stigma of loneliness. They were ashamed to admit their situation and had lost the confidence to do anything about it. Many reported to health services such as general practitioners and accident and emergency departments when professionals knew that the underlying problem was loneliness.

We discovered many important things about people's experiences, but what I would really like to mention before I move on to the detail—and what everyone should remember about this topic—is the terrible effects of extended loneliness. We have to stand together and say that it is not okay for anyone to suffer this kind of isolation no matter what their age is, and we must acknowledge the impact that it has on our communities and our health and social services.

Jane Kellock of West Lothian Council explained how important it is to think about how services are provided. She said:

“When systems break down in such a way that we disconnect from others, or when life circumstances come along—we might lose people we are close to, for instance—we need to be able to respond to that in a human way, rather than stigmatise people or further isolate them by treating them as if there was something wrong with them as individuals.

All the agencies in the partnerships around the country need to be responsive to that and to consider the structures of how we deliver services, how we make contact with people and how we speak to them on an individual basis. That is all very important for keeping our communities connected.”—[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee*, 23 April 2015; c 7.]

I cannot emphasise enough the issue of the health consequences of spending time alone without contact with others. We took very seriously Age Scotland’s point that the

“need for contact is an innate human need in the same way that feeling hungry or thirsty or tired or in pain is.”

The health consequences of isolation are shocking. Michelle McCrindle from the Food Train told us:

“Research has found just over 10% of over 65’s are often or always lonely with that figure rising to 50% for the over 80 age group. Similarly, research has also found that just over 10% of over 65’s are at risk of or are malnourished”.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The member mentioned stigma, but she has also mentioned just how widespread the problem of isolation is. Does she agree that it is a very widespread problem, that it is common right across Scotland and that we need to take it very seriously?

Margaret McCulloch: Yes, I totally agree with the member on that. The problem is widespread across Scotland and covers all age groups.

Ms McCrindle also said that the Food Train does not think that it is a

“coincidence that the same number of older people are affected by malnutrition and loneliness,”

and that in the Food Train’s experience

“the two are interlinked, which also means they can be successfully tackled together.”

We heard from the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services that people who are lonely are more likely to have health issues such as high blood pressure, poor sleep and depression. For older people, there are proven links between loneliness and poor health, including dementia rates. We also heard that, on average, socially isolated individuals are twice as likely to die prematurely and that they make poor choices on, for example, inactivity, smoking,

alcohol use and diet. The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland told us that people who experience loneliness are more likely to visit their GP, have higher use of medication and a higher incidence of falls, undergo early entry into residential or nursing care and use accident and emergency services more.

I have mentioned the commitment to tackle the loneliness that we uncovered, which is so important. Instead of finding that everyone was ignoring the issue or did not believe that it was important, we heard about many initiatives to tackle it. However, we felt that even more could be done, because all the projects and services told us that there were many people who, for a variety of reasons, they did not manage to reach. Without national prioritisation of the issue, we feel that there cannot be the large-scale improvement that we need to see. We recommended a strategy because we recognised that the issue of isolation has to be integrated into planning and services for things to really change.

We have noted the Scottish Government’s response to our recommendation that a national strategy should be developed. We recognise, as the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners’ Rights stated in his response, that it is important to strengthen individuals’ connections and resilience and that that work rests on the skills, trust and obligation of front-line workers and ordinary citizens. The Scottish Government considers that that work is very hard to manage from the centre and that, consequently, a strategy might not have the impact expected.

However, as a committee, we are committed to ensuring that there is a response to what we see as a worsening situation that has such a huge impact on so many members of our society that it is difficult to see how we can achieve better outcomes without a strategy. I take some reassurance, however, from the Scottish Government’s commitment to take more evidence on what works in addressing social isolation and loneliness, and from the fact that it is looking to build that more explicitly into public services.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Does the member agree with me and other committee members that we should monitor whatever evidence is taken with regard to a future strategy?

Margaret McCulloch: Yes, I totally agree with that. It is also important that the Equal Opportunities Committee continually keeps an eye on the situation later.

Mapping is also important, as is the work that is being done to look at prevention and the links between statutory and third sector services under the work that is being done to support community

planning partnerships. We know how important prevention work is. In fact, what we tried to promote in our report could all be seen as prevention work. That is why we see it as so important.

The Equal Opportunities Committee should have a role in engaging with the Scottish Government on how those developments will help to keep the issue of social isolation and loneliness at the forefront of services and how people in those services respond to the needs of lonely people. The Scottish Government has said that it does not want to bolt anything on to existing policies. It will be the work of the Parliament and any future Equal Opportunities Committee to ensure that work is taken forward and to find out what has been achieved at a strategic level. We cannot stand still. The response to our report and the level of engagement with the committee on the issue make it important for us to listen.

The committee thought that a national publicity campaign was important because of the stigma that is associated with loneliness and to show what communities can do. We heard from witnesses that people were so ashamed of their lives that they had lost the confidence to seek help. Services have encountered that.

We also wanted Scotland to have a national campaign so that we could tackle existing perceptions. As a society, are we prepared to accept that so many people are alone and are not able to participate in society? Do we think that it is acceptable for people to be so lonely that their mental and physical health is badly affected and that so many people are not reached even by established services?

We need a lack of acceptance—zero tolerance—of social isolation so that we can change our thinking and tackle the problem. Best practice has shown us that lives can be changed, sometimes with very small, but intelligent interventions. The Scottish Government has told us that it will work with stakeholders to consider what innovative approaches it can use to raise awareness of issues around loneliness and the role that communities can play in addressing it. As a committee, we can only encourage that work. We hope that the Scottish Government will keep us informed of progress.

I turn to the situation that many young people face. The committee thought it very important that we should not just focus on isolation and loneliness for older people. We had already heard about extreme isolation during youth homelessness work, and some of the informal sessions that we used to set up the inquiry left me with stark evidence about what early isolation can do to a young person.

There were three very important areas of evidence for young people. First, bullying because of a person's identity can cause social isolation that endures well into their life. It can deskill them and isolate them from many positive experiences. Discrimination starts a chain of events in a person's life that affects confidence and reduces the chance of positive outcomes in later life.

Secondly, unacceptable behaviour around people's identity should be explained to the perpetrators. That might sound obvious, but we heard from front-line youth workers that smart work needs to be done to explain to those who harass and exclude the terrible impact of their behaviour.

Thirdly—this leads on from that point—peer-to-peer support and initiatives are key. That came through in evidence, particularly from Enable and Roshni, in which it was clear that, if steps to tackle social isolation are to be taken seriously, they should begin with young people working with other young people to skill them up and support the connections that many of us have taken for granted.

I was glad to see in the Scottish Government's response that it supports anti-bullying work and that it agrees that much stems from that. Enable highlighted with us the importance of staff confidence in schools. Things need to be tackled head on. Equalities training is very important for staff, and it is important for children to know their own rights. We look forward to the revised anti-bullying guidance, which is due to be published this year.

One of the most important areas of work that we explored was the idea of a link worker system in which someone is able to signpost people to services that might support them. We believe that that link between services and projects in communities is essential to moving things forward and building connections for people.

Advances have been made in social prescribing, by which a general practitioner can refer patients to local services as an alternative to treatment or statutory support. We were greatly encouraged by the work of the deep-end link worker project, which allows a link worker—who is often from a community development background—to be based in a GP practice. We were very glad to hear that that programme is being evaluated by the University of Glasgow, and we look forward to the Scottish Government sharing the final report.

There are many individuals who clearly made their mark in the committee's inquiry. I want to quote from two of them directly. Contact the Elderly told us about its monthly Sunday tea parties and said that the event was sometimes the

only entry in a person's calendar. One client told them:

"I'm really looking forward to going to the tea next Sunday. I haven't been out for 7 weeks."

Who Cares? Scotland told us about a young person who used its service. He said:

"I have seen other people who have left the care system end up in tenancies where they have ended up being alone. The loneliness has meant they haven't been able to keep up a job or have become homeless after losing touch with those they used to be close to. When they started preparing me for leaving care I was really worried about ending up with no one. I have seen how devastating this has been for people I know."

We believe that our inquiry has been the first of its kind by any Parliament anywhere in the world. Many of us were moved by the evidence that we heard and persuaded of the need to address the social consequences and health implications of loneliness and isolation. I stress that this is not a lightweight report to be politely noted and then put on the shelf. There is a compelling case for change, and it must be heard.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations in the Equal Opportunities Committee's 5th Report 2015 (Session 4), *Age and Social Isolation* (SP Paper 816).

14:56

The Minister for Local Government and Community Empowerment (Marco Biagi): I thank Margaret McCulloch and all the members of the Equal Opportunities Committee for their inquiry into age and social isolation. This is a great opportunity to respond to it. It was a very positive exercise and is a very welcome contribution that is also timely, not least because of the festive season, as Ms McCulloch's highlighted in her opening remarks.

The report has raised important issues about how widespread social isolation has become across all levels and ages in society, including how it can affect and damage a person's sense of belonging, their empowerment and their contribution to society. Alienation is a word that is often used in the context of discussions about Jimmy Reid's contribution and Harry Burns's sense about work, but it also applies to society, with the same risks.

To its credit, the committee has been praised for its inquiry, with what Age Scotland has called the first parliamentary inquiry to be carried out specifically on isolation and loneliness anywhere in the world. I would join in that praise.

Alongside the constructive recommendations and evidence in the Equal Opportunities Committee's report, there is a strong moral case

for tackling the issue. We are social creatures. A lack of social contact hits people across the board with poorer health and a shorter lifespan, and it makes it harder to follow through on good lifestyle choices that could have beneficial impacts.

There are not any quick fixes—let us agree on that. Everyone in Scotland has to be committed to addressing social isolation and to taking tangible, measurable actions against it.

To begin, we must consider the differing needs of age groups in society. For example, there are the implications for and complex needs of our ageing population, which are only projected to continue. Twenty per cent of children born today—I repeat, 20 per cent—will live to be 100 years old, the statisticians tell us. Our young population has a whole range of ways of communicating and interacting socially that previous generations did not. Among the young there is a strong emphasis on technology and virtual contact, but it can have negative and positive impacts on social isolation. Changing working patterns, family patterns and social patterns also cause our forms of interaction to change, as indeed they always have over time. What we must do is adapt.

The good news is that we are together on the need to bring about greater community. That is a very helpful place to start. From the Parliament and its members, the passionate people who contributed evidence to the committee's report, those in public services, communities and the ordinary and, frankly, extraordinary people who, with good will, are trying to make a difference, there is already a collective sense of willingness, commitment and social obligation to tackle the issue. Leaders, organisations, communities and individuals want to work together to capitalise on what they are already doing that is good; they also want to learn from that and to share it more widely.

I want to outline our strategic approach to the committee's recommendations. We will endeavour to build this strand of work into all of our on-going, broader programmes and the frameworks that are already in place—I am referring to the Government's purpose and objectives, the national outcomes and the overarching approach to public service reform—because we recognise the issues that have been raised. Community planning partnerships and the health and social care partnerships, which Margaret McCulloch highlighted, have an important role and will be included. We can create an integrated approach to the specific issues of age and social isolation, as with all the other things that those partnerships have been set up to tackle. They exist to tackle the problems that no one service can tackle on its own, and they have developed considerably in their efficacy over the years for which they have been in place.

Under the Christie principles, we recognise the need to alter the balance of public services and to move away from crisis intervention towards more preventative approaches. That is an article of faith around the Parliament, and I am glad of that agreement. Tackling isolation before it leads to further harm is a perfect example of preventative action. Around Scotland, we have an ever-clearer view of what works in public service design and delivery and the challenges ahead. In all our work, we will drive things forward through a Scottish approach, which involves working in partnership rather than having experts who are detached from lived experience dictating from on high. That approach itself recognises the value in relationships, networks and the input of people who make up the communities. Health and fulfilment lie in attachment to others, to society and to having a life with purpose, but that attachment also informs what we do and it should inform good policy making.

The findings of the Equal Opportunities Committee's report will be included in our fairer Scotland discussions and the subsequent social justice action plan. People with direct lived experience of various forms of exclusion are helping the Government to shape the way in which we deal with social justice. That will be true in respect of the literal form of exclusion that we are discussing, just as it is true of financial or any other form of exclusion. The people who have lived the challenges that we want to solve are the ones who are best placed to tell us the answers.

As we go through some of the main recommendations in the committee's report, several jump out. A key recommendation is that the national social isolation strategy should be "integrated within all policy". We completely agree that the changes that are needed for mainstream services to respond to isolation in a human way must be embedded in the approach and planning of a wide range of services, including health, education, housing and transport. We want our social justice action plan to have that same broad reach, and I believe that our forthcoming action plan can fulfil that role by making social connectedness an important element.

In connection with the two recommendations on the need for more evidence, we have committed to commissioning research and publishing findings in summer 2016 on how widespread isolation and loneliness are and on identifying those who are most at risk. That will include analysis of the association between social connectedness and a wide range of important physical and mental health measures, which will provide further rigorous evidence on which to base further action. As well as recognising what the problem is, as I think we all do, we must try to get insights into how we can start to tackle it and what works. In

December 2015, NHS Scotland published a review on social prescribing in the context of mental health problems that looks at the benefits of linking systems much more widely.

I want to move on to the issue of a publicity campaign to raise awareness of social isolation. We certainly intend to work with our stakeholders and partners to consider what approaches we can use to raise awareness across communities and to tackle the stigma. A documentary called "The Age of Loneliness" that is to be shown on BBC 1 on Thursday night sets out to present the issue and will do so to a wide audience. I would love to claim the credit for that timely presentation on the television but I cannot, which again goes to show that the Government does not have the arm to reach into telling the BBC what to do.

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): Hear, hear.

Marco Biagi: Indeed—and long may that remain so.

On the ground, there has been a surge of willingness from third sector stakeholders to be involved and to share good practice in this area. There has also been a momentum, which has been highlighted by the festive season in particular, behind the idea that no one should be isolated socially.

We were also asked to share what has been learned from the deep-end evaluation and to include link worker systems in a national strategy. The University of Glasgow is evaluating the programme and we will share the final report at the end of 2016. We will consider very seriously expanding our approach once we have seen the evaluation. That is the sensible approach to take—to look at the evidence and to refine practice on that basis.

There is a lot more to report on what we are doing and what we are committed to doing on volunteering, transport, housing, health, health and social care partnerships and digital inclusion—and whatever anyone else cares to name. It is a big topic that is hard to sum up in 10 minutes, but it is a worthy one to which to devote an afternoon's debate, so that we can explore all the issues.

The time is right to take action. The inquiry is timely. It has given us a substantial challenge and we want to continue our partnership approach to share some of the great work that is out there and to get more of that happening. It is a chance to ensure that Scotland is different, to tap into the groundswell that is out there and, through concerted actions, to ensure that vulnerable, socially isolated people, regardless of age, have the support that they need to be connected to the services and communities around them.

I am a minister for two areas, one of which is community empowerment. I want to ensure that everybody can be part of a community, so that those communities can be empowered.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Many thanks. We are quite tight for time today. I call Jenny Marra.

15:06

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank the committee very much for its inquiry and all the clerks and members for their work. I will start by picking up a strand that the minister threaded through his speech about Scotland being different as regards social isolation. I perhaps misinterpreted what he said, but I am sure that social isolation in our communities, and certainly in my community, is not specific to Scotland. We may want to take a much more innovative approach here with the powers in this Parliament, but I am sure that such isolation is not particularly experienced in this country alone. However, it is, indeed, a sign of our society.

In the lead-up to and over the Christmas period, I was taken by, first of all, John Lewis's television advert, which pulled at people's heartstrings and got to the point of social isolation and loneliness. However, it was Age UK's campaign on the back of that advert that most struck me. The campaign appeared on my Facebook newsfeed. I noticed that friends of mine and people across my community in Dundee were signing up to go and visit elderly people in their houses. I then began to wonder about the societal bonds that have meant that it takes such a campaign to instigate such action by people. It took me back to years ago, to when I was a young child and my father took me to visit some of the elderly parishioners in our church and how delighted—I think—they were to get a visit from a young family in the parish. That led me to think about the bonds of inclusion. Those are very much alive in our churches, our trade union movement and our political parties. Such organisations bind together people of all ages and form networks and events for people to attend. I was glad to see that the campaign was so successful and that it had used social media to foster those bonds again and to get people returning to a routine of visiting and going into peoples' homes.

I am very much looking forward to the short election campaign in April. Every member across the chamber, I think, will recognise as I do that one of the great privileges of campaigning is, as a candidate, going to someone's door, especially that of an elderly person, and being invited in, and seeing that they are glad of that five or 10-minute visit.

That gets to the nub of the debate, which is about how we achieve the infrastructure in our communities that allows people to feel free and willing to do such things. The Facebook campaign showed that a lot of people want to do such things; we need to provide the infrastructure, which I think—if he does not mind my saying so—is what the minister meant when he talked about taking an innovative Scottish approach.

One of the things that jumped out at me from the Age Scotland briefing is the sentence that says:

“Though the State is not primarily responsible for the quality of people's personal relationships, it does often have to deal with the consequences where these break down or are absent.”

That is where the budget implications and the human cost come from. As I said, the state is not primarily responsible for relationships, and I do not think that people want it to be primarily responsible for them, but it needs to support the infrastructure that allows people to have stronger bonds in their communities.

When I prepared for the debate, a figure jumped out at me from the Office for National Statistics and a longitudinal study of ageing that says that 34 per cent of those aged 52 or over say that they feel some loneliness. Among those aged 80 or over, that figure rises to 46 per cent. Nearly half of our citizens who are over 80 say that they feel often or always lonely and cut off from society.

John Mason: Does the member recognise the issue, which the committee addressed, of the difference between isolation and loneliness? Isolation can be measured to an extent, but loneliness is much more difficult to pin down.

Jenny Marra: I absolutely agree with John Mason, who sat on the committee and heard the evidence. As I said to the minister, the Government has a role in supporting the networks and mechanisms that ensure that people are not socially isolated.

I was coming on to the committee's recommendations, some of which are very good—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Do so in your last 30 seconds.

Jenny Marra: I am glad that Alex Neil has responded to the recommendations and put the focus on services and budgets. We need a commitment from the Government—I think that the minister was going in this direction—to providing the infrastructure that will give support.

I am glad that we are having the debate. Health and social care integration provides an ideal opportunity. The multidisciplinary teams that work in our GP practices, which follow up patients once they pass a certain age and which try to prevent a

lot of ill health, can really have a role in addressing social isolation. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

15:13

Annabel Goldie (West Scotland) (Con): All the razzmatazz of Christmas has come and gone. Some memories will fade, as with some presents, such as the jumper that gets lost at the back of the wardrobe, but other images will stick with us. Like Jenny Marra, I found poignant the television advert that features an elderly man on the moon who is alone in the festive period. A young child sees him and sends him a telescope so that he can share in the young child's Christmas. Ultimately, that is an image of someone who is isolated and alone.

Professor Mima Cattan defines social isolation as

“an objective, measurable state of having minimal contact with other people, such as family, friends or the wider community.”

That is a chilling definition that should trouble everyone in the Parliament.

It is our duty in the Parliament to always have an eye on how we can go one step further. Can we go further than the child in the TV advert? The Equal Opportunities Committee has already gone one step further and it is an impressive step. I thank my committee colleagues, our excellent clerks and all the other participants for contributing to such a useful and powerful report.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I hope that the member recognises that to be alone is not necessarily to be lonely. For a small minority of people, being alone is a choice that they prefer to make.

Annabel Goldie: That point is well made and is acknowledged in the report.

I return to the significance of the report. Age Scotland considers that the committee is the first ever to set up an inquiry into social isolation, which demonstrates that the Parliament is taking the issue seriously and that, together, we are attempting to understand it better.

Sadly, social isolation exists all year round. It can affect everyone, regardless of age, background or mental or physical health. It can have a corrosively negative impact on lives, particularly among older persons, looked-after children and groups that face prejudice because of their ethnicity or disability. Social isolation is this century's new malaise; it is a contemporary disease. It is usually invisible, depressingly widespread and progressively debilitating, and it is as prejudicial to health and wellbeing as many diagnosable clinical conditions. It does not affect just one group but impacts on the lives of many,

and for those whose lives are so blighted there are multiple consequences.

In our communities, there are now patterns of lifestyle that were unknown even 20 years ago. Individually and collectively, those contribute to weaker social engagement and social coherence. However, although that may explain why social isolation is a significant social issue, it can never be an excuse for it. We can develop positive measures to help those who are at risk, and we owe it to them to do that urgently. The Parliament must be proactive.

In 2014, 16 per cent of the Scottish population was aged 65 and over. When we factor in that 80,000 of those who are aged 65-plus in Scotland describe themselves as often or always feeling lonely, we can predict that social isolation will increase in the future unless we act now. There is and will be intensifying pressure on our national health service and social services as a consequence of the condition.

In Parliament, we have all agreed to the health and social care integration plan, and we agree that general practice needs to be reformed to accommodate the changing demographic. Those are two vital developments in seeking to identify and combat social isolation. However, Audit Scotland has repeatedly raised concerns about the progress of the development and implementation of the integration of health and social care, and I do not think that we can ignore that flashing red light.

Having said that, it would be wrong to suggest that the integration of healthcare and social care is the complete answer—it is not. The committee found that an holistic approach is needed to tackle social isolation because health, housing, education and transport can all play a vital part in providing solutions. That is why the committee called for a national approach.

The Scottish Government has rejected such an approach. It may surprise the Government to learn that I have some sympathy with its view because I believe that a one-size-fits-all approach has its weaknesses. Nevertheless, the Scottish Government must explore how we can deploy our resources within an holistic approach. The Government may not want a national strategy or a national advertising campaign, but I think that we need an holistic approach if we are to find solutions.

We need to work much more closely with the third sector to develop crucial local services. We also need to look at transport issues and the impressive field trials, which we were made aware of, that could be introduced to general practice not only to identify those who may be socially isolated or at risk of becoming so but to inform and

educate those people about the services that are available to them. However, that assumes that they can get to the GP or health centre and that they can access the services once they are aware of them.

In conclusion, I think that an holistic approach is required to tackle social isolation. I am fairly flexible about how the Scottish Government wants to interpret that, but increasing our understanding of what is effective in this crucial area is of the utmost importance.

We have taken the first step in holding an inquiry and having a debate. I think that that will provide a positive and fruitful contribution to how we approach the issue and anticipate what we may bring forward in the future to support those who find themselves socially isolated. Further steps are urgently needed to alleviate this devastating condition, but I detect that there will be a willing political consensus in the chamber to support such initiatives.

15:19

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP):

I am delighted to have contributed to the Equal Opportunities Committee's inquiry into age and social isolation as a full member of the committee, and I add my thanks to all those who participated in the inquiry, including the clerks and the Parliament staff who participated in the launch of the inquiry report. That was a fantastic and important event, which the media attended. I also thank those individuals and organisations who made oral and written submissions to the committee.

I thank the minister for acknowledging the kind words of Derek Young from Age Scotland, who said:

"We have not been able to find another inquiry at any other parliamentary institution anywhere in the world that has specifically considered isolation and loneliness."— [Official Report, *Equal Opportunities Committee*, 26 March 2015; c 17.]

It is right to repeat that, as we should be proud of it.

Annabel Goldie touched on that fact. She said that she was glad that our strong parliamentary system delivered this kind of proactive inquiry, which in turn will strengthen our society and our urban and rural communities. Sometimes the value of Parliament's committees can be questioned, but it is important that we can do different kinds of work, such as proactive inquiries like this, to see what kind of society we are and what kind of society we want to be.

We looked at the impact that social isolation and loneliness has on people's lives in modern Scotland. We acknowledged first how much

organisations, groups and individuals are doing already to tackle social isolation and loneliness across our rural and urban communities. We met many young and old people on our travels and spent a few days in Islay. I truly fell in love with the place. The welcome that we received was tremendous and, when the weather stopped us going to Jura, the people of Jura came to us.

Reading the report, members can see how much of a challenge it is for young and old people to live remotely, and they can also see how some of our more remote communities deal with that challenge. Joan Richardson told us how the Jura Care Centre group started in 1996 and told us about the impact that it has had and continues to have. It helps older people to join in socially, attend clinics regularly, go to the GP surgery with ease and mix with people of different ages, which is important. It is now the focus point for the community. If members want to know how it has become that, I encourage them to take a trip to Jura.

Members could also take a trip to my town of Westhill, a few miles from Aberdeen. Westhill was the first community in Scotland to adopt the Australian model of a men's shed. There is no gender balance when it comes to social isolation among older people: generally women have a better circle of friends outside of work and are better at socialising. However, best practice is out there and is replicated across the United Kingdom. The example of Westhill Men's Shed is now followed everywhere. It is a great concept. Maybe more important, it is proof that the people who suffer from loneliness and isolation are themselves the best people to create and develop solutions to tackle the problem. From the start, Westhill Men's Shed was created and delivered by the people who use it. They needed support, of course, and they got it from the community, Aberdeenshire Council and other organisations that offered it.

Let me be clear: empowering people is the answer to the problem. Westhill Men's Shed applied for one of the first community asset transfers in Aberdeenshire, to use a disused building as its new home. The minister is right to say that the new Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is bringing together public authorities and community bodies to work on action to improve local outcomes and reduce inequalities. It is important to see how that can work in urban settings as well as rural settings.

There is a lot of good practice and there are a lot of good ideas out there. I am pleased to say Aberdeenshire is leading the way. We heard from Karen Nicoll, the chief officer of Aberdeenshire Signposting Project, which is an interesting model that provides a link to services and receives a range of referrals, including from GPs. We have

heard already in the debate today about the importance of social prescribing. GPs are now referring patients to local services as an alternative to treatment or statutory support. That is so important: GPs used to treat illnesses; they went on to treat patients; and now they are treating people. Things are very much people centred now, and that progression will help tremendously to change attitudes around social isolation and loneliness.

In my mind, our role as politicians and as a Parliament in tackling social isolation and loneliness must be about how to design the society in which we live. I truly believe that, in the past 50 years, we have stopped planning for our villages and towns to be the best places to live and, instead, we let promoters and developers shape our homes, our streets and our communities. It is so important that we tackle that issue of planning the best places to live.

I am proud that the Parliament is, so far, the only Parliament in the world that has specifically considered isolation and loneliness.

15:25

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I accept John Mason's point that social isolation is objective and loneliness is subjective, but we all realise that there is a big overlap between the two and that those who actually seek social isolation, whom Stewart Stevenson referred to, are surely a very small minority.

Social isolation is a problem and, if we look at the numbers, we can see that it is a very big problem. I was struck by a recent headline in the *Edinburgh Evening News* that said that more than half of Edinburgh people never have a feeling of loneliness, with the article saying that that is better than anywhere else in Scotland. However, what struck me is that that still means that an awful lot of people in Edinburgh have feelings of loneliness. We should accept the figures that Margaret McCulloch gave that 10 per cent of over-65s and 50 per cent of over-80s—fortunately, we will have more and more of them in the future—often or always feel lonely. There is a big problem.

We know about the emotional and psychological dimension, but I was struck recently by the impact on physical health. There has been lots of evidence on that. In fact, just yesterday, I retweeted a tweet by a consultant cardiologist who was highlighting the issue in terms of stroke and heart disease and referring to other illnesses. We have to take account of that aspect of the issue.

Sticking with older people, it is clear that the issue can be triggered by the loss of a loved one or even by retirement and the loss of social

networks as a result. It is a problem that we have to address, and it is important that we have lots of community initiatives to do so. I will mention two good examples in my constituency. One is the Pilton Equalities Project, which focuses on older people. It provides a great deal of accessible transport to take older people to activities and it has a befriending service, five day care clubs in north Edinburgh, a weekend resource group for people over 50 who are feeling isolated, and a visiting and information service to take the community to older people who are otherwise unable to access community facilities.

I emphasise that organisation because of the work that it does and because it is facing a 15 per cent cut next year. We do not want to turn the debate into one about local government finance, but we cannot ignore that reality.

Many of the excellent voluntary sector initiatives that address the issue are funded by local government. Another one in my constituency is the Leith community connector project, which is based at the Pilmeny Development Project in Leith. A community connector is a supervised volunteer who works with appropriately matched socially isolated older people for a time-limited period in order to facilitate social connections.

That is a key idea. Recently at the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on health inequalities, we heard about the community connections project in Glasgow, which is funded under the new integration arrangements and which connects vulnerable older people to services.

We have also heard about the deep-end GPs in Glasgow, who have link workers who link people to services and initiatives in the community. This is a crucial area of activity for the new health and social care partnerships and, as the report from the Equal Opportunities Committee emphasises, appropriate housing is an important part of that. It clearly should be part of the work of the integration authorities.

The issue is not just about older people so, halfway through my speech, I will move on to children. Loneliness is a major issue for children, as ChildLine told the inquiry. One of the saddest comments that I came across in reading the material in the report and the evidence was Margaret McCulloch's reference to the fact that some children have American accents because they relate to their computer rather than to anybody in their family environment. That is a very sad situation.

Prevalence studies tell us that loneliness peaks at adolescence, and young people in care are particularly affected. Therefore, there is a crucial role for schools. Obviously that involves

addressing issues such as bullying, but it is wider than that. Schools really have to be sensitive to young people who are socially isolated. Those young people suffer mentally and physically because of that, but I am sure that it also has an effect on their education.

Social media is relevant. I certainly appreciate its positive elements but, as the committee reminded us, we must also consider the negative aspects. In relation to young people, we are all aware of those. Cyberbullying is the extreme example, but we must examine social media carefully from the perspective of social isolation.

Of course, social isolation affects all age groups, not just the young and the old. Vulnerable first-time mothers can experience feelings of loneliness, which is why projects such as home start are important. Migrants in particular can experience them, and projects such as living in harmony in the Pilton area of my constituency are important in addressing that.

The issue can affect everybody. That is why building up social networks and social capital in the community is crucial. The voluntary sector is at the heart of that. Volunteering is critical to it because volunteers can connect with people who are isolated. They have an important role to play. I must refer to funding, because much of that work depends on funding, particularly from local government.

The committee makes important recommendations on

“a national strategy ... integrated within all policy considerations”,

which I am sure everybody supports, and about research and the publicity campaign. I welcome what the minister said about those. We look forward to what the research tells us about identifying the people who are most at risk and the relationship between social connectedness and the health issues that have been referred to. I hope that the publicity campaign will be modelled partly on the see me campaign in terms of addressing stigma but will also highlight the contribution that people can make to addressing the problem.

15:31

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): One of the first challenges that we had in the committee was to come up with a definition of isolation. Members can see in paragraphs 5 and 6 on page 1 some of our thinking about that. For example:

“Professor Cattani considers that whilst it might be possible to measure social isolation, the feelings of loneliness are personal and individual and therefore more challenging to measure objectively.”

However, we found that some witnesses used the terms interchangeably and, for the purposes of the report, we decided to consider both.

As Stewart Stevenson suggested, one person can enjoy their solitude while, in similar circumstances, another person can feel lonely. A minor example of that is, when the committee went to Islay, most of the members and clerks stayed in hotels but I stayed on my own in a tent. That was because I enjoy that and love being on my own. We all got together at certain times.

In recent years, there has been a strong commitment to keeping older people at home and providing them with the care that they need there. Most members across the parties support that concept. However, one of the lessons from the report is that one size does not fit all and home is not always the best place for someone to be.

My mother is 88 and getting quite frail but can still get out under her own steam to the hairdresser and some of the shops, and friends and family visit regularly, so I agree that the best place for her to be is still at home. However, there can come a stage when someone cannot get out at all and they perhaps have very few visitors because their friends are elderly or no longer with them and family may live at quite a distance. In that case, it may be best for an older person to be in a care home or similar setting where there is more company at hand and care provision is also nearer by.

I used to work for a group of care homes. It was not unusual for an older person's health to improve when they came into a home and got more company. As a by-product, it often took pressure off family members.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I hear what John Mason says about the appropriateness of people staying at home or going into care but does he agree that there is another group of people who could be sustained in their homes with suitable care? It does not have to be a massive care package, but there is an issue about care being so threadbare that we are driving people towards the care home option or the other alternative, which is being lonely and uncared for.

John Mason: Johann Lamont raises a valid point because there may be some people in care homes who should be at home. There are also some at home who should be in care homes.

I was glad to see that in the Government response, under recommendation 2, it talks about supporting people to live well

“at home or in a homely setting”.

I thought that that was quite a good way of putting it. The point has already been made—I think by Jenny Marra—that we are very dependent on

volunteers, family members and the third sector. It is just not possible for the public sector to provide befriending and care for every single person in this country.

The other side, perhaps, to what we have just heard is that when I visited a care home in my constituency a little while ago, the staff said that, in effect, it was being used as a hospice by Glasgow City Council, with admission only taking place when the older person was towards the end of their life and was in too poor a state to really benefit from the care home setting.

Finances are clearly part of the whole equation, because being in a care home is not cheap. I strongly contend that we must live within our means, but I think that we are seeing cases where some older people are being kept at home for financial reasons and as a result they are isolated and are not in the most appropriate setting.

One of the visits that the committee carried out was to Easterhouse in the east end of Glasgow and the convener and I also went with the Food Train on visits to Shettleston and Dennistoun. We met an elderly couple who lived three storeys up and they were struggling a bit with walking up the stairs but they did not want to move—they wanted to stay where they were. The kind of support that Food Train provides is ideal and essential for keeping people in their homes.

As the name suggests, Food Train is primarily about buying and delivering shopping for people. That is absolutely great, but it struck me and the convener that the volunteers were also able to spend time with people as they delivered the shopping, which was very much appreciated by those people.

We have to accept that paid care workers are very much under pressure with multiple visits and perhaps cannot spend a lot of time befriending and chatting. However, Food Train and other befriending services can give more of that time that people need.

Housing has to be part of the answer to all this and a range of housing must be available. I still have too many people in my constituency coming to me who everyone agrees are in the wrong type of housing—for example, an older person who is up a close and cannot manage the stairs—yet there are very few ground-floor flats and sheltered or very-sheltered housing is just not available. The Finance Committee looked at that issue a little while ago.

I think that I am running out of time so I will cut out one or two bits from my speech.

We need to support all types of housing and we need to think about whether we should be investing more in housing generally or whether we

should be making a more specialised investment in things such as sheltered and very-sheltered housing.

I think that we all learned from this study. In one sense, we all knew that isolation and loneliness existed but carrying out this study and reporting on it as we are today has underlined, for me at least, that it is not just a minor side issue; it is a real and serious issue that must remain firmly on our agenda.

15:38

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I thank the committee for its hard work and for the development of the report that we are discussing.

On the one hand it is motivating that the Scottish Parliament is one of the first Parliaments in the world to be discussing old age and social isolation, but on the other hand it is concerning that the issue has been allowed to take such a grip on our society. Nonetheless, by taking this first step into a public discussion, I hope that we can raise awareness about isolation and loneliness and explore how to reshape our current policies to tackle those issues.

The main theme emerging from the report is that isolation is not unique or exclusive to one group of people. Young people, old people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth, ethnic minorities and people in rural and urban areas can experience it.

The report makes specific reference to the difference between social isolation and loneliness. Although one is not more important than the other, social isolation can be measured while loneliness can be experienced in a very personal way and can be more difficult to address.

That is why community care, which will be integrated in just a few months, as well as social groups and other channels of socialisation all have a crucial role to play in reaching out to people who are at risk of being both lonely and socially isolated.

The report notes that social prescribing can be an invaluable source of ideas that can be taken forward. Some are already in place and it would be wise, and in fact it is recommended, to take the lessons from those projects and develop them further.

I note that the committee heard the repeated mentions of the importance of general practitioners. Food Train hit the nail on the head on GPs and the important part that they play in people's lives:

"In many cases, a lot of older people won't be in contact with any other service, but the one service they will usually have some interaction with will be their GP."

For older people who receive home care, especially in remote and rural areas, the Royal College of Nursing notes that physical and virtual connectivity, greater support for the role of advanced nurse practitioners and support for independent living can contribute to more information being shared and a better connection to the community. Providing adequate information is invaluable for those who have limited exposure to the services that provide it. As the report recommends, a national campaign to raise awareness among those who need information on social isolation and loneliness is most welcome.

Before the Scottish Government develops such a campaign, we need to have more information on the true scale of social isolation in Scotland. The Scottish Government is urged to commission research, as the report notes, because the full extent and prevalence of social isolation for younger and older people is still unknown. We need to answer those questions before engaging in an attitude-changing campaign.

Social participation and inclusion affects mental health and promotes good mental health. With demand for mental health services growing, and supply simply not being enough to address everyone's needs, we need to be bolder in our efforts to provide people with alternative options to medication.

The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations was clear. It is concerned that

"We are heading in the wrong direction. The sums of money that are spent on prescriptions vastly outweigh the sums of money that are available to support the kind of initiatives that would make a difference to people's lives."—*[Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee, 26 March 2015; c 22.]*

The third sector also brings up the question of how to achieve a more joined-up approach in working together to inform GPs and service users about their services and areas of work. That is a matter of concern. The approach of social prescribing can help people to get in touch with other people and become more active members of society. In turn, reduced medication can help people to gain more self-confidence, as well as save money for the NHS. The Royal College of General Practitioners also calls for more information and for social prescribing to be developed further in GP practices, based on the experience of the community links practitioners.

As I mentioned, the problem of social isolation is not exclusive to old age. The committee makes it clear that young people, particularly those from ethnic minorities or LGBT groups, can face bullying, which harms their self-confidence and pushes them into isolation. The serious long-term effects that early discrimination can have on young people are particularly concerning. Each and

every young person has the right to develop his or her identity. Inclusion and understanding of differences must become the norm, and I would welcome the inclusion of that aim in the campaign against isolation.

I will end by pointing to a very important recommendation by the committee that the Scottish Liberal Democrats have been voicing for some time. Reducing social isolation and loneliness is not a policy that can operate in a silo. Just as good housing is conducive to good health, good health also requires that normal social activities are part of an individual's daily life. We must look at this as a problem potentially affecting people from many social, ethnic, and age groups, and one that has wide consequences.

15:44

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP):

As a non-member of the committee, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Reading the record of the evidence-taking sessions, two points struck me about the cabinet secretary's evidence in June last year. The first was his comment that all the answers cannot come from Government. Often, he said, it is about interpersonal relationships and issues that are well outside the control and remit of the Government, although he recognised, of course, that isolation and loneliness can lead to other problems, not least with mental and physical health. I entirely agree with that. The second point was his highlighting of the fact that loneliness and isolation can affect anybody of any age and of any social or economic status, in any circumstance. Again, I agree. Loneliness is clearly not just an affliction of the elderly. As Susan Hunter of YouthLink Scotland told the committee:

"social isolation has an effect on young people's confidence, their self-belief, their anxiety levels, their ability to know that services are there for them and their ability to meet people for the first time."—*[Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee, 5 March 2015; c 3.]*

Loneliness is potentially universal, but it is also complex, and someone's ability to cope with loneliness is a personal reaction, the long-term consequences of which can be considerable.

The period after Christmas and new year is undoubtedly a good time to highlight the issue of loneliness. As Marco Biagi said, tomorrow night, BBC television will broadcast a programme on precisely that topic. It will be interesting to see the reaction to the programme.

As the committee's report makes clear, the full extent of the prevalence of social isolation for younger and older people in Scotland is not known. Much reference is made to one set of Age UK statistics, particularly the reference to the fact

that half of all people aged 75 and over live alone and that 17 per cent are in contact with family friends and neighbours less than once a week. However, as many organisations have pointed out, there is a lack of comprehensive information about the prevalence of isolation and more particularly its health impacts. Although loneliness would seem likely to increase the risk of depression, for example, we really do not have much information on that, so more research on the links between social isolation and health needs would be welcome.

In relation to just one area of policy—housing—the link to social isolation is clear. Sheltered housing and care homes need a community room and facility. I was encouraged by the evidence that was given to the committee by the North Ayrshire health and social care partnership that a major refurbishment programme for sheltered housing facilities will incorporate a community hub. However, as that same evidence session made clear, the issue is not about day centres per se, but about providing focused activities. With regard to physical immobility, it means that the community in the widest sense must come to the individual and that facilities must be available for that interaction to take place. In relation to those who are able to get out and about, we should not forget the importance of transport—particularly public transport—in tackling isolation. That is why the over-60s free bus pass is important, as it helps our older citizens to feel less isolated.

Alternative models of housing, such as the one for co-housing that is promoted by the Vivarium Trust, are to be encouraged. One such project is being run in my constituency, in conjunction with Kingdom Housing. Co-housing is a concept that was promoted in Denmark and involves homes that are designed for the individual but which exist within a community that contains communal facilities that are based on the preferences and needs of its members. Communal facilities are often in the form of a common house that contains areas for leisure, socialising, office space, gardens and workshops.

Ideally, we should strive to avoid creating ghettos of old people. Let us also recognise that, for example, although a young single mum might be glad of housing, her house might be a long way from family and friends. Too often, young mums can feel isolated because of the sheer pressure of time and lack of money that too often arises.

As many speakers have already suggested, the integration of health and social care provides an opportunity to build tackling social isolation into that change, but it cannot all be about integrating budgets. It ought also to be an opportunity to ensure that, while we prioritise care at home, which might well have a profound economic

impact, the need for social interaction is not forgotten in relation to helping to build more fulfilled lives.

It is also clear that carers frequently become more socially isolated because of the very demands of caring. That is an isolation that respite care will not necessarily solve. And what of the young and minorities of different types? I think that the committee is right to see the link between anti-bullying strategies and social isolation. Schools, in particular, have a key role to play. Although rates of suicide are declining, we must recognise that there is a group of young men whose isolation in the widest sense from the community places them at risk.

That perhaps brings home the fact that social isolation comes in many forms, which means that a one-size-fits-all strategy would have clear drawbacks. Indeed, any comprehensive strategy would have to be extremely nuanced.

Although I was pleased to note that the committee received a lot of submissions on the benefits of social prescribing or signposting people to services that might benefit them—all eminently sensible—I have a lot of sympathy with GPs. The Food Train might be right to suggest that the one service that a lot of people will have some interaction with is their GP. However, there are already substantial demands on GPs, so it is vital that, at the very least, clear information about local support services is made available to GPs and that GPs are not required to go out and look for it.

I welcome the committee's report and the debate that it has stimulated.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Before I call the next speaker, I remind members who wish to contribute that they should press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:50

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I was a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee when it undertook its inquiry into age and social isolation. I thought at the time that our work could point the way to new models of local service delivery and a new awareness of the true cost to society in health, social and economic terms when people feel isolated and lonely.

Loneliness takes no account of age and is not unique to older persons. It is prevalent among people of all ages in society, with a particular focus on the young and the old. Misconceptions about social isolation are only part of the picture, and we must continue to examine not only the reasons behind its causes but the practical solutions to tackle it where it occurs.

I am proud of the Scottish Parliament and the work that it has undertaken to pay specific attention to age and social isolation, I welcome the comments by Derek Young of Age Scotland, who stated:

“We have not been able to find another inquiry at any other parliamentary institution anywhere in the world that has specifically considered isolation and loneliness.”—*[Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee, 26 March 2015; c 17.]*

Although we live in a world that is increasingly interconnected, isolation and loneliness still exist, and it is important that work is undertaken to examine why that is the case and what we as a Parliament can do to address the issue. I thank the numerous charities, local authorities, health boards, health and social care partnerships and individuals who have been working tirelessly on the campaign. It is through their dedication and hard work that we are discussing the issue today in Parliament. I welcome the recommendations in the committee’s report, and I hope that we can collectively agree to work together to ensure that tackling isolation and loneliness is given the attention and political will that is required.

Social isolation is unique to the individual who is experiencing it. It is a complex issue, with many subjective elements. Many people perceive social isolation as pertaining to life in remote communities. Although that is sometimes the case, many people experience social isolation in some of our biggest cities or in the same house as members of their family.

A young person said in evidence to the committee that they often felt isolated in their bedroom when everyone else was in the house, but that experience was unique to them in their situation. Amazing work is undertaken by various organisations throughout the country, but we need a national strategy to integrate the issue with all policy considerations in order to both understand and tackle the concerns across Scotland.

To achieve that aim, we must work with local communities and existing local networks and build from there. We need to understand the individual, and often different, concerns affecting communities where people are experiencing social isolation. From examining that information, we can begin to build a model that will tackle the issues and ensure that those concerns are taken into account at all stages of further policy development.

At this stage, I should highlight the impact that the cuts to council budgets across the country will have on social isolation. The small and often community-based support services that are often funded by councils should be a paramount concern. Many older people rely on those services, and it is often the case that the return on

the investment that is required to provide them is more than matched by the reduction in the impact on other services. It is not always easy to conduct that kind of cross-sector cost benefit analysis, but government at all levels must get better at that if we are—in the spirit of the Christie report, to echo the minister’s comments—to deliver services that deliver the maximum outcomes.

Many voluntary organisations are trying their best to continue through this difficult period. I was privileged to have some contact with one of the organisations that gave evidence to the committee last year when I opened an art exhibition staged by the Impact Arts craft cafe. The craft cafe is a creative workshop programme, with support from an artist in residence, for residents of sheltered housing. I met some of those people when I opened the exhibition and found out about the work that Impact Arts undertakes. The craft cafe is a place where they can learn new skills, renew social networks and reconnect with their communities. That is the kind of work that challenges the stigma of loneliness and highlights the importance of social contact for everyone, no matter what age they are.

I agree with the committee’s recommendation that the issues of social isolation and loneliness should be built into the plans and strategies of health and social care partnerships across Scotland. We must understand that health concerns change over time, and isolation is increasingly becoming an established health concern for the people of Scotland. We must tackle it, as we would any other health or social concern that impacts daily on the lives of citizens.

Understanding the root causes of social isolation and loneliness is a difficult process due to the subjectivity of the problem. However, some things come up consistently when we discuss the issue, one of which is access to appropriate and affordable transport. That comes up time and again in both urban and rural settings and for people of all ages.

When I used to work as a policy officer in the accessible transport team in Fife, I spent a lot of time talking to people who used public transport and people who did not, to try to find ways of improving our services. Too often, older people would tell me that they did not have a transport problem, saying, “It’s okay, hen, I never go out.” When I asked them where they would go if they could, I soon got a different answer. They mentioned all the things that people with good access to transport and good mobility take for granted—shopping, social visiting, leisure, health and work.

The lack of access to appropriate transport is one of the factors that contribute to social isolation and it requires co-ordinated partnership effort and

action by providers of transport services, local government and the voluntary sector. Such partnership working will underpin any progress that we make on addressing social isolation. It is the connections between services that make the difference, and that is most effectively managed and encouraged at a local level. I look forward to seeing the committee's report having an influence on this on-going area of work.

15:56

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I found both the Equal Opportunities Committee's report and the Government's response to it very interesting. Colleagues' speeches today have shown just how wide-ranging the report is. However, when we move forward on this, as we all appear to wish to do, it is important that we note the clear difference between loneliness and social isolation. I worry that, if we use the terms interchangeably, we might take away from the importance of tackling social isolation and what we can do about it. I understand the committee's decision to use the links between the two things to inform its recommendations, but we must recognise that personal loneliness cannot always be addressed by strategies or public service practices.

I firmly believe that there is a role for public services to play in helping to alleviate some forms of loneliness, but much more so with social isolation. After all, as the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights points out in his letter accompanying his response to the committee's report,

"Evidence shows that where ... people have strong, supportive social networks ... benefits are ... higher on a range of socio-economic and health inequalities measures".

He also mentions something that I feel strongly everyone in all the public services should strive for in all that they do—wellbeing.

I note the committee's recommendation of a national strategy. I am not yet convinced that that would be the best way forward, but I could be convinced. The other recommendations include that much more research is carried out, and I note that the cabinet secretary, Alex Neil, has committed to reviewing the existing data, with a report being due by the summer this year. I am particularly pleased that research on what we call social prescribing and the linking of systems will form part of the report, because it is incredibly important that we have joined-up approaches, as others have mentioned.

The integration of health and social care is a start, and we should recognise that it is about more than home care and freeing up hospital beds. It is about the promotion of wellbeing and

the associated benefits to the individual and the community as a whole.

Another recommendation from the committee is that there be

"a national publicity campaign to tackle stigma on loneliness"

tied in with anti-bullying and so on. I can see the need for that, and we should link it with training on good practice and joined-up approaches in public services. Too often, people can feel stigmatised by those agencies and organisations that are actually there to help. I believe that we are all guilty—I certainly am—of judgmentalism to some degree, and I am afraid that, too often, those who are already socially isolated can be made to feel more so by attitudes that are encountered when they come up against what they perceive as authority.

A lot more can be said about that and about other interesting subjects in the committee report. For example, there is the availability of community transport, which Jayne Baxter just talked about. Community transport is incredibly important for allowing people to have social links, and it ties in with the great shopmobility scheme that we have in East Kilbride—I know that Jayne Baxter has been heavily involved with the shopmobility scheme in her area. The scheme gives people the ability to meet in the local town centre, particularly in new towns such as East Kilbride, and pass the time with friends.

In tackling the issue of social isolation, we should also look at housing development and design, and take note of the importance of landscaping, the environment and the sense of place, as well as models of occupancy and housing allocation policy.

I will finish by talking a wee bit about the voluntary sector and volunteering. In terms of countering loneliness and social isolation, volunteers and the voluntary sector in general do a fantastic amount of work, but they do not always get credit for it. However, I want to record what Calderglen high school in East Kilbride does through a befriending scheme. What I think is wonderful about it is that the whole sixth year ties in with the befriending scheme. They visit elderly people in their own homes who feel lonely and isolated, and they invite them to the Café Clare project to interact with others.

What is really important about that befriending scheme is that it works for both sides and is not just about young people turning up to do their duty and tick off the volunteering box. I am finding that real friendships across the generations are being made through the scheme. What is also important is that it is not just about the elderly people feeling that the young people are paying them a visit; the elderly people also feel useful because they are

imparting their knowledge and experience, so the friendships are working in that sense. If people feel useful, that goes a long way towards having a sense of well-being and avoiding social isolation and loneliness.

I look forward to further discussions about this subject as we move on.

16:02

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I thank the committee for its report and I congratulate the convener, Margaret McCulloch, on outlining in her speech the detail of how the committee addressed the issue.

I welcome the fact that members across the chamber are clearly interested in addressing the questions involved. However, I say to the minister that, although his contribution to the debate was very thoughtful, I think that it is a mistake to exclude the possibility of a national strategy at this stage. I think that Alex Neil has described such a strategy as a bolt-on solution, but that is not how I perceive it. A strategy would allow more than just the Government to ask, "How do we address social isolation? Are we doing things through our policy that make the issue worse?" It is about mainstreaming thinking about the consequence of Government decisions as well as active policy in the area.

It is clear that I am not the only one who was touched by the John Lewis Christmas advert, which symbolised the sense of loneliness and isolation that is felt by some older people by placing an elderly man on the moon, a world away from the happy celebrations of families on earth. However, the John Lewis message cannot be just for Christmas, to be discarded along with the wacky and usually ill-advised jumpers. The reality for many who look forward at old age is fear of two things in particular. The first is the fear of dementia and loss of capacity and self. The second is the dread of loneliness: outliving contemporaries, with families far away, and being left with little to do, few to see and only rare opportunities to be involved in the events and occasions that enrich our lives. Healthcare, detection of dementia and effective care services and support for those looking after their loved ones must continue to improve, shaped by the experience and understanding of those who know best the impact of dementia and its consequences.

Tackling loneliness and isolation is important because they have such an impact on health and wellbeing; and their cruelty surely ought to speak to the need for compassion for those who suffer. We know that loneliness and isolation are no respecters of person or class, although living in poverty makes the challenge of isolation more

difficult still. We all know of elderly people who have retired, lost the routine and camaraderie of their workplace and fallen into a lonely life. We know of elderly people who have been widowed and left after many years of caring and are very isolated because of their caring, which excluded them from maintaining friendships and connections. I commend the south-west Glasgow carers centre in my constituency, which not only supports people in a caring role but keeps the doors open and welcomes them when they are bereaved as they cope with the loss where the caring was before. We all know many people who are in those circumstances.

Jenny Marra and, indeed, the Government are right to say that this is not just about the role of the state in spending money, but there are choices that we can make and decisions to take that will make lives better and address the blight on too many lives. It has been acknowledged that the job of the Government is not simply to wring its hands. If we want to address isolation, we should do something basic. We should start with the person and follow with action. The challenge is huge, but there is a simple question for the Government. We do not expect it to do everything, but is it making things better or worse through what it does?

How many elderly people in some of our poorest communities rely on GPs who are busier and under more pressure and have access to fewer resources than their peers in better-off areas? As doctors in my constituency have told me, although those people need time from their GP, the funding settlement allows doctors to spend huge amounts on drug prescriptions while denying them the means to tackle underlying problems, which are often not medical ones at all. It is ironic that an elderly person from a more affluent area who suffers from loneliness and isolation is more likely to be given time by their GP than someone who comes from a poorer area. That simply cannot be just.

This is not a theoretical argument about funding formulae. The Government must address the fundamental injustice in the division of spending for GPs, as it not only fails to tackle health inequality but exacerbates it.

Sandra White: Does the member agree that more deep-end practice link workers and social prescribing, as recommended by the committee, would be one way of tackling what she sees as people from deprived areas not being treated proportionately?

Johann Lamont: I recognise the particular work of link workers, but there is the fundamental question why GP practices with more people with more problems and more need of a GP are given less money than GP practices in more well-off areas. No matter the size of the cake, we need to

look at how that money is currently being distributed, because that means that people in poorer communities who need to talk to somebody are less likely to get that than people in better-off areas.

On transport, how many isolated older people have a bus pass but no bus to take them safely and easily to the shops? In my constituency, for example, many routes have changed and two buses are involved, whereas there would have been one bus in the past. Faced with that, some have chosen to go out less, and increased isolation is the consequence.

One small step that has already been referred to would be community transport having access to the bus pass scheme on a fair basis and funding being directed to communities that would most benefit from effective bus services. In addition, of course, there should be understanding in bus route planning of the need for older people, particularly women, to feel safe. That means more direct routes to key areas rather than routes that involve two or more buses.

If we understand that opportunities to meet others and go to lunch clubs and to be supported to go to the library or the church can be the difference between thriving and simply surviving in our homes, what follows? If we understand that connection, how do we support volunteers, who are often the bridge into an active life, when voluntary sector organisations face cuts? Why disproportionately cut local government with the consequence that support services that are not statutory but can be life enhancing disappear and the lifeline away from isolation that they represent is withdrawn?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you draw to a close, please?

Johann Lamont: In conclusion, if we all responded to the man on the moon because he hit a nerve, we must all individually look at what we can do, but those with the privilege and responsibility of power can do much more. Let the money follow need. If we have a conversation about that, Labour members will support the Government. Otherwise, I fear that we will continue to isolate politics from the real world. That is a bleak future for all in Scotland and particularly those who live with loneliness and isolation.

16:09

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): In her contribution, Johann Lamont said something very important indeed, on which I want to anchor my remarks: we must start with the individual.

In its response to the committee's report, the Government says that the report

"usefully acknowledges the responsibility of citizens, public services and the Scottish Government in taking any action forward."

That is pretty much self-evident.

I will say one or two things about the approach that the committee has taken, but before I do, I say that because it is the first parliamentary report on such a subject, we have no point of comparison with predecessor reports. It is clearly an excellent piece of work; it is thorough in its scope and analysis and in its drawing of conclusions. However, for next time, there are one or two things that we might think of doing.

Annabel Goldie: When does Mr Stevenson think the next time will occur?

Stewart Stevenson: As Winston Churchill and others have said, predicting the future is particularly difficult, so I will not try to do it. That is a matter for committees.

I say seriously that it is in many ways a first-class report, but let us look at who gave evidence to the committee. Of the written evidence, slightly less than 10 per cent came from individuals, and every single person who gave oral evidence represented an organisation and had a job title. I recognise absolutely that when the committee went out and engaged communities, it talked to what I might call "real people"—which may sound patronising, although I do not intend it to be. It is a fundamental challenge for us in Parliament and in committees to get beyond the institutions and to talk to the people who are actually involved. I want to talk a little about that.

In the 13 recommendations that the committee made, the word "people" occurs only twice. It occurs properly but it occurs—

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Will the member take an intervention?

Stewart Stevenson: I will come back to John Finnie if I may, but I want to develop my point. One recommendation says that the Scottish Government should identify a

"typical profile of people who are at risk",

which I think would be entirely right. The last recommendation talks about technology and people.

The reason why I use people as an anchor is that I am one of the older participants in the debate—I will be 70 later this year—and a number of my friends from a long time ago are now affected by the very issues in the report. It is a great report in that it will equip corporate Scotland, the third sector, the Government and councils to respond even better to the problem. However, I

am not sure that it reaches the point of empowering individuals who have no status other than being, for example, the friend of someone whose mental capacity is diminishing. One thing that is absolutely necessary in interacting with a person who is still able to communicate but is suffering from the early stages of dementia, is knowing how to interact and how to give them something from the experience, when one visits them. I have a small circle of friends whom I visit who have some degree of mental incapacity. One of the key things to do, for example, is to talk about things that happened 30 or 40 years ago, because generally such memories endure, while short-term memory is often the part that decays. Perhaps I am privileged, because I come from a medical background through my father, to have that understanding, while others may not. We need to be sure with our responses that we equip people to do that.

I intervened on Annabel Goldie on social isolation versus being alone. I think that people find it more difficult to make friends as they get older. It is easier to keep or to refresh the friends that one has, and one way of doing that is through technology. Some of the old technologies can be quite good. This year I decided not to send Christmas cards and instead sent letters; each letter was personalised. There were quite a few people of my age with whom I have been exchanging Christmas cards for the past 25 years without our necessarily ever meeting. That was a pretty purposeless interaction, to be blunt. I have been amazed to suddenly get responses by writing just a couple of sentences on the back of a circular letter. There are things that we could be doing as individuals and as corporate Scotland to help others to understand the sort of things that can be done.

As people's mental faculties decline and their memory becomes less effective, we need to focus on their partners, because they are socially isolated in their own homes and often find it difficult to live all the time with the person to whom they have been married, or with whom they have lived, for decades. They, too, need support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you draw to a close, please?

Stewart Stevenson: On social interaction, I have previously talked about reducing taxation on bingo, and I make another plea to the Government to do that, because there is medical evidence that bingo is one way of keeping people mentally alert.

In rural Aberdeenshire—and, I believe, in Dumfries and Galloway—there is a particular problem in getting high-speed broadband to individual homes because of the technology that phones in those areas use to connect to exchanges: the use of exchange-only lines means

that a big proportion of homes cannot get connected to fibre directly. The social inclusion that results from using Skype, for example, and from being connected electronically would help. That is another little thing that could be done.

The report is excellent and I commend the committee for it, but next time we should perhaps move on to look at what individuals can do, rather than at the corporate response.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that all the extra time in the debate has now gone, so I ask the next two members to keep to six minutes.

16:16

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I would like to thank all the contributors to the report and the staff who were involved in preparing it. Those contributors were very real people—that is what I wanted to say to Stewart Stevenson. No slight is intended, but they were very real people whom I had a coffee with in Easterhouse, and they were very real young people whom I saw give Christian Allard a hammering at pool at the youth centre on Islay. I understand the point that Stewart Stevenson made, which was about the general nature of the people who come to Parliament to give evidence. At the ceilidh—the good news is that I did not dance—we met very real people; we sat and had cups of tea with them and got to understand them.

I want to touch on an issue that a few members have mentioned—the definition of “social isolation”. Talking about the definition might seem like a very dry place to start, but it was actually extremely helpful. It was important that people said what they understood the term to mean, but we wanted some form of evidential basis, and the definition that we got from the academic Professor Mima Cattán was about what is measurable and what is personal. It is not a case of saying that one is more important than t'other; it is simply a case of contrasting those two aspects.

The issue of contrast also applies to the locations that we went to—Easterhouse and Islay. In Easterhouse, we heard from Food Train about the wider role that it undertakes, which is typical of the extra value that we get from the third sector. That was compelling evidence to hear.

We had planned to visit the Jura Care Centre, but we were unable to go because of the weather. That gives members a flavour of community isolation: especially in recent months, Islay and Jura have had significant issues with that. I had the good fortune to visit the centre during the summer recess, and it is an excellent model that is often held up by people who are aware of social care, which is about sustaining people in their homes in the community. As people get older and

frailer, they gravitate towards the centre, where there is a respite facility. It is excellent and I commend it.

There was commonality in the issues of the two communities that we visited, relating to housing and transport, for example. I hear what Johann Lamont said about buses; she mentioned people having to take two buses. The challenge of getting suitable transport in urban settings came up, but the contrast there is with the many parts of rural Scotland in which there are no buses. Nothing negative is inferred by that, but there is a challenge in getting about at all in some rural areas, not least because of the dearth of bus services.

The people whom we met were very real people, and I am grateful to all of them for their contributions. In some cases, it was a very soul-searching experience and we dealt with some very sensitive issues. The legacy of gangland culture came up in Easterhouse, and we also heard about the challenge of dealing with school bullying, and all the various relationships that go along with that, in an isolated community.

I will comment on the Scottish Government's response, in which it spoke about what it sees as the challenges. It mentioned the challenge of "rising expectations". I know that the Government did not mean that entirely negatively, but if our communities have rising expectations, that is a good thing.

The Scottish Government also said that the challenges include

"pressure on resources and living standards, public health issues, an ageing population"—

what a great news story that is, with all the statistics about how much longer we are all going to live—

"and the impacts of multiple deprivation".

I add to that list the impacts of rural deprivation—especially fuel poverty, which is a significant issue.

The Scottish Government's response said that it "has a clear view of what works in public service design."

The public do, too. The Government also assured us that its approach to reforming public services

"places the needs and aspirations of people at the centre of all that we do."

That is reassuring.

The response mentioned plans to realign services to meet the new challenges. It also alluded to a number of positive initiatives—not least of which is the recently commissioned research into design for ageing.

Age Scotland was a significant contributor to our inquiry. I am grateful for its briefing, which expresses disappointment about the Government's response that

"a national strategy might lack impact",

not least because there are

"34 specific strategies the Government either has adopted or is developing, with 12 of those in the health field alone."

The landscape may be cluttered, but social isolation issues are not going to go away.

Another thing in Age Scotland's briefing that I will talk about, and to which Jenny Marra alluded, is the idea that, although

"the State is not primarily responsible for the quality of people's personal relationships, it does ... have to deal with the consequences where these break down or are absent."

That is true, but the state is statutorily responsible for provision of education, health and care. We forget that at our peril.

I am concerned about how the profit motive in social care, housing and transport affects social isolation. Housing has been mentioned.

I want also to mention another issue in the Scottish Government's response, on comments that were made by the then chief medical officer, Dr Harry Burns. It said:

"Dr Burns was clear that the fundamentals of human well-being that underpin health and fulfilment lie in attachment and in lives with a sense of coherence and purpose."

Clearly, that is what we all want.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in producing the report. There is talk of additional research, which would be helpful. I am sure that Parliament will revisit the topic.

16:22

Hanzala Malik (Glasgow) (Lab): Good afternoon, Presiding Officer. I am delighted to take part in today's debate on the Equal Opportunities Committee's inquiry into age and social isolation. The Scottish Government has a lot to do in this area of equality, because people who are living with terminal illness and their carers and families can often experience social isolation.

I have been contacted by several constituents and community groups that are suffering from local authority cuts and the huge increase in the costs of attending day centres for the elderly. The cuts that our elderly people face are creating real hardship. Many older people's voluntary organisations and groups are being shuffled around in a bid to accommodate them and cut their expenditure, but that has totally failed, particularly in Glasgow.

In its submission to the Equal Opportunities Committee, Glasgow City Council said:

“Glasgow is Scotland’s largest city. Outside London, Glasgow is one of the largest concentrations of economic activity ... The city and its surrounding area, the Clyde Valley, make a significant contribution to Scotland’s economy. Glasgow ... has a high level of citizens living in single occupant households”.

The council appreciates that

“not every one of these people will feel or consider themselves socially isolated but living alone is considered a large factor in isolation and loneliness”.

More than 30 per cent of households in Glasgow, which is nearly 87,000 households,

“have one single occupant under the age of 64”.

Nearly 13 per cent of households, which is more than 36,000 households,

“have one single occupant aged 65+”

and 14.5 per cent of households, which is more than 41,000 households,

“have an occupant who is a lone parent”.

Looking after our citizens is vital. People must be prioritised and looked after. It is crucial to have regular visits to the elderly by professionals, who should consider equality and cultural-awareness issues.

The best places to raise awareness of the opportunities and support that are available to people who are experiencing social isolation are the places where they tend to go most often, such as general practitioner surgeries, community nursing facilities, community groups and health centres. We require a national awareness-raising campaign that is backed by local information provision through, for example, GP surgeries and other organisations.

Cultural recognition cannot be ignored. The Government must reassure many people in our communities of its commitment to and determination about providing the best possible service. The delivery record must be monitored so that there is clear evidence that the services that are being delivered are fit for purpose. There is no point in having services if we do not record or monitor what people are doing.

When we give our pensioners free bus passes, we like to say that that is a job well done. I am sorry, but I disagree; we can do a lot more for our elderly and vulnerable people. Our pensioners should also get free off-peak cinema tickets and access to our sports centres, which lie empty all day. They should be able to use golf courses and all the other such facilities out there. Businesses should not get a free ride any more; they need to demonstrate that they care for elderly people in this country and they need to make a meaningful

contribution. Local authorities and the Government should not have to pay bus companies for the free travel; if a company wants a licence to operate in Scotland, allowing our elderly people to travel free should be part and parcel of the licence conditions.

Such things would help to reduce isolation and to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities. There are many examples of good work that is being done, but we also need to examine the services that we are providing and ensure that there is no duplication. I do not know who monitors voluntary organisations that get grants and other funding; there is no record of how they are monitored and assessed and of whether they provide value for money. I want the minister to take it on board that we need proper monitoring in place to ensure that decisions are evidence based and that people get appropriate services.

16:28

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Not being a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I begin by congratulating the committee’s members on an excellent report following their extensive and detailed exploratory work on the important issue of age and social isolation. I confess that, when I heard the subject of the debate, I assumed that it would deal exclusively with problems of social isolation in the elderly. However, having read the report, I have been forcibly reminded that any age group can be adversely affected by a sense of isolation and loneliness.

Social isolation also affects people from all backgrounds, including the full range of protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010. People with disabilities, people with a range of long-term conditions, people who are restricted physically, psychologically and socially in coming to terms and dealing with terminal illness, even when they are surrounded by family and friends, and unpaid carers—not least those whose caring role has ceased following bereavement—may all experience isolation and loneliness. That may—and often does—go unrecognised because it is not thought about as a possibility by people who are preoccupied with their own lives.

I have a little personal experience of social isolation that would nowadays be called bullying. As an only child growing up in the early 1950s, I was roughed up and called names because I did not speak in the broad Aberdeen dialect of my schoolmates, probably because my father had been brought up south of the border. I remember my mum telling me to put a brave face on it and to try to ignore the jibes. I eventually learned to cope by developing one language for home and another for the playground. However, the experience was

difficult at the time, and without parental support it could have been devastating.

What stands out for me in the committee's report is the importance of communication. If we fail to communicate and make proper contact with people, we will never fully understand the needs of the individuals in our communities and the sort of help and support that they may need to live a full, inclusive life whatever their age or physical status and whether they live alone or with the company of other people. It is telling that, in an age when so many channels of communication are available, there is still a significant problem with social isolation and loneliness in Scotland. The report gives us a timely reminder that it is everybody's problem, that it should not be ignored or tolerated and that a change in attitude is required in our society if its impact is to be reduced.

It seems strange, given the widespread nature of the problem in the modern world, that nowhere else has the issue of social isolation been considered by any parliamentary institution. The Equal Opportunities Committee is therefore to be congratulated on leading the way. I hope that its recommendations will have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of many people, not only in Scotland but further afield.

The 16 recommendations in the report are too numerous to deal with in detail, but the first two are, I think, particularly important. The first is:

"that the Scottish Government develops a national strategy on social isolation that ensures that the issue is integrated within all policy considerations so that the impact of isolation and loneliness is understood and tackled across Scotland."

The second is

"that the Scottish Government ensures that the issues of social isolation and loneliness are built into the plans and strategies of health and social care partnerships across Scotland."

I welcome the Government's overall positive response to the report, which the minister outlined.

We are at a crucial stage in the development of the integration of health and social care. If the integration joint partnerships take on board the need to prevent and deal with social isolation, they can go a long way towards improving the health and wellbeing of many people in both urban and rural Scotland who are currently disadvantaged.

Communities need to be made aware that they have a major role to play in highlighting the importance of social contact for everyone in their area, regardless of age and background, and that local action can be taken to improve communication and let people know how to contact local services, which can improve the lives of people who are at risk of social isolation. We have seen an excellent example of such

community spirit this week in Ballater and Braemar, in my region, in the aftermath of December's devastating floods. That spirit of caring for neighbours is typical of those small communities.

The report highlights the importance of community and public transport and the need for health and social care partnerships to incorporate housing issues and links with housing professionals into service planning. Those are important aspects of the committee's inquiry, as is the recommendation that the outcome of the deep-end project's work should be shared across Scotland. It is clear, too, that research is needed to assess what is required to prevent and deal with social isolation issues across all age groups.

A large number of excellent projects and community activities to identify and tackle the widespread issue of social isolation and loneliness are already in place in many parts of Scotland, and I feel that I should mention one in my region. It is also mentioned in the report and has been cited by Christian Allard this afternoon. The Aberdeenshire Signposting Project works with people who are affected by, or who are at risk of developing, low to moderate mental health problems to increase their level of social contact and their usage of locally available leisure and educational facilities. It does that by putting those who have been referred to the project by GPs and others in touch with sources of appropriate support, help and advice. Such so-called social prescribing has been found to be beneficial by witnesses to the committee, and we have heard about a number of such innovative projects from members today in what has been an excellent and far-reaching debate.

Nevertheless, the recognition of the need for such activity, as well as its availability, is piecemeal and it is clear that there needs to be a co-ordinated effort to extend best practice across the country. That can be achieved only through Government involvement in developing a national commitment to mainstreaming the issues within all policy considerations. The excellent report by the Equal Opportunities Committee shows the way, and, once again, I congratulate everyone who has been involved in a pioneering piece of work that I hope will bear fruit in many places in the months and years ahead and will help to overcome the problems of the many people who face, or who are at risk of facing, social isolation in our communities.

16:35

Drew Smith (Glasgow) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Labour Party and I reiterate our thanks to my fellow committee members and, in particular,

Margaret McCulloch, the committee's convener, for the report.

I was not a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee when it conducted the inquiry, but I enjoyed hearing committee members' perspectives on the evidence taken as the report was prepared for publication. The subject was broad and the issues raised are undoubtedly complex, but they are also very human. The chances are that all of us will have experienced loneliness at some time in our lives, for whatever length of time—although perhaps John Mason is slightly less vulnerable to loneliness, due to the benefits of his tent, as he explained. The power of the personal stories that the committee collected in the report has given importance to the debate and has resulted in the extensive coverage of the issues that the committee has achieved.

The committee has also achieved an understanding of the public policy issues raised by the loneliness of some of our citizens through its recognition of factors such as age, rurality and social isolation in a more comprehensive sense. As members have said throughout the debate, and as the committee's report made clear, loneliness can be a consequence of social isolation, but not all socially isolated people are lonely, and not all lonely people are socially isolated. Social isolation can be a risk of rurality, but it is not exclusively so. Social exclusion can create the risk of isolation for those who live in our biggest towns and cities.

Although the committee was specifically interested in the vulnerabilities impacted on by age, notably among our older and younger citizens, it recognised that those things are risk factors, not causes, and that generalisation is not likely to be the best aid to an improved response from public services or society more generally.

The report recognises that we live in an era of technology. It highlights that technology can assist communication and sustain valuable networks, but that it carries a risk of minimising or competing with face-to-face contact, evidenced by the dangers of addiction to or unhealthy usage of technology. There is also the risk of technological solutions being pursued for cost or other good reasons, such as improving the coverage or accessibility of a service. In reality, such technological solutions might have the impact of reducing an isolated person's contact with an imperfect but potentially more human form of interaction.

As I said, the great strength of the report is the human stories that it has unearthed from diverse witnesses who live in varied circumstances around the country, to whom many members have referred this afternoon.

In the time remaining to me, I will briefly touch on a couple of the committee's recommendations. My party fully supports the committee's conclusion that loneliness should be recognised as a public health challenge. It is a circumstance that has the potential to be life limiting, and mitigating it will have beneficial effects on other aspects of a person's health and reduce the need for more costly or invasive interventions later.

From my own work in the field of promoting health-enhancing physical activity, I know that combating loneliness is taken seriously by a range of projects that seek to make a comprehensive difference to our lives in the roundest sense. The word "wellness" is sometimes used to describe that, which some people like and some people do not—Linda Fabiani was correct to use the word "wellbeing", which is probably better. There is no doubt that there is no political divergence between the parties on the better lives that we want to see for our citizens. In his letter to Ms McCulloch, the cabinet secretary referred to the Government's national purpose and broad indicators relating to quality of life. That is to be welcomed, and it is welcomed by Labour.

The committee specifically makes the case for a national campaign against the stigma of loneliness. Although the Government has not endorsed that call, I think that there is merit in examining the idea further.

It is a hardy perennial issue for those of us who serve on committees, particularly when there is an open inquiry on a complex and broad social issue, that there is a call for more data to be collected. I confess that I can find that a bit frustrating, because there will always be no end of experts who could examine an issue further for us but, at some point, a political choice needs to be made about whether the challenge is sufficiently serious for action to be taken, rather than just to have more data collected. To be fair, I am sure that the Government recognises that tension, which my colleague Johann Lamont raised earlier.

The Government's response to the committee rightly tries to set the issue in the wider context of public service reform. Jenny Marra was right that we should not become too preoccupied with the role of social or other public services as the only means to improve lives versus other societal changes and the individual actions that we can all take.

I end by highlighting the particular circumstance of loneliness in the care environment, particularly for older people or those who suffer from a range of conditions, which a number of members have mentioned.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please do so very quickly, because we are over time.

Drew Smith: I will do so.

In my view, the biggest challenge for the next session of the Scottish Parliament will be to address some of those issues, and the committee's report will be of great benefit and assistance in that regard. I am happy to commend the report.

16:41

Marco Biagi: There is something that is often said but not as often meant in the chamber, but I want to say it and mean it: this has been a really valuable debate. A committee of the Parliament has identified a social problem and explored it and made recommendations, and the Government has weighed them and taken many of them on board. We are now debating it in an informed way, as a weighty issue, recognising the substance, putting forward perspectives, analysing the choices and trade-offs in a grown-up way and largely setting aside any synthetic partisan rancour. Every single speech today has been creditable. This is the Holyrood that the outside world never sees and, in truth, we do not often enough see it ourselves. As a soon to be former MSP, I really wish that we did.

I go back to the speech from Jenny Marra, whose vignette about the conversations that canvassers at the door sometimes have was one of the many things that I heard that really struck a chord with me because of my personal experience. It illustrated in an evocative way the effect of loneliness that I presume we have all seen at first hand.

Jenny Marra also asked whether we think that things are different in Scotland. My answer to that is complicated. I have no evidence that the problem of social isolation is any greater or lesser in Scotland than in other countries that are experiencing the same changes in age structure, employment, household type, communication methods and so on. However, my intuition is that the countries that we seek to emulate by having better support for the elderly, more stable working patterns and stronger local communities might also have better performance on social connectedness.

I argue that we are distinctive because Scotland's approach governmentally to public services—what we should do as the Scottish Government and the public sector—has connectedness at its heart. From “Throw open the doors” to co-production and the national standards for community engagement, we recognise as a matter of practice that connectedness means better government.

As John Finnie has referred to, we recognise Harry Burns's point

“that the fundamentals of human well-being that underpin health and fulfilment lie in attachment and in lives with a sense of coherence and purpose.”

Members have set that out very well. We recognise that connectedness means better society. We can argue about the difference between strategy and a strategy that has a glossy cover and can sit on a shelf, but what we are doing, and what I do as a community empowerment minister day in, day out, puts community and connectedness at the heart of the Government's approach to creating a fairer country.

I hope that the fact that I am a community empowerment minister in the overarching portfolio of social justice shows our understanding that community has to be at the heart of how we make Scotland a fairer and better place and improve the all-round wellbeing of our citizens. The Harry Burns perspective is also our perspective. The point is not that the state should say goodbye or do everything; it is that the state should ensure that there is a space for discussion, deliberation and connection and then respond to the priorities coming from that process as a democratic body.

In community empowerment, that means that, if a community wants to take over something and deliver it itself locally, it can do that through an asset transfer request and, if it wants to guide the public sector to respond, it can do that through a participation request. That is the philosophy. It will be embodied in the social justice action plan not only in how we brought it about from the fairer Scotland work but in how we develop our solutions for the country.

I visited an Age Scotland group in Cupar, where everyone talked about how valuable the group was and how it got them out of the house. They had all heard about it through word of mouth but were clear that there were more people in the community who were not taking up the service. Such experiences are effective in connecting key decision makers with the people who directly experience the challenges that we want to solve. They create a richer contribution than simply receiving something on paper from a representative group.

When I launched our support for the big lunch and observed the line dancing at my local constituency big lunch—I did not take part; there are no photographs because I made sure that any were burned—somebody asked me what it had to do with community empowerment. I said that there had to be a community before it could be empowered. My first encounter with the concept was Robert Putnam's “Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community”. He observed that, in America 20 years ago, the number of people bowling had been going up but

the number of leagues had been going down. People were becoming more disconnected and he ascribed many problems to that.

It is fair to say that more people are living on their own. In the 1961 census, the one-person household was the least common type at 14 per cent of households; by 2011, it was the most common type at 35 per cent. We must accept that we need creative solutions to that. I saw a *Guardian* piece about purpose-built housing for young people with communal space. It was very Shoreditch and Islington but it seemed an interesting idea and there was certainly a demand for it.

John Finnie: Does the minister acknowledge that we need to revalue public space? It has been vilified in many quarters and we need it for communities to operate in.

Marco Biagi: I will always value public space and I very much value communities taking over its management themselves. That is a far cry from the attempts to privatise and fence it off in other parts of the world.

I go back to John Mason's point on choice. The last time that I saw the inside of a tent was on a film screen and Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal were in it, so I completely respect John Mason's ability to face up to the Islay environment in that way. The key is the choice. It was his choice to do that. The difference between solitude and isolation is choice.

Choices can lead to unforeseen consequences. One rural local authority once highlighted to me a phenomenon that it was encountering of old people retiring to the country and leaving behind family and support only to find that that led to difficulties further down the line. Perhaps that is a higher-income example—not everybody can retire to a wee house in the country—but it also shows that isolation cuts across class. When stigma is a big issue, we have to be very careful about how we characterise it.

Malcolm Chisholm referred to online issues. Again, we have to be sensitive in our characterisations of those. In some ways, online interaction may be shallower but, for the person who suffers identity-based isolation in a physical community, connecting online with other people with the same identity and knowing that they are not alone can be a lifeline. Poor characterisations of behaviours can themselves be isolating.

To go back to some of the language that we have used, we should recognise social isolation but never accept it. It is a scourge on our whole society and, taken to the maximum, threatens the existence of anything worthy of that name. Every person who is locked in their home alone for weeks, every person who is locked out from their

surroundings more metaphorically because of the fear of harassment and anyone who is isolated from the warmth of human connection in any other way is a tragedy. We are right to debate the issue and we will have to work together to ensure that all individuals and communities in Scotland flourish.

16:49

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I think that I speak for the whole committee—I certainly speak for myself—when I say that, when we embarked on this investigation, we had a wee bit of trepidation because we did not quite understand loneliness and social isolation. We had to look at the issue very carefully.

One of the other things, obviously, is that we did not realise that we would be feeling very worried about John Mason in his tent when it was so windy and rainy on our visit to Islay. I am sure that we can all agree on that particular point—we did worry, but John was absolutely fine and so were we.

I thank my fellow committee members, both past and present, who have worked on the inquiry, the many groups and individuals who took part, and the clerks and the staff of the Equal Opportunities Committee, whose sterling work enabled us to produce the report. They did absolutely fantastic work, and I am sure that our thanks go out to all the staff, some of whom have moved on to other committees but some of whom have stayed with us.

We have heard from evidence and from members' speeches that loneliness and social isolation cross all age groups. Although the common perception was that older people were more likely to be affected, we know from the evidence that we received and from speaking to people that that is not always the case. Indeed, as we found out from our evidence-gathering visits to Islay and Easterhouse, which members have already mentioned, younger people—or indeed anyone, depending on their circumstances—can also experience loneliness and isolation.

Malcolm Chisholm touched on the example of the young family in Easterhouse. We were quite shocked that, because of a certain culture in certain parts of Easterhouse, the family was frightened to let their young kids go out and those young kids did indeed speak with American accents because all they did was play video games.

We also heard from the many volunteers in Easterhouse who were frightened to cross from one side of the road to the other because of the unfortunate prevalence of a gang culture, which shocked a lot of us. Knowing the area myself, I was quite shocked about that. However, the work

that was going on with the young people was absolutely phenomenal, and we praise them for that.

As I say, the issue can touch everybody's lives, not just older people. The convener, in her opening speech, went into great detail as to why the committee recommended that a national strategy be developed, citing evidence from Jane Kellock of West Lothian Council, among others. Jane said that all the agencies in health and social care partnerships need

"to consider the structures of how we deliver services".—
[*Official Report, Equal Opportunities Committee, 23 April 2015, c 7.*]

I have heard the minister's reply on that particular issue, and it is one of the key areas that we need to tackle if we are to tackle loneliness and isolation.

Hanzala Malik: I thank the member for all the good work that the committee is doing. I just want to re-emphasise my point about monitoring and measuring the level of success in tackling the issue. Will the committee take that on board with the continuation of its evidence gathering? Will that monitoring take place, and will the committee consider how we can truly measure the scale of success or failure?

Sandra White: I thank Mr Malik. I will come on to the point about monitoring progress because one of the recommendations related to it.

As I said earlier, I welcome the minister's comments about looking at structures and how we deliver services. The convener also mentioned that the committee was reassured by the Scottish Government's commitment to take more evidence regarding this particular issue. We have the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, community planning partnerships, and health and social care partnerships, which are all designed to work with services to support vulnerable people. That is the issue that I was trying to raise—we have to work together on this particular social integration.

I reiterate the convener's view that the Parliament should monitor how effective the approach will actually be. The monitoring aspect is very important. I welcome the Scottish Government's assurances on that particular issue, but we still need to ensure that we monitor how effective the approach is regarding inclusion priorities in strategic plans. We can put forward strategic plans, as the committee has said in its recommendations, but we need to know that that is prioritised and how it turns out. I hope that that answers Hanzala Malik's question. I would also like to think that that would be put into an Equal Opportunities Committee legacy document for the next parliamentary session.

I will touch on the committee's recommendation for a national publicity campaign. I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to working with stakeholders on the issue. I have suggested previously that there could be a media campaign that goes along the lines of the see me campaign to highlight social isolation. The Scottish Government could consider that. Jenny Marra and other members mentioned the John Lewis campaign and Age Scotland, and I would like to thank a number of newspapers, particularly *The Herald* and *Evening Times*, which published articles on the issue and helped to raise the profile of isolation and loneliness.

We talked about gathering evidence for strategic plans, which I have already mentioned, and a publicity campaign. The minister mentioned the third sector, and I would like to reiterate that point. We need to make sure that the third sector is involved. It plays a fantastic and enormous role in the delivery of services. I take on board the minister's comments about the third sector being involved in this issue.

I want to touch on the anti-bullying guidance. In response to the committee's report, the Scottish Government supported the committee's view that anti-discrimination and anti-bullying work is vital in tackling social isolation. Revised anti-bullying guidance will be published by the Scottish Government in 2016. I also know that the Scottish Government has given an undertaking to consider how it might enable greater use of peer education to tackle social isolation in schools and other youth settings. Like others members here and on the committee, I look forward to the publication of that undertaking, but I also look forward to seeing the greater use of peer education, how it will go about tackling social isolation and how that will be monitored.

We can get there in the schools by using the curriculum for excellence, peer monitoring and peer education to recognise and monitor loneliness and social isolation in young people. Some of the young people who we spoke to had great difficulty with speaking to others about themselves. I do not know whether it was because they were embarrassed, but they did not like to mention their isolation. Perhaps there was also a stigma factor. We really need to look at that aspect.

GPs at the deep end, link workers and social prescribing were mentioned by a number of members. Indeed, our recommendations 6, 7 and 8 all relate to the link worker system and the national strategy that must be involved. I welcome the Scottish Government's response to those recommendations, and I look forward to report from the University of Glasgow in 2016.

Many members and committee witnesses raised transport. As Jayne Baxter said in her contribution, the issue covers all areas and ages. It is not just about older people. We heard evidence—and Johann Lamont raised the issue today—that it is all right for someone to have a bus pass but there is no point in having it if they cannot get a bus. There are concessions for older people, disabled people and younger people, but it is no use if the transport is not there.

Linda Fabiani talked about a local transport initiative in her constituency. Perhaps we could look at that to see how it works and whether it could be rolled out in other parts of the country. However, I reiterate the committee's recommendations 11 and 12 on community transport: the Scottish Government should work with local authorities to improve the availability of community and public transport, and it should include transport policy as a strand in any isolation strategy.

In conclusion, I thank all members for their contributions. Like the minister and other members, I think that this has been a very good debate on an important subject that can affect any one of us at any time and certainly any of our constituents. The Equal Opportunities Committee has done a fantastic job in raising an important issue; it has carried out a very valuable piece of work that I hope will be a legacy to be carried forward during the next session of the Parliament.

Business Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S4M-15251, 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 12 January 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Delivering a World Class Education System

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 13 January 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
Health, Wellbeing and Sport

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 14 January 2016

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.30 pm Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Stage 1 Debate: Higher Education
Governance (Scotland) Bill

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Scottish Fiscal
Commission Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Scottish Fiscal
Commission Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 19 January 2016

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Apologies
 (Scotland) Bill
followed by Final Stage Debate: National Galleries
 of Scotland Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 20 January 2016

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions
 Infrastructure, Investment and Cities;
 Culture, Europe and External Affairs

followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 21 January 2016

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 Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I invite Joe FitzPatrick to move motion S4M-15252, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (Consequential Modifications and Savings) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.—[*Joe FitzPatrick.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S4M-15198, in the name of Margaret McCulloch, on age and social isolation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations in the Equal Opportunities Committee's 5th Report 2015 (Session 4), *Age and Social Isolation* (SP Paper 816).

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that motion S4M-15252, in the name of Joe FitzPatrick, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (Consequential Modifications and Savings) Order 2016 [draft] be approved.

Undercover Policing

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott):

The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S4M-15085, in the name of Neil Findlay, on the need for an inquiry into undercover policing in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the reports about the actions of undercover police officers operating in the National Public Order Intelligence Unit; is concerned about the alleged actions of officers, including an officer who, it understands, worked in Scotland on at least 14 occasions, including possibly in Lothian; further understands that this officer was authorised to work in Scotland by senior Scottish officers; notes reports that he formed intimate relationships with unsuspecting female environmental activists over many years in attempts to infiltrate activist groups; believes that the Pitchford inquiry that has been established by the UK Government will provide an opportunity for victims in England and Wales to access information and offer an opportunity for apologies and justice through the courts; understands with concern that such an opportunity will be denied to Scots, and notes the calls for the Scottish Government to hold a similar inquiry.

17:02

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The debate follows a theme of the members' business debates that I have secured and the issues that I have brought before the Parliament: class justice or, more accurately, injustice. I want to thank members from across the Parliament for supporting the motion and enabling the debate to take place.

The issue that is raised today gets to the heart of the principles of our criminal justice system and asks a key question. Do we have a policing and justice system that treats everyone the same, irrespective of class, status, colour, religion or political persuasion, or do we have one that picks out individuals and groups for special treatment because they challenge the prevailing orthodoxy and the established order or threaten, even in a tiny way, the grip that those in positions of power have on our economy and society?

If we look over my short lifetime we can see numerous instances when vested interests in the media, big business, Government, the police and the courts have worked together to quash dissent, control behaviour and prevent any challenge to their grip on power. That has been done through anti-trade union legislation, court reform, anti-terror legislation and much, much more. If we look at cases such as those of the Shrewsbury 24, The Cammell Laird 37, the 96 Hillsborough fans, the ordinary victims of phone hacking—not the celebrities—the family of Stephen Lawrence, the 95 miners arrested at Orgreave, the 300 Scottish

miners arrested at Ravenscraig or the 4,000 blacklisted construction workers, 400 of whom were Scottish, we can see the state machine conspiring with powerful interests against ordinary working people whose only crime was to defend jobs and communities or support their fellow workers or even their football team.

I suspect that, in all those cases and many more, undercover police officers have been operating with the freedom to do whatever they want; with little control or accountability; and outwith any ethical framework in which they should be carrying out their activities. All of that was apparently sanctioned by senior officers in the areas in which they were operating, including Scotland.

My interest in the matter stems from my work on blacklisting. We know that the security forces have been involved in political and industrial campaigns going back to the suffragettes and beyond. In the case of blacklisting, special branch was working hand in glove with the Consulting Association, not to prevent terrorism or potential threats to life, but to infiltrate legitimate democratic trade unions and to act in collaboration with big construction companies to deny people the right to work.

We now know that at least 120 undercover officers have been deployed by the special demonstration squad since its formation in 1968, but so far only 12 have been exposed, half of whom worked in Scotland. The most infamous of those is Mark Kennedy, who was deployed here 14 times in his seven-year career. We now know that the undercover officers targeted Scottish workers and environmental activists who campaigned at the G8 in Gleneagles, one of whom now works for a Scottish National Party member of Parliament. The officers targeted trade union officials and at least 10 Labour MPs, including the current leader of the Labour Party. They did not gather evidence for use in court; instead, they amassed intelligence so that people could be monitored, anticipated and disrupted. Those officers acted as a law unto themselves.

An internal Metropolitan Police Service report from 2009 said that the officers

“preferred the less bureaucratic approach and directed their operational activity without intrusive senior supervision and management”,

and it went on to state:

“The SDS directed their own operations with significant tactical latitude and minimal organisational constraints”.

That is code for “They did whatever they liked”, and their tactics were truly abhorrent. The majority of known officers had long-lasting and intimate relationships with people they spied on, and three officers engaged in relationships with women in Scotland. That was all part of the strategy. More

than one officer had a child with a woman while pretending to be someone else. One victim described it as

“like being raped by the state”.

The police in our country are operating like that. It is outrageous.

Officers acted as agents provocateurs, encouraging activists into confrontations and taking key roles in the organisation of events. Mark Kennedy was the transport co-ordinator for the protests at the G8, while Jason Bishop and Marco Jacobs drove van loads of activists up from England. Another officer, Lynn Watson, was also at the G8 as part of the action medics team.

Officers often received convictions under their false identity and withheld evidence during court cases that undermined those very cases. In any other circumstances that would be perjury and perverting the course of justice. We have now found out that more than 50 convictions have been quashed since the scandal came to light.

What kind of false identity did the officers take on? For some of them, it was the identity of a dead child. Police officers have been operating in our country under the identity of a dead child to victimise people whose only crime is to want a fairer, cleaner and more just society. I do not know about other members, but I find that nauseating and utterly corrupt.

In response to that being exposed, the UK Government has commissioned the Pitchford inquiry, and I commend Theresa May on that. Its remit is

“to inquire into and report on undercover police operations conducted by English and Welsh police forces in England and Wales since 1968”.

Pitchford does not cover Scotland. When I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Justice last year whether the police were spying on trade union, environmental and political activists in his party and mine, he said, “I have no idea.” That was astonishing in both its arrogance and its complacency. Then, on the first day of the recess, as we all went off for Christmas, he slipped out a letter to the 10 MSPs who had written to him, stating that he now wants Pitchford to be extended to look at the operations that happened in Scotland.

Police officers committed a string of human rights abuses against Scottish citizens on Scottish soil. We do not know what arrangements they had with Scottish police forces or whether those arrangements existed in other force areas, nor do we know which campaigns they infiltrated. We do not know which Scots they spied upon or how many of our citizens were affected. If that was happening elsewhere, there would be

condemnation all round, but it is happening or has happened under our noses.

The cabinet secretary has not appeared in the chamber for the debate. I find that sad, given that it is on such an important issue, but perhaps the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs can confirm whether, if the Home Secretary refuses to extend the remit of Pitchford to cover Scotland, the cabinet secretary will instruct a similar judge-led inquiry here.

I am well over my time. There is so much more that I want to say on the matter, but time does not allow it. What happened is a scandal and an affront to our democracy. We have to expose what went on here in Scotland and we must ensure that nothing like this ever happens again.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are tight for time. We will probably have to extend the debate, but in the meantime I call on Johann Lamont, to be followed by Rod Campbell. I ask for speeches of four minutes or thereby, please.

17:12

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): I congratulate Neil Findlay on securing this important debate and commend him for his passionate speech, in which he argued for transparency in Scotland in relation to the role of the police. I want to make only a brief contribution.

I instinctively support the police. I recognise their role in keeping our communities safe and in the past I have been active in ensuring that the police address issues such as domestic violence, violence against women and antisocial behaviour, so I do not come lightly to a position that recognises that there is a problem here in relation to policing. However, I do not think that we can overstate the significance of the revelations about the conduct of the police over a long period of time, the impact on confidence in the police or the right to justice for victims of behaviour that is hard to believe in its audacity and its cruel disregard for those who it affected. I want to add my comments on why the issues matter, why the aims of the motion matter and why I believe we are entitled to ask the Scottish Government what it is planning to do.

Just before Christmas, I had the privilege of attending an event that hosted representatives from the Orgreave truth and justice campaign. Those amazing women outlined their campaign to secure justice for miners in mining communities who were treated disgracefully at Orgreave during the miners' dispute in the 1980s. The campaign emphasises the need for truth and justice. They need to know exactly what happened and who gave sanction for it, and they need justice for those who were attacked and maligned. They

spoke particularly powerfully of those who went to their graves unable to clear their names of the attacks that were made upon them.

I recall the miners' dispute in the 1980s as a difficult time but also as a time of solidarity and community, and I remember the kindness of those who sought to support those who were striking to save their industry. However, we also know now that it was a time when the state moved against a group of workers in an unbelievable and brutal way. At the time, on TV, we were shown pitched battles. There were reports of attacks and arrests and commentary on the violence, but although there were rumours about the behaviour of the police, their role in those actions and events was not properly understood, reported or addressed.

I believe that it is to our shame that miners were so badly treated and their actions misrepresented. At their meeting, the Orgreave campaigners highlighted the significance of what happened in the Hillsborough inquiry to change attitudes and open people's minds to the possibility that the rumours of corrupt behaviour by the police could be true. The campaigners strongly believe that the exposé of the disgraceful behaviour of the police in the Hillsborough case has created an opportunity for the Orgreave justice and truth campaign to secure its aims because there is recognition that some of the rumours are not just wild imaginings but are true.

We have to salute those women for making that progress and salute those who took on the might of the press and the police in the Hillsborough campaign. However, we must recognise that there remains a challenge here for us, too, in terms of why the Hillsborough campaign matters. The actions by the police in the Hillsborough case were once regarded as being inconceivable, but they have now been laid bare. It is essential that we understand properly what has been done in our name in Scotland by the police, who made the decisions to allow those actions and when those people will be held to account.

If the Pitchford inquiry can be extended to Scotland, then that is fine. However, I think that there is a question about what we explore and understand with regard to what the police have done in Scotland to innocent victims here so that we can understand what we possibly need to address in policing to make sure that our communities can have full confidence in the police again. It is not about an attack on the role of the police in our communities and society; it is about supporting the rights of people to ensure that we have a policing regime that is open and that people can have confidence in.

I hope that the minister will give the reassurance that if the Pitchford inquiry is not to be extended to Scotland, he will do all that he can to make sure

that a similar inquiry is conducted in Scotland. I think that the people of Scotland would expect nothing less.

17:16

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): I begin by recognising the commitment of Neil Findlay to the issue. It is fair to say that although the member sometimes ploughs a lonely or unpopular furrow, he has on this issue highlighted a legitimate area of public concern.

We know that the Gleneagles G8 summit in 2005 was a focus for spying on activists that seems to have involved divisions or organisations with a relationship to the Metropolitan Police—an organisation whose chief constable directly reports to the Home Office and the Home Secretary. Given those allegations and the fact that we know that the Metropolitan Police has already apologised to women who might have been befriended by undercover operators, and given the allegations that were unearthed by the Ellison review into the circumstances surrounding the investigation of Stephen Lawrence's murder, I believe that it is right that the Home Secretary has instigated a judicial inquiry, for which she should be commended.

As Mr Findlay's motion makes clear, however, that inquiry is currently restricted to England and Wales. If Metropolitan Police officers or divisions were operating in Scotland, though, it seems that it would be sensible to extend the inquiry's remit to Scotland. I await with interest the minister's comments on the Scottish Government's request to the Home Secretary on that point.

It seems that the Pitchford inquiry will extend well beyond the issue of the G8 activists to that of campaigners on behalf of Stephen Lawrence, as I have said. We know that it is alleged that Labour MPs, trade unionists and anti-racism groups were similarly targeted. The extent to which there is a Scottish dimension to that remains to be seen, but if there is credible evidence of that, I say to Mr Findlay and others that it should be presented and is something that the Government should take on board.

Neil Findlay: On the point about evidence in Scotland, there are several court cases, a child has been produced as evidence and there is evidence from other campaigns. For example, Dame Stella Rimington, who became the head of MI5, was on picket lines during the miners' strike not 2 miles from my house. There is extensive evidence of operations occurring in Scotland. If the Pitchford inquiry is not extended to Scotland, I hope that the member will support our having an inquiry here.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you extra time, Mr Campbell.

Roderick Campbell: I hear what Neil Findlay says and I reiterate my point about presenting that evidence. However, if he lets me finish my speech, he will hear what I have to say.

I understand that 57 convictions have been quashed to date, but I am not aware that any such convictions were obtained in a Scottish court. However, it is clearly unacceptable in any democracy where the rule of law is sacrosanct for evidence to be obtained as result of duplicity on the part of offices of the state, save in carefully monitored circumstances. As I understand it, one of the problems is that the now defunct national public order intelligence unit was engaged in intelligence gathering and that the judiciary did not have the opportunity of reviewing any authorising officer's decision, rationale and justification for deployment because it was classed as intelligence rather than evidence gathering.

Procedures have now changed, organisations have changed, there is now an agreed set of operating procedures and, of course, we now have a covert human intelligence sources code of practice, which was brought in as a result of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000. Therefore, things have moved on, and as a result of the Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary report of 2012, there is now tighter governance of what is rather unfortunately called "domestic extremism".

We know, of course, something about the activities of Mr Kennedy, which formed the background to the 2012 report, but we do not know how other undercover policing has operated. The Pitchford inquiry intends to go back to 1968, to the start of the special operations squad, or the "special demonstrations squad", as it became known. It is, of course, possible that evidence will be uncovered that relates to activity in Scotland since 1968, but I am not aware of any reports that in some way or other do not relate to the Metropolitan Police, apart from the matters to which Mr Findlay has referred. In the absence of that evidence, it seems hard to justify the need for a Scotland-only inquiry. However, in the interests of openness and transparency, the Scottish Government should be open to that possibility, should it arise, and it should keep an open mind on the need for an independent Scottish inquiry.

Mr Findlay was right to raise the issue; we will have to see how matters develop.

17:21

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): As one of the 10 MSPs who signed the letter that my colleague Neil Findlay referred to, I

am pleased to participate in the debate. I commend Neil Findlay on securing a debate on issues that involve abuse of women that is quite difficult to comprehend.

The demand for the Pitchford inquiry to be extended to Scotland should never have been controversial, in any case. The police have already admitted wrongdoing and apologised for the damage that has been done to women who have been abused and manipulated as a result of undercover officers starting intimate relationships with them. Furthermore, there have been record compensation pay-outs to women victims as a result of the conduct of those officers. However, as it stands, the inquiry will be limited to police activity in England and Wales.

The campaign opposing police surveillance, which investigates the role of undercover police, has documented numerous instances in which officers who have been proved to have committed acts of abuse operated and were active in Scotland. There can be no doubt about that. I am astonished that some members still seem to doubt and question that. Despite the Metropolitan Police's apology for the undercover operations, there is still a lot more to be investigated and revealed about the extent to which—not whether—those officers were active in Scotland as well as the rest of the United Kingdom.

One of the cases in England in which undercover officers were found to be active and potentially perverting the course of justice was the Stephen Lawrence murder case, which has been mentioned. An investigation into that case determined that the Metropolitan Police was “institutionally racist”. As a result of that inquiry, steps were taken to address the problem. Although there is still some way to go, improvements were made.

If we look at the frequent pattern of male officers abusing their position to exploit women and start sexual relationships, and the implied approval that that would require from senior officers, the question is whether the police are institutionally sexist. We urgently need a full and comprehensive inquiry into the role of undercover police in Scotland to discuss whether the issues of sexism and abuse of women can be openly and honestly addressed.

I would prefer an inquiry in Scotland. If we have that inquiry, perhaps the doubting Thomases can get the concrete evidence that is there. It can be put in front of their eyes.

The personal experiences of the women who were, effectively, victims of the police make very disturbing and distressing reading. I will not mention individual cases, of course, but in general the victims began relationships with undercover

officers and often speak about how they genuinely fell in love with those men and shared every personal and physical aspect of their lives with them. Officers would attend family functions and even funerals of victims' family members. Astonishingly, as Neil Findlay pointed out, in some instances children have been born who were conceived by undercover officers who never revealed who they really were. When those officers were finally extracted or extracted themselves from the operations, they would suddenly disappear at short notice from the women's and their own children's lives with fabricated excuses. They left broken homes and caused huge amounts of distress and heartbreak. That is the real story here.

When it was finally revealed to the women that the men were actually undercover officers, untold psychological damage was done to the women. Their whole lives were turned upside-down by those revelations. One woman speaks of having been in a relationship with “a ghost” when she now looks back on the time that she spent with him, as she never knew who he really was. The trust and confidence of those women have been shattered and the revelations have left them feeling humiliated, demeaned and violated.

Although the victims have stated that no apology or compensation can make up for the abuse that they have suffered, we owe it to them to fully investigate and expose those horrific practices. If we do not fully investigate the role of undercover police in Scotland, we will not only be letting down those women further but will be potentially risking the health and wellbeing of other women in the future. We must learn the lessons of the known cases in order to have any chance of stopping future abuse. The Pitchford inquiry should be extended to cover Scotland, but if that is not agreed, the Scottish Government has a moral duty to undertake its own inquiry into that horrendous practice and to provide truth and justice.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call the next member, I let members know that because of the number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. Mr Findlay, would you move such a motion?

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[Neil Findlay.]

Motion agreed to.

17:26

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank Neil Findlay for bringing this debate to the chamber, as it provides the opportunity to explore

some compelling issues relating to undercover police operations.

The motion refers to the inquiry set up by the UK Government and led by Lord Justice Pitchford. Its terms of reference, which were announced by the Home Secretary, Theresa May, on 16 July 2015, are:

“To inquire into and report on undercover police operations conducted by English and Welsh police forces in England and Wales since 1968 ... For the purpose of the inquiry, the term ‘undercover police operations’ means the use by a police force of a police officer as a covert human intelligence source (CHIS) within the meaning of section 26(8) of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, whether before or after the commencement of that Act. The terms ‘undercover police officer’, ‘undercover policing’, ‘undercover police activity’ should be understood accordingly. It includes operations conducted through online media.”

The inquiry was set up in response to the concerns raised about the activities and conduct of undercover who were officers operating within the national public order intelligence unit and the SDS—the special demonstration squad.

We have established that anyone, including Scottish residents, who was affected by the activities of undercover officers is entitled to submit evidence. It will then be for the inquiry chairman and the counsel to the inquiry to review the evidence and decide on its admissibility. I also note the request to extend the inquiry’s remit to include Scotland.

By way of background, the SDS was formed in 1968 and based inside the Metropolitan Police’s Special Branch, which focuses on national security. At a time of terrorist threats and heightened security, there clearly remains a requirement for undercover officers.

However, revelations about the activities of certain undercover officers have prompted the inquiry, which covers three broad areas. The first area is

“Establishing what has happened: the motivation for, and the scope of, undercover police activities in practice and their effect upon individuals in particular and the public in general”

and

“the role of and the contribution made by undercover policing towards the prevention and detection of crime.”

The second area is

“Investigation of systems and procedures: governance and oversight of undercover policing the adequacy of justification, authorisation”

and it covers

“the selection, training, management and care of undercover police officers and the statutory, policy and judicial regulation of undercover policing”,

and it

“will also explore the state of awareness of undercover policing within Her Majesty’s Government.”

The third area looks to the future and

“will take evidence from a variety of witnesses, including expert witnesses, about the future of undercover policing and associated matters with a view to informing recommendations.”

The estimated publication date of a written report and recommendations is summer 2018.

It is clear that the Pitchford inquiry will be thorough and meticulous, so, although I have sympathy with the intent behind Neil Findlay’s call for a Scottish inquiry, I consider it to be premature, especially given the ability of those who reside in Scotland to submit evidence to the Pitchford inquiry and the request to extend its remit to Scotland.

Neil Findlay: The comment that Margaret Mitchell makes is fine, but the fact that the inquiry’s remit does not extend to operations in Scotland is the problem. People in Scotland can supply evidence to it, but what happened in Scotland will not be investigated. That is the issue.

Margaret Mitchell: I understand that. That is why we are looking at the admissibility of evidence from Scotland, how that will be treated, how it will affect the inquiry and whether it might lead to a decision to extend the inquiry. All those things are unknowns at the moment, but they will be explored and decided as the inquiry progresses.

Undercover police officers hold a position of privilege and carry out duties that are essential to the safety and security of the public, and it is deeply concerning that some undercover officers have strayed so far outside the framework within which they were authorised to operate. Therefore, if the findings of the Pitchford inquiry prove to be unsatisfactory in relation to the activities that were undertaken in Scotland, and in particular at the G8 summit in Gleneagles, the matter could and should be reconsidered. In the meantime, at the very least I would expect Police Scotland to monitor closely developments in England and Wales with a view to taking on board any lessons that are learned from that process.

17:31

Elaine Murray (Dumfriesshire) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Neil Findlay on bringing this important matter to the chamber for debate.

For reasons that I will elaborate on shortly, I am not surprised to learn that undercover police operations were conducted by police forces in England after 1968, but what shocks me is that such operations were still on-going in the 21st century and that they have been happening in Scotland.

I am not surprised to learn that, because a long time back—37 years ago, almost—I observed an undercover agent at work when I lived and worked in the south of England, which I did between 1976 and 1989. As people of my vintage may remember, at the end of the 1970s the National Front emerged as a significant political threat in parts of England and put up many candidates at the general election and the council elections in 1979. The Anti Nazi League, of which I was a member—I was also a young and idealistic member of the Socialist Workers Party at the time—was set up in 1977 in opposition to the rise of the NF, and it regularly demonstrated against NF marches and meetings.

On 21 April 1979, the National Front marched through the streets of Leicester, where it was hopeful of electoral success in both the general election and the local elections that coincided with it, and the Anti Nazi League, as was its habit, arranged a counter-demonstration. That was the day before Blair Peach was killed by an officer of the Metropolitan Police at a similar demonstration in Southall. After what I saw in Leicester, I was not surprised that someone lost their life.

Apart from being hit by a brick—which might have been thrown by someone on our side with poor aim, although the story on the bus that brought us drinks is that it was thrown by someone else—I still have a vivid recollection of one man. In fact, it is so vivid that I could still describe what he looked like. He was casually dressed and towards the front, although not at the front, of a large group of demonstrators and he was very vocal—he was shouting encouragement to the demonstrators and telling them to attack the police and to try to reach the National Front marchers.

Of course, under the circumstances, tempers flared and the demonstrators attacked and were subsequently pursued by police dogs and horses. As my left arm was by that point in a sling formed from a comrade's belt and I wished to avoid further injury, I hung back from the crowd to observe what was happening. As the dogs and horses dispersed the demonstrators and the police arrested those whom they could get hold of, the man who had been doing all the shouting gradually retreated further and further back in, and eventually out of, the crowd. He then calmly got into the front—not the back—of a police van. He was not in cuffs and he voluntarily got into the front of the van. It is clear that he was an undercover officer and an agent provocateur. I tried to shout out to people what he was, but because of all the noise no one could really hear what anyone was saying.

I was not surprised by that back then, because the police in England had a bad reputation as far as people on the left of politics were concerned. As Johann Lamont has alluded to, most of us will

remember the scenes from the miners' strike in 1984. It certainly was not just Mrs Thatcher who believed that the left and trade unions were the enemy within at that time. However, I am appalled that spying and undercover activity has been ongoing in Scotland and that, only 10 years ago, environmental activists wishing to make their views known at the G8 summit—

Neil Findlay: Will the member take an intervention?

Elaine Murray: Yes, certainly.

Neil Findlay: We know that to be the case, and what the member has told us about her experience is helpful in that regard. However, we have seen that members of the security services, who went on to very high levels, were involved. For example, the director general of MI5 was on picket lines in Scotland. Surely that tells us that such operations were extensive here at that time.

Elaine Murray: It certainly raises a large number of questions about what was going on. The fact that that was happening so recently shocks me—not terrorists but environmentalists were being treated as though they were enemies of the state.

Worst of all, female activists were deceived into sexual and emotional relationships with undercover agents. That was a terrible violation of their human rights. They could be considered to have been raped, as they thought that they were having a sexual relationship with someone different, and I wonder whether prosecution of the agents involved could be considered.

I am sure that the vast majority of police officers serving in Scotland will be as outraged by those activities as we are. We owe it not only to the victims of the undercover police spies to get to the truth of what happened here, but to the thousands of hardworking police officers fulfilling their duties to keep us safe, working day in, day out to look after their communities, as they could be stained by association if the truth remains unexposed. I hope that the Scottish Government agrees with me on that point.

17:36

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I, too, congratulate Neil Findlay on securing the debate. He has pursued the issue with vigour.

I hope that we can all agree that the issue that we are discussing is important. The allegations that have been made against the police officers in question are serious. As we have heard, they used the identities of dead children for cover without discussing that with the parents, spied on the parents of a teenager viciously attacked and stabbed by a group of youths in a racially

motivated attack and engaged in sexual relations with female environmental and political activists and, in some cases, formed long-term relationships and fathered children. The revelations have resulted in serious emotional trauma for those duped by the officers involved.

Ian Loader, Professor of Criminology has written:

“Every police-public interaction ... is a ‘teachable moment’—an occasion in which something is necessarily communicated about the law and legal authorities and what they stand for. That ‘something’ can have fateful (positive or negative) consequences for people’s future willingness to trust and co-operate with the police, and for whether they think of the law as worthy of their compliance because it represents moral values which they share.”

The police-public interaction in these circumstances has shocked us all. Such behaviour transgresses professional and moral boundaries and flies in the face of common decency. It is, in fact, such behaviour that threatens the legitimacy of policing.

We know that undercover officers were also allowed to operate in Scotland. For example, we have heard reports that they infiltrated protesters at the G8 summit at Gleneagles. Therefore, even if the officers were from police forces in England and Wales, it would appear that their authorisation to work in Scotland came from senior Scottish officers, so I support the call for the Scottish Government to hold a similar inquiry.

The Scottish Government has acknowledged that it is supportive of widening the Pitchford inquiry to include activities in Scotland, but does not believe that there should be a separate Scottish inquiry. The terms of reference of the Pitchford inquiry have been established and its work begun. It is unfortunate that the remit does not include the activities of the undercover officers in Scotland and I suspect that it is unlikely to change its remit.

Unless the SNP Government is arguing that unearthing what has gone on in Scotland, both in terms of English officers operating here and of undercover policing within Scottish forces, is of no importance, there must be an inquiry here in Scotland; otherwise Scottish people will be short changed. We, too, deserve to know the scale of the operations carried out and the lines of accountability and authorisation.

Given the recent revelations about Police Scotland spying and breaches of interception of communications orders, we certainly have no room for complacency. Citizens are entitled to expect the highest standards of policing and—rightly—they expect a clear justification for and authorisation of any clandestine policing. Equally, officers who are engaged in undercover policing

should be carefully regulated and trained and regularly assessed.

Can we guarantee that such an approach has always been in place in Scotland? Is it in place now? We do not know. That is why an open and unflinching examination of the extent of undercover policing past and present and of its governance and oversight in Scotland is necessary, so that we learn lessons and establish clear terms of engagement. I support Neil Findlay’s motion.

17:40

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I congratulate Neil Findlay on bringing the motion for debate and on making a speech that was not just passionate but comprehensive and analytical in setting out what is—to be frank—a horrific and unacceptable catalogue of abuse by the state in this country. If, in our complacency, we tolerate or refuse to properly investigate that, we will also be complicit in it. We owe it not just to ourselves and those whom we represent but to future generations to show that living in a democracy means that there are safeguards, there is protection and there are rules that everyone must follow.

I was watching the minister during Neil Findlay’s speech. The minister appeared to be surprised or maybe a bit cynical when Neil Findlay said that one of the victims is now working for an SNP parliamentarian. It would be well worth it for the minister to find out who that individual is and to speak to her, because she has a wealth of knowledge. If the minister does not accept what Neil Findlay and others say, at least speaking to her would help matters.

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Paul Wheelhouse): I take Hugh Henry’s point, but I was showing disbelief at the openness with which such matters were being discussed. I appreciate the sensitivity of the subject and its importance to Mr Findlay and other members, but I was concerned that we should be careful not to name inappropriately people who have no opportunity to defend themselves in this place.

Neil Findlay: Will Hugh Henry give way?

Hugh Henry: I will finish my point; if Neil Findlay still needs to come in after that, he can do so.

The individual whom I mentioned came openly to a meeting that an MSP organised in the Parliament and publicly contributed to the discussion. She has no problem with being identified, so no confidences are being betrayed and there is no erring on the wrong side—

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Hugh Henry: Not just now, thank you—I want to make progress.

I welcome some of Margaret Mitchell's comments, but Alison McInnes touched on the fundamental issue. We are not talking just about providing additional information to Pitchford or saying that we would like the inquiry to look at some things in Scotland. Because the terms of reference have been established, what the inquiry can do is limited. I welcome the Scottish Government's belated action to write to ask for the inquiry to be extended but, unless we get a guarantee that it will be all-encompassing and that the terms of reference will include things that have gone on in Scotland over the years, so that it is a genuine UK inquiry, we will be short changed and we will need our own inquiry.

As I said, some of the things that have been touched on are—to be frank—unacceptable in a democracy. We need to do something about that. The new chief constable of Police Scotland, who is coming into the job fresh, has an ideal opportunity to work with the Scottish ministers and look at what has gone on. In some respects, he is uniquely qualified, because part of his responsibility when he worked in England was special branch and units that special branch worked with, which Neil Findlay and others mentioned.

I do not know whether those who interviewed the new chief constable asked him about those activities or asked him for assurances and guarantees but, along with ministers, the accountable body for the police should at least tap into the new chief constable's knowledge and find out what he knows about unacceptable things that have gone on here. That could help to shape any terms of reference for an inquiry here.

Johann Lamont was right to say that we need to know what was done.

Sandra White: Will the member take an intervention?

Hugh Henry: No, thanks. I need to make up some time.

It is not just about some of the historical things that Neil Findlay mentioned and that I and others were involved in. In the recent referendum, were any of these people involved on either side of the debate, provoking yes or no votes or trying to inflame the situation? Johann Lamont is right to say that we support the police, and many police officers are disturbed by some of the things that go on, which are not about issues of national security but about protecting the interests of big business or certain political views. Were any of these

people involved in the referendum campaign? We should be told whether people were trying to stir things up in the way that Elaine Murray mentioned.

This is the one opportunity that we have to put things right. We know that wrong has been done over many years, in Scotland as well as in the rest of the United Kingdom. If we fail to take the opportunity to get to the bottom of what was done and put things right, we are letting Scotland down, we are letting future generations down and, frankly, as individuals, we are letting ourselves down.

17:46

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I, too, congratulate my colleague Neil Findlay not just on lodging the motion but on his tenacity—which other members have mentioned—in relation to a number of issues. Like many members, he wants to protect hard-fought-for workers' rights and the right to peaceful protest, and, like many, he is concerned that the full force of the state was visited on the miners' strike, with all the challenges that that brought.

Nevertheless, I would like to qualify something that Mr Findlay said. He said that this is about the police, whereas I would say that this is about an attack on the police by the state. As members will know, I was a police officer for 30 years and my sworn duty was to guard, watch and patrol so as to protect life and property. Uniformed officers play an important, visible role in reassuring the public, but there is also a role for plain-clothes officers and an important role, on occasions, for undercover officers—all, however, to reassure and protect the public.

Neil Findlay: I thank Mr Finnie for allowing me to clarify my comments. The police officers I know in my community do a fantastic job, and I have a very good working relationship with them. What we are talking about is the type of thing that undermines confidence in the police, and I am sure that the officers Mr Finnie served with will be as appalled by it as I am.

John Finnie: Indeed, they are. Mr Findlay need only visit my Facebook page to see that. In my experience, officers were entirely well motivated and were trying to catch the bad guys. Importantly, however, it was the courts who decided who the bad guys were. The problems that have associated themselves with various constabularies have come when the police have wanted to act as judge and jury.

There are issues with the security services, which I have raised in committee in the Parliament—and I have received some astonishing responses to that. An officer might return home from work and say that they have

infiltrated a legitimate protest group, but I cannot envisage their explaining that they have had relations with someone in that group. It is important that we use the words that the woman involved used—she said that she had been “raped by the state”—because that level of language is appropriate in this instance. It is also disgusting that the identity of a dead child was taken. Officers I served with were appalled by that sickening behaviour.

The worrying thing is that that was not the action of a rogue individual; it must have been known to supervisory officers. Either they ignored it or they were unaware of it, but, either way, they were negligent. Who were they? Indeed, do we have one in our midst in the form of our new chief constable? People will be aware of the coverage of that appointment. SNP members are smiling, but, as Mr Henry rightly points out, given that the new chief constable had supervisory responsibility in his special branch role, it is inconceivable that he does not have some knowledge that he could share.

Given that he shares membership of the Justice Committee with me, I am surprised that Roderick Campbell would say that things have moved on. As my colleague Alison McInnes said, at the moment we are dealing with the public’s deep-held concerns about intrusion and privacy.

The motion talks about the opportunity that is being afforded to victims in England and Wales, but what about victims in Scotland? I will not go into the G8 protests, but to assume that the monitoring that went on across Europe suddenly stopped at Gretna is to be blissfully naive. The monitoring was either continued or handed on. One way or another, it certainly took place here—I attended G8, in the capacity of protecting the welfare of officers.

It is true that there are some nasty folk out there who need looked after, but there are legitimate ways in which that can be done. The issue is about the supervising and scrutinising that needs to go on.

I am surprised and deeply disappointed by the Scottish Government’s response and, going by the attendance here, my colleagues’ response to the issue. I am sure that there are many important meetings taking place elsewhere in the building tonight, but this level of interest is disappointing. I am sure that people would expect a greater level of interest.

Scotland has a separate legal system and police system. The ability of someone to act with power of constable in Scotland is something that should be richly regarded and held in absolute esteem. Uniquely on this issue, the Scottish Government seems keen to cede any involvement or control to

the UK Government. I find it strange that it would allow UK intrusion—if you like—by inviting a Tory-inspired inquiry to deal with something on which there is clearly evidence that should give rise to an inquiry here.

It is not good enough. Pernicious forces were at work, and I fear that they may still be at work. If the minister wants to provide reassurance, this is a very good time to do that, given that a new chief constable is in place and given all the difficulties that we have had. The way to do that is not to piggyback on the actions in England and Wales—possibly in the knowledge that we would get a knock-back anyway—but to acknowledge that there are problems in Scotland and to address them by putting in place an proper inquiry. I am sure that the minister would get support from across the chamber if he did that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have had a late bid from Sandra White.

17:52

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for taking the late bid. I did not intend to speak in the debate; I thought I would listen. I do not know too much about the background, but I have been involved in various issues, particularly while working with anti-racist groups that have had to report to the police. I have been concerned with that.

When I intervened on Hugh Henry, he was talking about the miners’ strike and the referendum. I have known him for many years, going way back to my Renfrewshire Council days and the time of the militant faction—although I was not involved in that. That is why I wanted to intervene on him.

I am concerned about some things that members have said that have given the impression that the chief constable—John Finnie just mentioned him—and others are, for some reason or other, doing underhand things.

John Finnie: I am not making assertions about anything. Hugh Henry rightly pointed out that an excellent opportunity has been afforded to us by the arrival of a new chief constable, who may have some knowledge and could share that knowledge with us. That may well put a lot of our concerns to rest. I suspect that it would not, but it is an opportunity.

Sandra White: I thank John Finnie for making that intervention, because he used a word that has not been used in the debate: “may”. I am not sticking up for anybody, but I am thinking about the letter of the law, sub judice issues and various other issues. Other words have been bandied about in the debate, but if members use the word

“may” or “alleged”, which is used in the motion—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry. Mr Findlay can come in if he wants—I do not mind.

Neil Findlay rose—

Sandra White: I will let him in if he lets me finish this point. The motion that Mr Findlay lodged says “allegedly”, and that is fine. Other members have not said “allegedly” or “may” but have made assumptions. The assumptions in some of the contributions have been that people knew about underhand things that were going on. I cannot be party to that, and I do not think that this Parliament can be party to that either.

I am all for looking into things. I am all for an inquiry. Hugh Henry, in another part of his speech that I wanted to intervene on, brought up one of the issues that I wanted to mention, which was the referendum.

Neil Findlay: Will the member give way?

Sandra White: I will just finish this point.

Obviously, the unit was set up in 1968, which was under a Labour Government and, in 1979, we had the first referendum. I would be interested in whether we can get any information on that. That is another reason why I wanted to intervene on Hugh Henry, so I am glad that I have been able to say that.

Can I take an intervention, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes.

Sandra White: I will let Neil Findlay in, then.

Neil Findlay: I am genuinely curious about what Sandra White is referring to when she says that members have said inappropriate things in the debate. If she can pinpoint those, and if it was anything that I said, I would try to clarify it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could we just endeavour to keep off issues that might be sub judice? I do not feel that you necessarily need to respond to that Ms White.

Sandra White: Thank you, Presiding Officer. If I recollect correctly, it certainly was not anything that Mr Findlay said, but I am sure that we will look at the *Official Report* of the debate and see it there.

I am all for an inquiry, whether it is extended from Westminster to Scotland or whether we have our own inquiry. I do not know what the minister is going to say, but I am all for it, because I want to find out. The unit was set up in 1968. We had various things happening such as the miners' strike, anti-racism activities and the rise of the National Front, which Elaine Murray mentioned. There have been lots of things that I certainly have

had concerns about with regard to policing, and I would like answers, too.

We need to look at the timescale. The unit started in 1968 and it is now disbanded. How far would we go in the timescale? If we ask the inquiry to look at the issues or set up our own inquiry, I hope that lots of things would come out with regard to infiltrators, MI5 or anything else and in relation to not just 1968, 1979 or 1980 but more up-to-date events.

Thank you, Presiding Officer, for indulging me as a latecomer.

Elaine Smith: Will Sandra White take an intervention before she finishes?

Sandra White: I am sorry, but the Presiding Officer has just indicated that I am finished.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are taking everybody today.

Sandra White: Okay.

Elaine Smith: I just want Sandra White to clarify that she accepts that apologies have been issued and compensation has been paid to women who were in this situation. That is not getting into matters that are sub judice; we are not mentioning individual cases.

Sandra White: I recognise that compensation has been paid, but that is not to do with the sub judice points that I was talking about. The member should look at the *Official Report* of the debate, and I will have a look at it, too. I was certainly a bit uncomfortable with some of the language that was used by some contributors.

17:57

The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs (Paul Wheelhouse): I thank members for their contributions on what I fully acknowledge is an important and sensitive subject. As members have outlined, the impacts on individuals are very significant indeed. I fully acknowledge that that is potentially the case. A number of valid and constructive points have been made. I recognise and value the concern that members have expressed about ensuring that legitimate protests can take place unmolested where they comply with the law of the land and are entirely lawful. If that has been subverted, we obviously all share the concern about that.

I am sure that it will not have escaped members' attention that, although the Scottish Government is accountable to this Parliament for policing by Police Scotland, the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament are not responsible for the activities of the Metropolitan Police Service or its specialist units. I am not trying to get away from the importance of the issue; I am just stressing the

point of fact that those units are not accountable to the Scottish Parliament.

Neil Findlay: Will the minister give way?

Paul Wheelhouse: If I can develop the point, I will bring in Mr Findlay.

It is the mayor of London, Boris Johnson, and the deputy mayor for policing and crime, Stephen Greenhalgh, who hold the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to account. It is the Home Secretary who is responsible to the Westminster Parliament for policing in England and Wales and who in March announced the Pitchford inquiry into undercover policing.

Neil Findlay: A report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in 2012, called "A review of national police units which provide intelligence on criminality associated with protest", said:

"Although Mark Kennedy worked for a national unit, his undercover activities were **authorised**"—

that word is in bold—

"by senior officers from the police force that covered the particular local area in which he was working."

That clearly states that, if he was operating in Scotland, authorisation was given here.

Paul Wheelhouse: I appreciate that that is a statement that Mr Findlay has made in relation to a point made by another individual, but I point out that we are not aware of evidence that Scottish officers have authorised that. Indeed, it would be something that we would hope—

Neil Findlay: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Paul Wheelhouse: Mr Findlay, I need to develop my point. Can I please finish the point first?

To address Alison McInnes's point about officers in those units being authorised by senior Scottish police officers, we are not aware of that happening. English authorisation, if I can use that term, under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, not the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000, would most likely have been put in place in that scenario.

I give way to Mr Findlay.

Neil Findlay: I thank the minister—he is being very good with his time.

I received that response in a parliamentary answer from the minister. I refer him to the HMIC report, which he can find online. I suggest that he looks at it, assesses what has been said by HMIC and comes back to me and members of this Parliament with a response to that point, because the report clearly states that the authority was

given by senior officers in the area in which those people were operating.

There is a clear difference between what the minister is saying and what that report is saying. This Parliament has to know what the facts are on that point. Will he come back on it?

Paul Wheelhouse: I will point out two things. First, just to correct the record, I am not responsible for the answer to which Mr Findlay refers. I believe that the answer would have come from the cabinet secretary rather than from me. Secondly, on the point that Mr Findlay is making, there is no specific reference to Scotland. That is the point that I am making. I appreciate Mr Findlay's point, but we do not yet know whether Scottish officers authorised such operations. Indeed, that is something that we hope will be covered by the extension of the Pitchford inquiry to Scotland.

Johann Lamont: Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul Wheelhouse: I really need to make progress. I apologise to Ms Lamont. Presiding Officer, will I have additional time if I take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You will have to decide, Mr Wheelhouse, whether you are taking the intervention.

Paul Wheelhouse: I am very short of time. I apologise to Ms Lamont. If I can, I will let her in after I have made some progress. This is an important matter so I need to put stuff on the record.

I trust that Mr Findlay is pursuing the Home Secretary and indeed the mayor of London with a similar vigour to that which he has shown in his pursuit of the matter with the Scottish Government. I am not being flippant; I am making a factual point again. It is important to note the lines of accountability for the units concerned.

John Finnie: Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul Wheelhouse: I really must make progress—I apologise. I will try to bring members in later if I can make some progress.

There was much focus in Mr Findlay's speech on criticism of the Scottish Government but I encourage him to encourage Ms May to extend the inquiry to include Scotland.

Notwithstanding that, if officers attached to those units—

Neil Findlay: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I wonder whether you can help me out. We seem to be in a unique position in which the Scottish Government is for once saying, when

there has been encroachment on its patch by the UK, “This is nothing to do with us, guv. Go and see Boris Johnson, or whoever the bloody mayor of London is these days.” What is going on here today is bizarre, Presiding Officer. I wonder whether you can ask the minister to clarify the position.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay, as you will know, that is not a point of order. The minister’s words are a matter for him, not for me. I thank you for raising the point, but it is not a point of order. I invite the minister to continue.

Paul Wheelhouse: As I said, notwithstanding the point that I just made, if officers attached to those units were active in Scotland—and the inquiry has been set up specifically to look at related activity—we strongly believe that the inquiry should be able to consider that activity, irrespective of where it took place.

That is why the Cabinet Secretary for Justice wrote to the Home Secretary on 10 December last year asking her to confirm that the inquiry would be able to take account of any activity by Metropolitan Police units that took place in Scotland. To date, as of 10 to 5 when I came down to the chamber, we have not yet received any response from Ms May, but we are hopeful that we will receive one, of course.

We are not and must never be complacent about these matters and I recognise members’ concerns. Even on my own party’s benches, my colleagues Sandra White and Roderick Campbell have made the point that they are concerned about the nature of the activities that may have been conducted in Scotland.

Undercover policing is a legitimate policing tactic, as Mr Finnie has said—

Hugh Henry: Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul Wheelhouse: I really must progress my comments, if I may.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Progress, then.

Paul Wheelhouse: However, that tactic can intrude on privacy and must always be subject to the most robust procedures and rigorous oversight to prevent the harms to individuals that members have referred to.

It is our belief that the use of undercover officers by the Scottish police is very different from the allegations that have caused such concern and attracted so much media attention. Nevertheless, we have put in place measures to strengthen the control of undercover officer deployment by Police Scotland.

Neil Findlay: Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul Wheelhouse: Presiding Officer, I have made it clear that I have to make progress unless I have extra time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can take an intervention if you want to because it is an extraordinary sort of evening and we are allowing extra time.

Paul Wheelhouse: Thank you for your patience, Presiding Officer.

Neil Findlay: The minister says that the Scottish police act differently from what has happened. That might be true, and I hope that it is, but what evidence does the minister have for that statement?

Paul Wheelhouse: If Mr Findlay will allow me to develop my speech, I am trying to establish the point to which he is referring. I am not referring to the allegations about Metropolitan Police units; I am talking about undercover operations of the Scottish police in Scotland in general, to address Mr Findlay’s concern.

As I said, we have put in place measures to strengthen the control of undercover officer deployment by Police Scotland. I hope that that will be of some reassurance to Elaine Smith, Johann Lamont and other colleagues who have stressed their support for Police Scotland and the work that it is doing. I welcome that support. They rightly want to be sure that that work is done to the appropriate standards, and I will go on to set out why I believe that it is.

Our response to an HMIC report that made recommendations for police forces in England and Wales was to bring forward legislation that raised the rank at which authorisation may be given; we required all authorisations to be notified to the Office of Surveillance Commissioners; and we required all deployments to be approved by the Office of Surveillance Commissioners once they reached the 12-month stage. Furthermore, when the Pitchford inquiry comes to make its recommendations, we will look at those recommendations very carefully, and if there are sensible measures that we can take in Scotland, of course we will do so.

The deployment of undercover officers is an operational decision for the police, and I know that Police Scotland takes such sensitive matters very seriously. Police Scotland has a code of ethics that clearly sets out its core values of integrity, respect, fairness and the importance of human rights. Indeed, the human rights elements of policing were built into the fabric of the service when the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 was passed, and every constable now makes a solemn declaration when appointed that they will “uphold fundamental human rights”.

John Finnie: Will the minister give way on that point?

Paul Wheelhouse: I will if I have further latitude from the Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We should really come to a conclusion, to be fair. Please conclude, Mr Wheelhouse.

Paul Wheelhouse: I will do so with apologies to Mr Finnie.

Under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000, which was passed during the Liberal Democrat and Labour Administration, the Parliament put in place the covert human intelligence sources code of practice. The code states:

“Any Police Scotland Officer deployed as a ‘relevant source’”

—the term used for undercover officers—

“in Scotland will be required to comply with and uphold the principles and standards of professional behaviour set out in Police Scotland’s Code of Ethics.”

We raised the bar in 2012, and the Office of Surveillance Commissioners, the independent judicially led body that oversees undercover policing activity by all UK forces, has extensive powers to address any issues that arise. I understand that, to date, the commissioners have not raised any issues with either Police Scotland or Scottish ministers.

I have listened carefully to the arguments that have been made by members during the debate—not least by colleagues in my party—and the case that they have made for a separate Scottish inquiry. However, at this stage, it is important to press the Home Secretary to extend the Pitchford inquiry to cover activities that might have taken place in Scotland. That is the right way forward.

When police forces do not live up to the high standards that we expect of them, it is only right and proper that they should be held to account, but that accountability has to be to the appropriate body. In the case of the allegations that have been made to date, that accountability is clearly to the London mayor and the UK Government.

John Finnie: And the Lord Advocate.

Paul Wheelhouse: I take Mr Finnie’s point.

As I indicated previously, the Scottish Government believes that there is a strong case for Lord Justice Pitchford’s inquiry to consider the activities of specific Metropolitan Police units in Scotland, and we await the Home Secretary’s response with interest.

Meeting closed at 18:08.

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

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