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Wednesday 20 February 2019

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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

National Health Service (Wigs Policy)

1. **Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what the NHS policy is on prescribing wigs for patients receiving private healthcare. (S5O-02879)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): The prescribing of wigs is dependent on clinical assessment and individual need. The Scottish Government has previously issued guidance on the provision of wigs to all NHS boards to allow them to deliver services that meet the needs of their local populations. We expect independent healthcare providers to administer all necessary treatment for each episode of care.

Richard Lyle: Being told that one has cancer is a blow to anybody, and to family members. Whether a cancer sufferer is a private or an NHS patient, they do not need officialdom or red tape. That is what one lady got until officials realised who they were dealing with. The policy is quite clear and should be implemented in that way. I thank the officer in the Scottish Parliament information centre who answered my inquiry in a matter of hours.

As I spoke to that patient, her young son drew the picture that I have in my hand, which says, "We want the wig." That says it all. By the way, the patient got her wig.

Will the cabinet secretary ensure that a policy that is set out to aid all cancer patients is implemented correctly and that patients, whether private or NHS, are treated with respect and get the service that they deserve?

Jeane Freeman: I could not agree more with Richard Lyle. When someone receives a diagnosis of cancer or any other life-threatening disease, the last thing that they need is red tape and bureaucracy. I am happy to confirm that I will ensure that our guidelines are reissued across all our boards and to the private providers with which we are in contact, so that all our patients are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I have been assisting a constituent who has alopecia, which has prompted me to write to

health boards to ask for a breakdown of the number of real-hair wigs that are offered to patients, as well as the number of synthetic wigs. It is proving difficult to get the data. What can the Scottish Government do to help health boards improve the data that they hold, so that patients with alopecia and other conditions can get the quality of wig that they need and deserve?

Jeane Freeman: It is an important issue. My understanding is that NHS patients may receive up to four stock wigs as required per year. With human-hair wigs, new patients with long-term hair loss may be prescribed one wig per year, or two wigs in the first year, which must last 24 months, then one wig per year thereafter. That is my understanding of what happens currently. I am happy to write to and set that out for Monica Lennon, and also to look a bit further at the way in which data is collected by our boards, so that the kind of questions that Ms Lennon asked can be more easily answered. In the meantime, I will write to Ms Lennon.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Question 2 has been withdrawn.

General Practitioners Premises Sustainability Fund

3. **Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the roll-out of the GP premises sustainability fund will help reduce barriers to the recruitment of GPs. (S5O-02881)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): The GP premises sustainability fund, which offers a long-term interest-free loan of up to 20 per cent of the value of premises, is a direct response to concerns that were raised by the British Medical Association and GPs. It aims to ease the financial risk that is associated with owning premises and, in turn, to help with GP recruitment and retention. New GPs need to raise funds to buy into practice premises and can be unwilling to take on or anxious about the associated financial risks. That is considered to deter new GPs and has been evidenced as a barrier to recruitment to some degree.

The roll-out of the first £30 million of the GP premises sustainability fund has been approved and allocated. Last week, we announced an additional £20 million for that fund and the reopening of applications, bringing forward the timeframe to 2019 to 2021. So far, all the feedback that we have had from GPs and the BMA has been very positive, in that the fund has responded directly to their concerns and—we hope—will ease the risk of premises ownership and increase recruitment and retention.

Gil Paterson: The feedback that the cabinet secretary described is very similar to the feedback that I have had. I know that financial risk is critical factor in GP practices in my constituency and I welcome the Scottish Government's ongoing commitment to the recruitment and retention of GPs.

The cabinet secretary has answered some of the questions, for which I thank her. However, can the Scottish Government say how much funding has been allocated in total to support the GP premises loan scheme and the new GP contract?

Jeane Freeman: We initially allocated more than £140 million to support the premises loan scheme, the new GP contract and wider primary care reform in 2018-19. I have now increased the £30 million that was part of that £140 million to £50 million. That is our current total investment in this aspect of the recruitment and retention of GPs.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I welcome the GP premises sustainability fund and, indeed, called for it two years ago. It is vital that we ensure that Scotland's GP surgeries are sustainable and that any prohibitive costs that are faced by GPs and their staff are addressed.

The vast majority of GP practices across the country—793 surgeries—are privately run by doctors themselves and not by the local health board. Can the cabinet secretary confirm today that all GP surgeries in Scotland will not be included in the Scottish National Party's car park tax proposals?

Jeane Freeman: I have to say that that was a wasted opportunity on the part of Mr Briggs. He is the shadow spokesperson for health, and that is the best that he can do. We will debate the issue tomorrow, but he knows as well as I do that we are talking about an additional power for local authorities to use or not as they choose.

The finance secretary has made it clear more than once—as have I—that NHS staff will not be required to pay that tax, should the local authority concerned implement it. That, of course, applies to GP practices that have a contract with us to provide NHS care. How much clearer can we be on that? Next time, Miles Briggs will perhaps ask a question that is relevant to the health portfolio.

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I welcome any and all initiatives to improve the sustainability of general practice, particularly in rural areas. However, I read in the national code of practice that health boards will have a new power to withdraw both notional rent and borrowing cost payments from GPs. Will the cabinet secretary outline in more detail where and when the new powers could be used?

Jeane Freeman: I think that Mr Stewart is referring to the lease aspect of the new scheme. As we know, some GP practices own the premises; that is where the loan scheme comes into play. Others do not own but rent their premises. We are offering those GP practices the opportunity for the lease to be taken on by the health board, thereby alleviating some of the risk that the practice might face in relation to a private landlord, as well as offering longer-term security for the lease provision.

I think that that is what Mr Stewart asked me about. That is part of the overall primary care reform programme and is already under way. I am sure that it will be taken up more in 2019-20. If the member wants more details on that, I am happy to provide them.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): For the first time since the creation of the National Health Service in 1948, the village of Stoneyburn has no GP service. The premises—although they need improvement—are there, but there is no doctor in the health centre. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is completely unacceptable, and will she come with me to see the premises and to speak to local people about the fact that they no longer have a GP?

Jeane Freeman: My understanding is that my officials are in contact with West Lothian health and social care partnership, which has, of course, planning and commissioning responsibility in the area. They have advised me of the decision to continue to provide consolidated GP services for all patients who are registered at the Breich Valley medical practice, including patients who live in Stoneyburn, and that the partnership remains committed to retaining the Stoneyburn community health centre, in which patients can access a wider range of community health services, including district nursing and health visitors, and is looking at ways of bolstering services to the Stoneyburn community, with housebound patients continuing to receive exactly the same services that they currently do.

I am happy to look at the matter further and, indeed, to discuss it personally with Mr Findlay to see whether there is more that we can do at this point.

Healthy Valleys (Community-led Health Initiatives)

4. **Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what role third sector organisations such as Healthy Valleys in Lanark play in supporting preventative health and other community-led health initiatives. (S50-02882)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): I acknowledge the very important work that community-based organisations such as Healthy Valleys play in addressing the challenges of inequalities in health and the complex issues that lie behind those challenges. Scotland's strong and dynamic third sector plays a crucial role in the drive for social justice and inclusive economic growth, and it is essential to reform of public services and to the wellbeing of our communities. That is reflected in our continuing financial support for the sector via the core third sector budget and a range of other planned expenditure across portfolios.

Claudia Beamish: The core budget is, of course, very important, but does the minister agree that some sort of guidelines—I do not know whether the Scottish Government already has those—and specific plans are needed to help organisations such as Healthy Valleys to gain a more assured future? Many of them are reliant on unreliable short-term grant funding, which makes it difficult to support specialists and, indeed, quite remote rural areas in working preventatively with continuity.

Joe FitzPatrick: We absolutely encourage organisations such as Healthy Valleys to work with their funding partners to support them to continue their good work on a more sustainable basis. The Scottish Government continues to look at how we can support that activity. We are currently considering how future funding under the empowering communities fund can be streamlined to support that and improve delivery.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport and I recently attended the launch of a collaboration between Yipworld and Cycle Station, which are third sector organisations. We would like such collaboration to be promoted. Does the minister agree that the way that the third sector is currently funded makes such collaboration difficult? Is not it about time that we looked at how we can align the third sector and fund it so that there is more such collaboration?

Joe FitzPatrick: Brian Whittle makes a good point. I have already said that collaboration is really important and that such organisations need to work with their funding partners. There needs to be partnership working.

I think that we all agree that we want to encourage models of social prescribing in the future. That involves looking at how we use the funds that we have. That is why it is important that we are specifically looking at what the funding models are, and at how we can use the empowering communities fund to streamline delivery better. We need to ensure that we are as joined up as possible across all portfolios so that

we support the kinds of initiatives that Brian Whittle has mentioned.

NHS Scotland Resource Allocation Committee Funding Formula

5. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to review the NRAC funding formula for NHS boards. (S5O-02883)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): There are currently no plans to review the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee funding formula for national health service boards. The formula has been used in NHS Scotland since 2009, following its approval by all NHS boards and the technical advisory group on resource allocation. It is updated annually on the basis of statistical analysis by experts, and it remains the most objective and robust method of allocating health service funding on an equitable basis.

Liam Kerr: This year, our health boards are getting an average uplift of 3.8 per cent. That is less than the 5.3 per cent uplift for the overall health budget. Health boards deliver the vast majority of NHS work. Thanks to Barnett consequentials and the United Kingdom Government's spending decisions, an extra £2 billion is coming north for our NHS. How will the cabinet secretary allocate that extra money to guarantee that our health boards get the funding that they deserve?

Jeane Freeman: Mr Kerr is displaying significant misunderstanding of the funding of our health service and the various means by which that funding gets to patients, which is the most important thing. As he will be aware, NHS boards receive an allocation in addition to the funding under the waiting times improvement plan, which provides additional resources. There is £160 million more in the draft budget, although that funding is dependent on Parliament approving the budget tomorrow. That sum includes funding to extend free personal care to under-65s, which I know Miles Briggs was, quite rightly, very keen to promote, so I hope that he will support the budget tomorrow. The £160 million for additional provision will go to our health and social care partnerships and to local authorities.

If members look in the round at the overall level of health spending on patients, and at our commitment, which we honour consistently, to pass all health consequentials on to the health portfolio, they can see that we continue to increase our health spending and that we are on track to achieve our target of shifting the balance of care from acute to community settings.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that there will not be any increase in NHS funding if the budget is not passed tomorrow? Does she also agree that any future review of the NHS Scotland resource allocation committee funding formula must take greater account of poverty and deprivation, given that they are primary indicators of likely health need?

Jeane Freeman: Mr Gibson is completely accurate to say that where we stand with our health service will depend on Parliament's decision on the draft 2019-20 budget. I remain ever hopeful that all members will understand the vital importance of the additional resource that we are putting into health, and that they will be able to support it.

Mr Gibson is also right to say that poverty and deprivation are key elements in the NRAC formula, which supports access to health care according to need. As I have said, recent reviews by independent experts have ensured that the formula remains fit for purpose. Of course, as with all formulas, it is not an exact or perfect science, so we should always remain open to continued consideration of the formula's effectiveness.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): The Scottish Parliament information centre has produced research that shows that NHS Grampian has received £239 million below the NRAC target allocation over the past 10 years. Does the cabinet secretary accept that it is not the case that the NRAC formula is at fault, but that there has been consistent failure to provide the NRAC allocation every year since 2009?

Jeane Freeman: All boards being moved as close as possible to parity under the NRAC formula requires that some boards lose funding and other boards get increased funding. Mr Rumbles will know that the Government has, in stages, moved to the position in which all boards are within 0.8 per cent of parity with the formula. The figures to which he refers date back to a point at which NHS Grampian's parity with the NRAC formula was at minus 4.8 per cent. We are making progress towards increasing equity and fairness in application of the formula, and will continue to do so on a staged basis. Every penny relates to a direct service to patients, which means that we need to take that staged and sensible approach.

Clinical Nurse Specialists (Enhanced Role and Benefits)

6. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it has enhanced the role of clinical nurse specialists in the NHS and what the benefits have been. (S5O-02884)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): The role of clinical nurse specialists in our health service is important, and there has been development across a range of specialisms over a number of years.

We are engaging on a transforming nursing roles programme. The work includes the establishment of a specialist short-life working group, which will look at the clinical nurse specialist role. The group's aims are to clarify the role, regardless of specialism, to reduce variation or duplication in the roles across the country and to have a clear focus on the total education, training and support requirements for clinical nurse specialists, in order to improve and enhance patient care.

That work has begun. I am told that it is expected to be completed in a year's time, but I have asked officials whether there is any way in which it can produce interim recommendations or complete its work much earlier than that.

Joan McAlpine: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, which I very much welcome. The Royal College of Nursing recommends that all children with epilepsy be seen by a specialist nurse, and that is happening in every health board area in Scotland except Dumfries and Galloway; even the Borders, with its smaller population, has this issue covered. An estimated 150 to 250 children and young people in Dumfries and Galloway live with epilepsy and, although I understand that it is a matter for the board, that is little comfort to the families concerned. Can the Government put any pressure on the Dumfries and Galloway board to change its position and catch up with the excellent position in the rest of Scotland?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Ms McAlpine for her supplementary question, and I share the concern that she obviously has at Dumfries and Galloway appearing to be an outlier in an area that is pretty important, not least for the families whom she has mentioned. I assure the member right now that I will personally look at why the Dumfries and Galloway board has taken this view, what it perceives to be the barriers that lie in its way as opposed to what is happening in other health boards and how we might assist it in overcoming those barriers and meeting the recommendation that she has referred to.

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): Given recent reports of the extremely high demand for accident and emergency services at Borders general hospital, which culminated in the director of nursing and acute services making a public appeal to urge people to visit A and E only in a serious medical emergency, how does the cabinet secretary see the enhanced role of clinical

nurse specialists easing the pressure on NHS Scotland's strained A and E departments?

Jeane Freeman: A number of enhanced roles can address the additional pressure on our A and E departments. Ms Ballantyne is correct in pointing to the issue of additional demand; indeed, we experienced such demand only last year, which, as members will recall, was made particularly difficult by weather, flu and so on. For a number of weeks, demand across almost all our A and E departments increased in percentage terms to varying degrees.

As well as looking to ensure that all our emergency departments apply the six key actions that have been agreed so that they operate as effectively as possible, we are looking with health boards and health and social care partnerships at two other areas. First, there is the flow through the hospital, which will also include the issue of delayed discharge.

As for the second area, I do not want to say to people, "Don't go to your A and E department." Instead, I want the emergency department and those at the front door of the hospital to be able to signpost people appropriately. For example, the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh has recently opened a minor injuries unit beside its emergency department; people who come to the front door are properly signposted to that unit next door, where they will be treated properly and where a range of professional input, not least physiotherapists but advanced nurse practitioners, medics and clinical nurse specialists, can, where relevant and depending on the nature of the demand, play a role. We are looking at making the best possible use of the range of professional disciplines and skills in our health services and at increasing and enhancing them while at the same time ensuring that the patient gets the care and skills that they need at the point that they need them.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): How is the implementation of advanced nurse practitioners, which are different from clinical nurse specialists, in primary care settings such as general practices benefiting communities, particularly those in rural areas such as Dumfries and Galloway in my South Scotland region?

Jeane Freeman: Ms Harper is right that advanced nurse practitioners differ from clinical nurse specialists. Advanced nurse practitioners have an important role, which is why we have committed to train 500 of them by 2021. Their role in primary care, in GP practices and in some of the linked community-based services that I touched on in response to Ms Ballantyne and others is to support joined-up anticipatory and preventative care through working with individuals in their local community. In my constituency, I have seen

advanced nurse practitioners take on a number of roles in the primary care setting, which has allowed GPs to step forward into the role that the new contract and the British Medical Association wish GPs to be in, which is that of clinical general specialist lead in the local community for the team of healthcare practitioners, including the advanced nurse practitioners.

Rural Clinics

7. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that its commitment to develop rural clinics aligns with the needs of NHS boards and clinicians. (S5O-02885)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): We are committed to ensuring that healthcare services provide high-quality sustainable care for patients across communities, including those in rural areas. Integration authorities are responsible for planning local services in line with national policies and local priorities, and they have a statutory duty to consult partners, stakeholders and professional groups as part of their strategic commissioning process.

The memorandum of understanding that was published alongside the new general practitioner contract is clear that primary care redesign needs to be safe, effective and accessible to all and agreed with local clinical professionals. That should help to ensure that, across the country but particularly in remote and rural areas, the services that are redesigned as part of our overall primary care reform—for which there is additional resource—meet the particular needs of local communities, and that that is done through consultation, which is a statutory responsibility on health and social care partnerships.

Stewart Stevenson: The cabinet secretary will be aware that, in many rural communities, access to carers is important and access to transport is relatively limited. In light of that, will the cabinet secretary encourage the integration services to take those factors into account when designing the new way in which rural clinics are operated and offered?

Jeane Freeman: I am happy to give Mr Stevenson that commitment. I know from my experience in my constituency that, in a rural area, it is possible to look at a map and think that it is not that far from A to B when actually it takes a great deal longer than it perhaps would take in a central belt location. I am happy to give the member a commitment that I will ensure that our integration authorities take those factors into account wherever they commission and plan services.

Ambulance Drivers (Safe Working Hours)

8. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government for how many hours on-call ambulance drivers can safely work in addition to their day shift. (S5O-02886)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): All working patterns in NHS Scotland meet the limits of the working time regulations, including the average 48-hour working week and the required minimum daily and weekly rest periods. Over the past 12 months, on-call working for ambulance crews has been eliminated in Wick, Thurso and Dufftown and an announcement was made last week to recruit to six new ambulance posts, which will eliminate on-call working in Portree. The Scottish Ambulance Service recognises the staff concerns around fatigue related to on-call working and has agreed in partnership a fatigue policy, which is designed to address those concerns.

Rhoda Grant: Ambulance crews in remote rural areas work their day shift hours and then cover the rest of the 24-hour period on an on-call basis. That can mean that staff work their full day shift and are then called out in the middle of the night. In my region, those call-outs can involve a round trip of more than six hours on top of the day shift already worked. If those staff were employed as professional drivers, that would be illegal and indeed they could be charged with dangerous driving. They can register as fatigued—that is up to them—but if they do so they cannot return home. I ask the cabinet secretary to investigate that practice and ensure that the health and safety of the crews and their patients are safeguarded.

Jeane Freeman: I understand Ms Grant's point, and I am happy to confirm that I will have further discussions with the Scottish Ambulance Service on that point and will write to her in due course on the outcome of those discussions.

St Brendan's Hospital

9. Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on plans to replace St Brendan's hospital on Barra. (S5O-02887)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I completely understand the frustration that I am sure Dr Allan feels and the local community certainly feels at what appears to have been a lengthy process.

The health board, the local authority and the Scottish Government remain committed to delivering the St Brendan's re-provision at the earliest opportunity. The outline business case was approved in April 2018.

Work continues between the health board, the council and the integration joint board, with the support of the Scottish Futures Trust, to determine the best approach for delivery of the hospital project and the Castlebay community hub—integrated or separate solutions—to ensure that public infrastructure best meets the needs of the local population and provides an effective and sustainable health and education resource for the future. We have made clear—and I make clear again today in the Parliament—that, although we are supportive of NHS Western Isles exploring that opportunity, we do not want it to create any delay in the submission of the full business case for the health centre.

Dr Allan: I thank the cabinet secretary for her helpful answer. Will she acknowledge that people in Barra have been waiting a very long time for NHS Western Isles to provide a replacement hospital? I will be in Barra on Friday, and I know that my constituents there will want to be reassured that, in whatever form this project is realised, any changes will not delay the submission of a full business case or affect the Government's commitment to provide a new hospital by 2021.

Jeane Freeman: I am happy to give Dr Allan that absolute assurance. I have asked my officials to provide an update on where we are between the submission of the outline business case about 10 months ago and the full business case that I expect to see very shortly. Should there be hiccups or hitches in that regard, I expect my officials to intervene and to assist the health board in producing the full business case at the earliest opportunity, so that we can make good on our commitment and the assurances that we have given many times—it is time for us to ensure that they are delivered on.

NHS Fife (Out-of-hours Urgent Care)

10. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on out-of-hours urgent care in NHS Fife. (S5O-02888)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): Fife health and social care partnership is in the process of carrying out further work with communities and key stakeholders across Fife, following the meeting of the integration joint board on 20 December, when the decision on the future of out-of-hours services was postponed until the community participation requests had been answered. I understand that NHS Fife expects to communicate with the community groups as soon as possible and I have asked to be kept informed.

Annabelle Ewing: As the member for the Cowdenbeath constituency, I stress that overnight,

out-of-hours urgent care at the Queen Margaret hospital in Dunfermline and in Glenrothes and St Andrews has been suspended for nearly 11 months. Will the cabinet secretary use her good offices to ensure that Fife health and social care partnership resolves matters in the interests of individuals and families in Fife?

Jeane Freeman: As Ms Ewing knows, I was concerned in December that the integration authority might take what I considered to be a precipitate decision; I am grateful that it postponed the decision and has undertaken the further work that I think was required.

I assure the member that I am taking a close interest in the matter. I understand that a progress report on a number of the outstanding issues will be given to the IJB meeting in April and I am assured that some progress has been made, including, for example, the introduction of a new remuneration rate for general practitioners, which has supported an increase in the number of GPs who provide regular sessions.

In addition, continued support for and investment in nurse training and the use of paramedics is improving resilience in the short and longer terms.

I absolutely understand the need for consistency and resilience in the service. My officials will continue to work with Fife health and social care partnership during this period, and I will ensure that I am kept up to date.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): What steps is the cabinet secretary taking to ensure that staff shortages do not lead to further centralisation of out-of-hours services in Fife?

Jeane Freeman: It is clear that there are a number of issues that the health and social care partnership needs to address, to ensure that there is as reasonable as possible equity of access to out-of-hours services.

I benefited from discussion with GPs from St Andrews on their propositions for what might be appropriate and possible there. I have all those matters in mind as I look to be updated on how Fife health and social care partnership's consultation is going and on the final set of propositions that it brings forward. I take Mr Stewart's point. I do not believe that it is entirely a matter of staff shortages, and I have already outlined some improvements in that regard. It is about understanding what is most suitable for the local communities involved and issues such as transport—we touched on that earlier—and ease of access to out-of-hours facilities. I will be looking for that when I see the final proposals.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The cabinet secretary may be aware that, in

December 2018, the highest number of patients of any time over the past four years attended the down-scaled out-of-hours service that is based at the Victoria hospital in Kirkcaldy. Does she agree with me that those numbers illustrate the demand for the service? Does she share my concern that the centralisation disadvantages communities outwith Kirkcaldy? She referred earlier to the issue of rural distances, and I hope that she recognises that Fife comes into the category of areas that are affected by that. Notwithstanding her previous comments, does she commit to supporting NHS Fife to increase the pool of GPs who will work out of hours. I understand that, at the end of last year, an advert for the post of out-of-hours GP in Fife had no applications at all.

Jeane Freeman: I hope that Ms Baker is assured that I understand the issues that she raises. I understand the point about remote and rural areas and, having travelled in Fife, I know that, although it looks like a relatively compact area on a map, travel on the roads in Fife is perhaps less straightforward than travel in other parts of our country—that is precisely my point. Some work has been done to increase the number of GPs who are prepared to work out of hours but also, as I said in response to earlier questions, to look more widely at the professional skills mix that is appropriate for out-of-hours services, not least in our increased and enhanced paramedical facilities as well as advanced nurse practitioners. I will be looking for that in the mix to ensure that, as far as is possible, we have equity of access to out-of-hours services across the kingdom of Fife.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary update the Parliament on the transport appraisal for Glenrothes hospital's GP out-of-hours service, in order to assure my constituents that access to transportation to the Victoria hospital has been assessed appropriately?

Jeane Freeman: If I had had advance notice of Ms Gilruth's question, I would have ensured that I had that information. I do not have it, but am happy to forward it to her.

Sports Pitches (Annie'sland)

11. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Annie'sland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the upgrade of sports pitches in Annie'sland to 3G multi-use game areas. (S5O-02889)

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): The Scottish Government routes plans and applications for the upgrading and maintenance of sporting facilities through sportscotland, which is the national agency for sport. It is not aware of any current proposals for pitch developments in the

Anniesland area, but it would be willing to discuss potential applications from clubs and/or community groups that seek support.

Bill Kidd: I know that the Scottish Government has been proactive in supporting upgrades for sports facilities in primary schools, including within my Anniesland constituency. Will the Government work with Glasgow City Council and other councils across Scotland to make further progress on ensuring that secondary schools also make the upgrade to 3G pitches?

Joe FitzPatrick: I understand that Glasgow City Council has asked Glasgow Life to lead a review of the existing pitch strategy in Glasgow. The review will focus on the sports that are covered in the existing strategy, which include football, rugby union, rugby league, hockey, cricket, tennis, bowls, shinty and basketball, and will look at the strategic supply of and demand for pitches across the city.

Of course, the focus of Glasgow City Council is on increasing the provision of grass and synthetic pitches across the city, and sportscotland would be happy to discuss that matter further with the council.

Royal Alexandra Hospital (Infection Control Measures)

12. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on infection control measures at the Royal Alexandra hospital and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. (S50-02890)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I will start my answer by passing on my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the person who died as a result of contracting the *Stenotrophomonas maltophilia* infection.

When an outbreak or incident is identified by a board, an incident management team is established to assess and manage the situation. Clearly, the specific control measures that are required to prevent further cases and ensure patient safety are tailored to the nature of the bacterium that is identified and how it is spread.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has worked with Health Protection Scotland to ensure that those additional appropriate infection control measures have been put in place and remain in place in relation to the incidents that have been reported across the board area, including those at the Royal Alexandra hospital.

Neil Bibby: Yesterday, Health Protection Scotland published a report on a recent inspection at the RAH that found staffing gaps in the domestic cleaning rota and issues with the

maintenance of the estate. That is concerning, as it comes after recent infections across the health board area, including the bacterial infection in the RAH that the cabinet secretary mentioned, which contributed to the death of a patient.

Does the cabinet secretary believe that the standards of cleanliness that are highlighted in the report are sufficient? What is the Government doing to ensure that our hospital environments are maintained and that there are no staffing gaps in domestic cleaning rotas?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Mr Bibby for his supplementary question. His analysis of what that report says is absolutely correct, and I take that seriously. I was concerned to read about those gaps in the cleaning rota and in relation to maintenance because, of course, cleaning, domestic services and maintenance are critical elements of infection prevention and control. My officials, including the new director general for health and chief executive of NHS Scotland, are in daily contact with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, picking up on those matters and checking the additional work that is being done to ensure that the concerns are addressed. I receive a daily update to ensure that I am kept up to date with the situation, and I am pursuing some of the issues with the health board directly.

As far as other health boards across the country are concerned, we have sought assurance from them with regard to the data that they have on their staff numbers in terms of domestic and cleaning work and maintenance, and when we identify what we consider to be unacceptable gaps in those numbers and a lack of any immediate plan to fill those gaps, we pursue that with those health boards in order to ensure that all the vacancies are filled, as far as possible.

Pitlochry Minor Injuries Unit (Reopening)

The Presiding Officer: Question 13 is from Murdo Fraser.

13. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Thank you. I had given up on you, Presiding Officer. [*Laughter.*]

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure the full reopening of the Pitlochry minor injuries unit. (S50-02891)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I had almost given up on Mr Fraser—[*Laughter.*] Never, ever.

The Pitlochry minor injuries unit's current opening hours are Monday to Friday, between 9.00 am and 4.30 pm. Outwith those hours, appropriate out-of-hours services, including a nurse or a general practitioner, can be accessed through NHS 24 by calling 111.

The Perth and Kinross health and social care partnership is continuing to run a recruitment exercise to appoint additional staff with the specialist skills required, in order to support the full opening hours of the Pitlochry minor injuries unit, which, as I understand it, were from 9 am to 9 pm.

Murdo Fraser: The cabinet secretary will know that the minor injuries unit at Pitlochry is now closing at 4.30 pm on weekdays, and has been closed at weekends for some months, which is causing a great deal of frustration to residents in Highland Perthshire, who face a long journey to the nearest alternative facility, which is in Perth.

What specific action can the Scottish Government take to support NHS Tayside to try to find replacement staff to ensure that that important local facility is reopened to the full extent?

Jeane Freeman: We continue to work with NHS Tayside to look at the detail of the problems that it is addressing and to consider whether there are additional measures and steps that it can take to improve its opportunity to recruit the necessary staff and whether it is looking as widely as possible at the appropriate staff mix. We continue to have those discussions.

It is important that members understand that, when we are aware of situations like this one—which has gone on for some time—we get in touch directly with the relevant health board and local health and social care partnership to understand the detail of what they are doing and to suggest ways that have been successful elsewhere that they might consider adopting or additional measures that the Government might assist them with. We continue to work with Perth and Kinross health and social care partnership and NHS Tayside on that, and I would be happy to update Mr Fraser on the detail of what we have been doing.

Hutchesons' Hospital Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill: Preliminary Stage

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-15617, in the name of Kezia Dugdale, on the Hutchesons' Hospital Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill. I call Kezia Dugdale to speak to and move the motion—you have around seven minutes, please.

14:47

Kezia Dugdale (Lothian) (Lab): I am pleased to open the preliminary stage debate on the Hutchesons' Hospital Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill.

I thank my colleagues Stewart Stevenson—the deputy convener—Ruth Maguire and Maurice Corry for their work in getting the bill to this stage. I also thank the clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre for their guidance and attention to detail throughout the process.

The bill was introduced on 25 June 2018 and is being promoted by the patrons of the Royal Incorporation of Hutchesons' Hospital in the City of Glasgow. This is the fourth private bill to be introduced in the current session; the previous three all received royal assent. By now, we are all becoming more familiar with this specific, but necessary and important, aspect of the Parliament's work. That is, in part, thanks to the most recent private bill to be discussed in the chamber—the Pow of Inchaffray Drainage Commission (Scotland) Bill, which gained a fair amount of attention from its observers during its passage.

So far, the work of our private bill committee has been far more straightforward, partly because no objections were lodged to the Hutchesons' Hospital Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill. As with all private bills, at the primary stage, the role of the committee has been to consider the purpose of the bill, its general principles and whether it should proceed as a private bill. If Parliament agrees, the bill will move to the consideration stage.

The Royal Incorporation of Hutchesons' Hospital in the City of Glasgow is a charity and is the legacy of the Hutcheson brothers, George and Thomas. The name Hutcheson remains well known—thanks, in part, to the grammar school of that name in Glasgow.

It all began in December 1639. In his will, George Hutcheson of Lambhill established the Hutchesons' hospital charity when he left land and

funding to build a hospital. In the 1600s, hospitals were places to shelter and support those in need.

Important milestones in the charity's history appear in 1821, when the charity became the Royal Incorporation of Hutchesons' Hospital in the City of Glasgow under a royal charter, and in 1872, when it was incorporated in its current form by the Hutchesons' Hospital Act 1872.

The purposes of the bill that we have in front of us today are to transfer the property, rights, interests and liabilities of the royal incorporation to a successor Scottish charitable incorporated organisation—or SCIO; to dissolve the incorporation; and to repeal the Hutchesons' Hospital Act 1872.

I feel that, before I move on to the committee's consideration of the bill, members might benefit from some background to the incorporation. The preamble to the 1872 act provides considerable detail on how the charity developed—15 pages of pre-1872 history in all, most of which members will get from Stewart Stevenson's speech this afternoon. Several sections cite provisions from George Hutcheson's will, in the original Scots. We had the benefit of a comprehensive promoter's memorandum, as one of the accompanying documents to the bill, which set out the history of the charity for us.

As I mentioned, it was George Hutcheson who donated the land in Glasgow and the funds to build a hospital on it. He also provided funds for clothes, food and lodging for, at that time,

“eleven aged and decrepit men”.

The support was for men who had been merchants, craftsmen or tradesmen who had fallen on hard times. George's brother, Thomas, also made bequests to the charity. He provided funding for educating orphans who were the sons of burgesses of Glasgow and he established the school that became Hutchesons' grammar school. A burgh was an inhabitant of the city who owned land, paid tax and was able to trade or practice a craft.

The original Hutchesons' hospital building was completed in 1650 at the Trongate in Glasgow, and it was demolished in 1795. A new hospital building, which included Hutchesons' school, was completed in 1805 on Ingram Street in Glasgow, and in 1810 the school moved into its own premises and then into a purpose-built building in 1841. The old hospital building can still be seen on Ingram Street today.

Over the years, other bequests were made to the charity and eligibility was expanded. For example, from 1781 poor women also qualified if they were residents of Glasgow and if their husbands or fathers were burgesses. Since 1885

the incorporation's distributions for educational purposes have been paid to, and administered separately by, the governors of Hutchesons' Educational Trust. The 1872 act still regulates the management of the charity and its revenues today, which brings us back to the objectives and purposes of the bill.

The bill's promoter, the patrons—or trustees—of the charity, have decided that change is needed to allow more modern governance of the incorporation's assets and to enable the charity to function more efficiently and effectively. They believe that a private bill is the best route to achieving that.

We heard from the promoter at our committee meeting on 7 November 2018, when we asked what the 1872 act prevented the charity from doing today. Mr Donald Reid of Mitchells Robertson, the firm of solicitors that supports the charity in its role as “chamberlains” to Hutchesons' hospital, explained:

“Our hands are not tied behind our backs at the moment; it is just that moving is like being in a spacesuit rather than in athletic gear. However, what needs to be done gets done.”—[*Official Report, Hutchesons' Hospital Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill Committee, 7 November 2018; c 5.*]

The patrons have already set up the new SCIO, ready for the transfer. The SCIO is a modern, flexible form of organisation for charities that is provided for by the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and regulated by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator.

The committee considered the purpose of the bill and the arguments presented in favour of enabling an updated governance structure and more modern financial management of the charity. We also considered the potential impact of the changes on the nature of the charity, its work and its beneficiaries, and whether a private bill was necessary to achieve the charity's aims.

Our report sets out our considerations, and my committee colleagues will provide some more detail on them later in the debate. The committee supports the general principles of the bill. Overall, we believe that it will help to ensure that the charity can modernise, streamline, improve its governance, remain effective and continue to provide support to its beneficiaries.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Hutchesons' Hospital Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill and that the bill should proceed as a private bill.

14:54

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank the clerks and my colleagues for the

progress of the bill to this stage, and I thank the convener, Kezia Dugdale, for moving the motion. As she mentioned, one of the reasons for promoting the bill is to enable the promoter to update the governance of the incorporation. Based on the 1872 act, which still governs it today, the governing body consists of 95 patrons. Many of those are *ex officio*, meaning that the individuals are there because of the post or office that they hold; they are not there through choice.

An example of that is that all the councillors on Glasgow City Council are still patrons because they were named as such in the 1872 act. The promoter underlined that, although there is a committed and active group of patrons, not surprisingly, there are also many who are not actively involved. The day-to-day running of the incorporation is carried out by an executive committee, but the 95 patrons still constitute the governing body, which means that they must be properly contacted and consulted. In the course of our evidence taking, the promoter explained that there are costs associated with that.

The promoter seeks to streamline and modernise how the charity operates, to make it more agile in how it can take decisions and, as the promoter explained, to respond to expectations of best practice in the charity sector. Such modernisation would include moving towards a model in which bodies would be named, which would then nominate people as trustees. The committee feels that a more direct and transparent link to a group of committed trustees would benefit the charity, because they would be in their roles through choice. Such a move would streamline activities and, ultimately, improve management and oversight. The promoter also believes that modernisation is needed to enable it to use the assets of the charity to their best effect. In evidence to the committee, it explained that, as currently constituted, the charity faces certain restrictions and has less flexibility in what it can do than would be the case for a Scottish charitable incorporated organisation.

As well as considering the arguments that were given by the promoter in favour of modernising the governance and financial management of the charity, the committee heard about the charity's intentions for the future. It provided its first pensions, or grants, to two men in 1643. In evidence from the promoter, the committee heard that the charity today provides grants to a group of between 20 and 30 people in Glasgow. It also employs a part-time social worker who visits those who receive such grants. David Dobson, who is on the charity's executive committee, described that work as

“one main thrust of the purposes of the trust, and it will be maintained absolutely”.

He went on to state:

“The other broad purpose of the trust is the advancement of education in Glasgow. Over the years, that has become established as being that 40 per cent of the trust's net income goes to another charity, namely the Governors of Hutchesons' Educational Trust. We have no intention of changing that, and that will be within the authority granted by the new SCIO, should we start operating in that way.”—[*Official Report, Hutchesons' Hospital Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill Committee*, 7 November 2018; c 8.]

The promoter also confirmed that none of the current beneficiaries would lose out as a consequence of the change.

I hope that I have provided members with useful detail on our considerations and some context as to why—as the convener mentioned in her opening speech—the committee has concluded that it is content with the general principles of the bill as they were presented to us.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stewart Stevenson to close the debate.

14:57

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The primary task of the committee was to consider whether the bill is a private one. We have thought about that and have looked at the definition that is in the Parliament's standing orders, and we have concluded that it is. In doing so, the committee is merely following the long history to which Kezia Dugdale referred, from 1639 via the 1872 act, which, although it was not technically based on a private bill, clearly served private purposes. As the bill that is before the Parliament today is a private one, it is part of the continuum of support that has been given to people in Glasgow.

The promoter had considered whether it could use alternative ways of dealing with the issue that confronted it, such as the charity reorganisation provisions that are set out in chapter 5 of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005, which are available to charities in certain defined circumstances. However, there appeared to be a lack of clarity as to whether the Royal Incorporation of Hutchesons' Hospital in the City of Glasgow would meet the criteria for applying those provisions.

To test that, the committee sought advice from an academic and a Queen's counsel, which is set out in considerable detail in the committee's report. The advice is more fascinating than might be imagined, and I encourage all members to read it. However, the bottom line is that it drew the committee towards the conclusion to which the promoter of the bill had come, which is that it could not reliably use the provisions of the 2005 act without the prospect of legal challenge. Therefore,

instead, it has pursued the private bill that is before us today.

The consequences of a legal challenge, were one to arise, could be both financially and practically quite challenging, so I think that the safe option that they have adopted, which the committee is happy to endorse, is to bring forward a private bill.

Of course, that leads to an issue for the Scottish Government, which we deal with in our report. It is that the legislation that I mentioned—the 2005 act—should perhaps be revisited to see whether we can provide greater clarity.

Having said that, the Scottish Government has published in the past month a consultation on Scottish charity law with a view to possible update of the 2005 act, and it includes a question that relates to the matter that I have just been referring to. Preparation of the consultation would have been well advanced but, nonetheless, the Hutchesons' committee was quite right to bring the bill forward in early course.

The other option was that it could have hobbled on with the 1872 legislation and the 95 largely indifferent people who were on the committee. There was some suggestion that many of them were not even aware that they were on the committee, including as it does all of Glasgow's councillors and many ministers of religion who, simply because of their office, end up legally and formally being on the committee.

We came to the conclusion that doing nothing did not make sense, because the trustees made a pretty cogent argument that we should look at updating and modernising the 1872 arrangements and bringing them into the world that we now have, with the oversight of OSCR and an SCIO. Having considered the alternatives, we are content with the promoter's conclusion that a private bill is most appropriate and best available method of achieving the aims.

We are left with one question alone, which is how we will adjudge the success of the parliamentary process. I think the key test is that the beneficiaries of the trust see no difference whatsoever and it continues to provide the support that they have enjoyed for some time. The support was described in the 1872 act, which was based on the mortification of George Hutcheson of 1639. It says:

“aiget, decrippet men may be enterit and placet yrin”.

I am “aiget” but hopefully not “decrippet”, but I was particularly excited by the provision that there be

“foure shillingis Scottis money”

every day, and every year

“ane gowne of convenient cullor”.

Before we get too excited, I note that, although four shillings sounds a lot of money, in today's money, because it was Scots pounds and not English pounds and because of decimalisation, that would be tuppence. I know that the beneficiaries get a little bit more than that today. The parliamentary process should, and I believe will, enable them to continue to receive the benefits in proper legal form.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the Hutchesons' Hospital Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill.

Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): It is time to move on to the next item of business—when you are ready, Mr Simpson.

The next item of business is a stage 1 debate on motion S5M-15892, in the name of Kevin Stewart, on the Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill.

15:03

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): I am pleased to be opening the stage 1 debate on the Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill. In this day and age, it is unacceptable that any Scottish household should have to make the choice between having the heating on and cooking dinner. If Scotland is to become a fairer and more socially just society, it is crucial that we make real headway towards ending the scourge of fuel poverty.

We are ambitious in our aims. Our groundbreaking bill places Scotland among the best countries in the world for tackling fuel poverty. Not only are we one of just a few countries in the world to have defined “fuel poverty”, but we are setting a goal for eradicating it. We are also changing our definition of fuel poverty so that it is much more reflective of relative income poverty, and we are being revolutionary through our introduction of a minimum income standard.

I thank the Local Government and Communities Committee for its detailed examination of the bill. I also thank the committee clerks, stakeholders, organisations and individuals who have contributed to the scrutiny process and engaged on the bill. I appreciate all their work to make the bill as good as it can be. I am, of course, pleased that the committee’s comprehensive report welcomes the bill and our draft fuel poverty strategy, as well as recommending that Parliament agree the general principles of the bill.

I turn to the bill’s three key aims. The first is to set the target

“that in the year 2040, no more than 5% of households in Scotland are in fuel poverty.”

The second aim is to capture, in the definition of fuel poverty, the folks who most need help, so we are proposing a new definition of fuel poverty that makes innovative use of the minimum income standard in order to better align fuel poverty with relative income poverty. Thirdly, the bill will ensure

that a new long-term fuel poverty strategy will be prepared, published and laid before Parliament.

Crucially, the bill will ensure that in preparation of the strategy we will consult people with lived experience of fuel poverty in order to ensure that our key measures and policies hit the mark. I am very grateful to Ann Loughrey and the Scottish fuel poverty advisory panel and partnership forum for their help in that regard. Once the strategy has been published, ministers must report every five years on the steps that have been taken, on progress that has been made towards meeting the target, and on the plan for the next reporting period. That reporting obligation will provide this and future Governments with focus and momentum in the fight against fuel poverty.

The bill is the product of a thorough and collaborative process. In 2015, we set up two short-life independent bodies to report on fuel poverty: the fuel poverty strategic working group and the rural fuel poverty task force. Following on from their reports, an independent academic panel was tasked with reviewing the definition of fuel poverty. The majority of its recommendations have been incorporated in the definition of fuel poverty that is in the bill.

We also ran a fuel poverty strategy consultation prior to publishing a draft fuel poverty strategy alongside the bill, and we set up the fuel poverty advisory panel and partnership forum as part of a robust new framework for monitoring progress in tackling fuel poverty, and for advising the Government. My officials and I have engaged widely with stakeholders throughout the process, and Parliament can be assured that we will continue to do so. All that shows just how serious the Scottish Government is about tackling fuel poverty.

I have responded to the committee’s conclusions and recommendations, and have outlined the many with which I agree and where I will lodge amendments at stage 2. I take the opportunity to discuss some of those now.

I welcome the committee’s support of the bill’s major aim, which is

“the target ... that in ... 2040, no more than 5% of households in Scotland are in fuel poverty.”

I also confirm my intention to introduce two interim 2030 targets: that by 2030 the fuel poverty rate will be no more than 15 per cent and the median fuel poverty gap will be no more than £350 in 2015 prices, before adding inflation.

The Government’s ambition is simple: it is to put an end to all fuel poverty. We will not stop working until that happens. All the targets will go a long way towards ensuring that we address the severity of fuel poverty, as well as its prevalence. I

therefore note the committee's recommendation that we also include a target to tackle extreme fuel poverty. I am pleased to say that I have listened to the committee and will lodge a stage 2 amendment to define extreme fuel poverty and set a target for its eradication.

The committee expressed the view that the Government should consider lodging an amendment to apply the 5 per cent target for 2040 to all 32 of Scotland's local authorities. However, although we are committed to helping folks out of fuel poverty no matter where in Scotland they live, I am keen to avoid setting some local authorities a goal that is unachievable and unrealistic. I have set out my views in detail in my response to the committee, but I am concerned that its proposal does not seem to be evidence led, and in particular that it has not been the subject of any consultation. I have therefore written to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to seek its views in detail. I note, in the meantime, that it has already written to the committee to express its concerns.

I welcome the committee's support for our proposed use of the UK minimum income standard in the measurement of fuel poverty, which will improve the alignment between fuel poverty and income poverty. No one should underestimate how important and innovative that move is. More than 80 per cent of fuel-poor households are also income poor under the proposed new definition, compared with just over 60 per cent under the current definition. Households that might not be income poor, but which struggle nonetheless to pay their fuel bills and to maintain an acceptable standard of living, will also be captured by the new definition.

I understand the concerns that have been raised about the higher costs that are faced by people in remote rural areas, remote small towns and island communities. I have carefully considered the committee's recommendations and the views of stakeholders that the Government should commit to introducing an additional MIS for remote rural areas, remote small towns and islands in order to reflect those costs.

In recognition of the unique challenges that such areas face in the fight against fuel poverty, I will lodge an amendment at stage 2 to introduce an MIS uplift, as the committee has requested, for areas that form categories 4 and 6 of the Government's six-fold urban/rural classification. I am examining the options for how that can best be carried out, along with the costs involved, and I intend to write to the committee to seek its views before lodging amendments.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome what the minister says about a rural MIS. Does he accept that it is imperative that the uplift

be introduced on a robust and independent basis, so the input of people such as Professor Hirsch of Loughborough University must play a part in development of the policy?

Kevin Stewart: I assure Mr McArthur that we have continued to speak to Professor Hirsch since he gave evidence and after publication of the stage 1 report, and that we will continue to do so. It would be wrong to introduce a policy that was not robust, so I will write to the committee, setting out the options and seeking its views, before I lodge stage 2 amendments. I thank Mr McArthur and others for continuing to engage with the Government during the process. We have had some robust exchanges and some very good ones. Long may that continue.

For our island communities, I emphasise that, in addition to our MIS commitment, we are conducting an islands impact assessment for the bill. The relevant provisions of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 are not yet in force, and the guidance for such assessments is still in development, but our assessment will be in the spirit of the act, in partnership and consultation with island communities and the six relevant local authorities.

The Government is alive to the calls from Mr McArthur, Alasdair Allan and others that the assessment should not be a desk-based exercise. I am firmly of the view that it is better for the Scottish Government to take the time to produce a comprehensive and detailed assessment in partnership with island communities. I previously committed to publish the assessment before stage 3. I confirm that that remains my intention: it will be published by the end of April.

I turn to reporting on fuel poverty. I am pragmatic and open to persuasion that reporting needs to be more frequent than every five years. That said, in order to avoid duplication and to promote co-ordination between complementary Government policies, I am keen to co-ordinate the timeframe for reporting on fuel poverty with the timeframes for reporting on energy efficiency and climate change.

I also want to ensure that fuel poverty reporting obligations do not place an undue burden on our local authority partners. I am aware that COSLA wrote to the committee to express its concern that that might be the case. I also share COSLA's concern that there is potential for reporting obligations to detract from front-line delivery. I do not rule out lodging a stage 2 amendment to make the reporting obligation on fuel poverty more frequent, but I want to engage with COSLA further to understand its views and ensure that we have the appropriate balance between its views and those of the committee.

As members will now be aware, I have carefully considered the views of the committee and aim to lodge many of the amendments that it has recommended. However, I cannot agree with the committee on the suggestion that the Scottish fuel poverty advisory panel be made statutory. In terms of its composition and structure, the panel is not the same as the United Kingdom Committee on Climate Change. It is key that the panel remains flexible and adaptable. To maintain its role over the intended lifetime of our proposed fuel poverty act, the panel's membership and remit must keep pace with the changing landscape of fuel poverty, potential new technologies and opportunities, and future partnerships.

I also share COSLA's concern that the creation of a statutory body would risk diverting funding away from the core objective of supporting households out of fuel poverty. I am sure that nobody wants that. I am strongly of the view that Parliament can provide the scrutiny that is required to ensure that this and future Governments keep on track on the objectives that we all share.

I am grateful that we have the opportunity to discuss the aims of the Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill this afternoon, and I look forward to hearing members' views.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill.

15:17

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I am pleased to open the stage 1 debate on the Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill on behalf of the Local Government and Communities Committee. I thank the minister for responding to our report last week in time for today's debate.

As the minister stated, the bill primarily sets a target to reduce fuel poverty to no more than 5 per cent of Scottish households by 2040, sets a new definition of fuel poverty, requires the Government to bring forward a strategy to meet the target and puts in place reporting requirements. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Dornan—could you move your mic over a little bit? We really want to hear you.

James Dornan: My apologies, Presiding Officer.

Recent statistics show that fuel poverty affects 24.9 per cent of households in Scotland, with some individuals and families struggling to pay their fuel bills or heat their homes to an acceptable

and comfortable level. Living in a cold, draughty home can have a negative impact on people's physical health and mental wellbeing and can impact children's attainment. No person should have to choose between heating their home or eating. Therefore, it is disappointing that so many households remain in fuel poverty, despite efforts by previous Administrations to tackle the issue.

The bill before us has been informed by such efforts. Most recently, a target that was set by the Labour-Liberal Democrat Scottish Executive in 2002 for people to not be living in fuel poverty by November 2016 was not met. Following a number of independent reviews and consultations led by the Scottish Government, a new definition of fuel poverty was strongly recommended—one that would more accurately identify those in financial distress in order to better target resources at those in greatest need. I will come back to the definition later in my speech.

The Local Government and Communities Committee was appointed as the lead committee for scrutiny of the bill on 5 September 2018. We received 67 written responses to our call for views, which closed on 9 November 2018. We heavily promoted our scrutiny of the bill on social media and held a number of oral evidence sessions with expert stakeholders. In addition to taking oral evidence, some committee members travelled to Dundee and the Western Isles to hear directly about the different experiences of those who face fuel poverty in urban and rural communities. In doing so, we heard about the particular challenges that are faced by those who live on our islands. I thank all those who provided written and oral evidence and all those who engaged with us during our scrutiny.

I turn to some of our key recommendations. Section 1 of the bill puts in place a new target for less than 5 per cent of households in Scotland being in fuel poverty by 2040. Although there was some debate around whether the target threshold should be set lower than 5 per cent, we agreed that that target is achievable and strikes the right balance between realism and ambition, recognising that the Scottish Government has little or no influence over two of the four main drivers of fuel poverty. However, we acknowledge that the 5 per cent target should not limit the ambition of future Governments and that the longer-term focus should be on eradicating fuel poverty.

There was also some debate around whether the target's end date should be brought forward from 2040. Given that reaching the target will rely on technologies that are still in development, the committee came to the view that it is realistic to build in time for those to come on stream.

It is also encouraging that the Government has agreed to our recommendation to amend the bill to

enshrine in statute the interim targets that are currently set out in the draft strategy that accompanies the bill. Specifically, those targets are that, by 2030, the fuel poverty rate will be no more than 15 per cent and the median fuel poverty gap will be no more than £350 at 2015 prices. It is hoped that such measures will help to prevent drift from reaching the target.

To prevent resources from being targeted at low-hanging fruit—the easiest-to-treat properties—we called on the Scottish Government to bring forward a separate target to tackle extreme poverty. Extreme poverty has previously been categorised as encompassing households that have to spend 20 per cent of their income on fuel. It is therefore welcome that the minister has committed to bring forward proposals for a separate target to tackle extreme poverty at stage 2.

I also note that the Government will give further consideration to the committee's suggestion that local targets be applied to address regional disparities. I look forward to receiving an update from the minister on the outcome of the Government's consultation with COSLA on the committee's proposals.

To more closely align fuel poverty with income poverty, section 2 puts in place a new definition that assesses whether a household is in fuel poverty following the deduction of housing costs, such as rent, mortgage, council tax and water rates, as well as childcare costs. It uses an income threshold measure known as the minimum income standard—MIS—to determine an acceptable standard of living. That was deemed necessary given that, under the existing definition, a number of households that were considered to be fuel poor were not actually facing financial distress.

The greater alignment between fuel poverty and income is welcome, as it will provide a more accurate picture of those who experience fuel poverty. However, many people expressed concerns that the new definition does not accurately capture those who face fuel poverty in our island and remote rural communities. We therefore called on the Scottish Government to bring forward an additional rural MIS to recognise the higher costs that are faced by those communities. It is welcome that the Government has accepted that recommendation, and we look forward to liaising with the minister on that important change in the lead-up to stage 2. It is also encouraging that the Government will carry out an islands impact assessment of the bill and the associated strategy.

We heard concerns that the complexity of the new definition could hinder the delivery of services on the ground. We therefore called for more information on the minister's thinking around the

development of a doorstep tool and on how proxies will be used alongside the new definition to better identify those who are in fuel poverty. It is helpful to have received clarification from the minister that the use of proxies will continue and that the Government, alongside COSLA, will further consider what tools and guidance are necessary for councils to target resources at those in the greatest need.

Sections 3 to 5 require the Scottish Government to prepare a fuel poverty strategy that sets out how the 2040 target will be achieved. They also set out the consultation, publication and laying requirements for the strategy. The committee agreed with those proposals, particularly the requirement to involve people with lived experience of fuel poverty. At the same time, however, we agree with our witnesses that it should be a collaborative, and not a top-down, process.

I turn to the contents of the draft fuel poverty strategy, which was published alongside the bill. It is welcome that the minister will listen to the views of our stakeholders on suggested improvements as part of on-going engagement with them. I was particularly encouraged that the minister will look to improve the strategy in relation to the list of issues that are highlighted in paragraph 199 of our report, which include how fuel poverty will be tackled in the private housing sector and our rural and island communities, and the actions that the Scottish Government will take to address all four drivers of fuel poverty, including those that are primarily the responsibility of the UK Government.

As our report sets out, we have written to the UK Government regarding problems that have been caused to people's houses by works that were carried out under UK-based energy efficiency schemes. We heard of serious misgivings about the administration of some of those schemes, and it is encouraging that the Scottish Government is also pursuing that matter with the UK Government.

Kevin Stewart: I am very grateful to the committee for looking at the situation with the UK schemes. As Mr Dornan has pointed out, the Scottish Government has been on to the UK Government on a number of occasions about trying to deal with some of the real difficulties that have been caused. I am very grateful to the committee for its efforts in joining the Scottish Government to try to seek a resolution, and I would appreciate our continuing to liaise on the matter. We must do all that we can to get the UK Government to see sense on those folk who are suffering because of Home Energy and Lifestyle Management and others.

James Dornan: I assure the minister that the committee will be happy to liaise with him regarding those letters.

The bill requires the Scottish ministers to lay periodic reports on the progress that has been made towards reaching the 2040 target alongside the steps that will be taken in the next reporting period to meet the target. It is welcome that the Government will report on progress in relation to all four drivers of fuel poverty. The bill currently provides that those reports should be laid every five years but, given the concerns that have been raised, we have recommended that they be laid every three years. The vast majority of those from whom we heard called for more frequent reporting. I note that the Government will consult COSLA on the viability of increasing the frequency of reporting, and I look forward to an update in due course.

It is disappointing that the Government has not accepted our recommendation to put the Scottish fuel poverty advisory panel on a statutory footing to provide an independent scrutiny role. However, the minister has provided the committee with clear reasons as to why that recommendation has not been accepted.

As the minister has noted, the Parliament will no doubt pay close attention to the Government's progress towards meeting the target as well as to the steps that it will take as the new technologies that are required in the fight against fuel poverty are developed.

I put on record my thanks to the committee clerks and officials in the Scottish Parliament information centre for all their assistance during the stage 1 process, and to everybody who gave evidence in person or in writing.

The bill has the potential to make a difference to the lives of many families in Scotland, but the real test will be whether the measures and strategies that accompany it are practical, deliverable and robust. It will be the job of the Parliament to keep a watch on that in the coming years.

The committee commends the bill to the Parliament and recommends that the Parliament agrees to its general principles.

15:28

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): The Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill should have been an exciting and far-reaching piece of legislation, but it is anything but that. However, it can change. The six pages of the bill could be replaced with a six-line press release and the same thing could be achieved.

In 2016, the Scottish National Party made a manifesto pledge to introduce a warm homes bill. In November 2017, the Scottish Government said:

“Eradicating fuel poverty is crucial to making Scotland fairer and that is why we are proposing that the key purpose of the Warm Homes Bill will be to enshrine in legislation our long term ambition to eradicate fuel poverty.”

Here we are in 2019 with a fuel poverty bill—not a warm homes bill—that does not set a target to eradicate fuel poverty. The bill even states its purpose to be

“An Act of the Scottish Parliament to set a target relating to the eradication of fuel poverty”.

Its purpose is not to set a target for the eradication of fuel poverty—which would have meant something—but

“to set a target relating to the eradication of fuel poverty”.

That is a far cry from the words that were issued by the Scottish Government in 2017. The bill is well meaning, but it lacks ambition.

First, the bill sets a new definition of fuel poverty. It says that, once a household has paid for its housing, it is in fuel poverty if it needs more than 10 per cent of its remaining income to pay for its energy needs and that leaves the household in poverty. That seems fair enough.

The bill sets a target of reducing the rate of fuel poverty to 5 per cent within—wait for it—21 years.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I am quite surprised by the tone of the speech so far. My understanding was that there was more or less consensus in the committee, and I do not remember you or any other colleague dissenting on any of the specifics, including the 2040 date, when we put the report together.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always address members through the chair, please.

Graham Simpson: Mr Gibson is well aware of how committee reports are put together. Members are entitled to give an alternative opinion in debates such as this one.

Who will be accountable at that date in 21 years' time? By then, Ruth Davidson could be in her fourth term as First Minister, and her son could have graduated, but I cannot see most of us being here. Given that the target date is so far into the distance, the Local Government and Communities Committee was entirely right to suggest statutory interim milestones, which could prevent ministers from wriggling off the hook along the way. I tend towards the view, which was expressed by the Existing Homes Alliance Scotland, that the bill should be amended to ensure that corrective action is taken if targets are not met.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Graham Simpson: I will not on this occasion.

If the bill is not amended, all that we will get is a Government shrug of the shoulders and, quite possibly, an attempt to blame someone else. That said, I am still carefully considering whether to lodge an amendment that would move the target date forward.

As we have heard, the committee did some sterling work. We visited Dundee and Stornoway. In Dundee, we heard about the problems that people who use prepayment meters have if they want to switch providers. We saw how area-based schemes can successfully lift people out of fuel poverty and help their health at the same time.

In Stornoway, one of the bill's serious omissions was brought home to us. When the minimum income standard is used, there is a refusal to define fuel poverty in a way that reflects the higher costs that are incurred by people who live on islands or in remote and rural areas.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Graham Simpson: No, because I am about to praise the minister for agreeing to amend the bill to reflect the committee's view on that matter. Fuel poverty rates in urban Scotland have improved since 2015, but rates in rural areas have not improved, so there is a widening gap. We have a legislative vacuum that simply must be filled at stage 2, and a number of stakeholders agree.

The committee heard of contractors carrying out substandard work under UK Government-funded schemes and of lax monitoring. I have heard of such activity taking place before, and it does not interest me one bit which Government is to blame, if that is the right word. I insisted that we mention that issue in the committee's report and, as he said, the convener has written to the Minister of State for Energy and Clean Growth, Claire Perry, about it.

Much has been made of the target to reduce the rate of fuel poverty to 5 per cent. A number of groups, including Energy Action Scotland, believe that the target is not ambitious enough. As SPICe has said, that could mean that 140,000 households will still live in fuel poverty—which is 140,000 too many. However, it will never be possible to completely eradicate fuel poverty. People will move in and out of fuel poverty as their circumstances change and, of course, it is not possible to know about everybody's circumstances.

One thing that the committee said that has caused some push-back is that reducing the rate of fuel poverty to 5 per cent should be achieved in every council area. COSLA did not like that, and nor did the minister, as he said earlier. However, the reason behind that suggestion was to ensure

that no area slips through the net. I accept that more work will need to be done on that matter.

The bill commits ministers to preparing a fuel poverty strategy. Helpfully, the Government produced a draft strategy in which the minister describes the bill as a "landmark piece of legislation". One of the best ways of reducing fuel poverty is to ensure that homes are as energy efficient as possible. The strategy says:

"all domestic properties are required to achieve an Energy Performance Certificate ... rating of at least EPC C by 2040 at the latest."

The strategy does not say how that will come about. It does not recognise the very real concerns about the accuracy—or lack of it—of using EPCs, nor does it say anything about real action on making new and refurbished homes as near to the Passivhaus standard as possible. I have repeatedly pushed the minister on this issue, but it is now time for action.

There was much disappointment when the bill was published, and there will be a clamour to amend it. Indeed, Opposition members are already being sent suggestions for amendments. I hope that the minister has learned from his bitter experience with the Planning (Scotland) Bill that he should be engaging with us in detail right now—

Kevin Stewart: Mr Simpson well knows that I will engage with anyone and everyone, and I have done so throughout the passage of this bill, as I have with others. Some members take the opportunity to speak to me, stakeholders always have that opportunity, and some of the reasoning behind the changes that will be made in stage 2 amendments has emerged from those discussions. I do not appreciate Mr Simpson's insinuation that there has been no discussion on this matter, given that I met him and Alexander Stewart in the very early stages of the process and will do so again if there is such a request.

Graham Simpson: I think that the minister has learned his lesson, because he has had a discussion with me and Mr Stewart, he has responded well to the committee's report, and he has said that he will lodge very helpful amendments. It would be in nobody's interest not to move forward along those lines.

We, on the Conservative benches, are pretty underwhelmed by the bill. However, we think that it can be improved, and we will support it at stage 1.

15:36

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the Local Government and Communities Committee for a lengthy but excellent piece of work. I must

confess that I did not read all of it, but I know that the committee went into real detail in its work.

I wonder whether Ruth Davidson is watching the Parliament on her maternity leave—who knows?—and I also have to wonder what she thought about Graham Simpson committing her to another four terms in this place. I have to say that the rest of us are slightly alarmed by that commitment.

Like everyone else, I believe that every Scot has the right to live in a warm, affordable and secure home. Unfortunately, we are a long way from that reality, with just over a quarter of households living in fuel poverty. The energy watchdog, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, recently announced an increase in the cap on the default tariff, which most people are on, and as those who saw that announcement will know, it means that, on 1 April, more than 1 million households in Scotland will be looking at an average rise of £110 a year. It is a really important point; the vast majority of people—even those who should know better that cheaper deals are available—are on default tariffs. Ofgem is the organisation that is meant to be protecting the consumer, but uSwitch has warned that larger families in Scotland could see their annual bills rise by up to £184 a year, and Age Scotland has responded to the increase in the cap by saying that it will do nothing to tackle fuel poverty and, indeed,

“makes a mockery of the term ‘cap’”.

Kevin Stewart: I agree completely and utterly with Ms McNeill. It is a great pity that, as far as the drivers of fuel poverty are concerned, this Parliament has no control over fuel prices or income. Between 2003-04 and 2017, the median household income in Scotland rose by 50 per cent while at the same time fuel prices rose by 158 per cent. I am grateful that a cap is in place, but it does not go far enough. I believe that this Parliament should have control over that, and I hope that Ms McNeill will consider supporting us in that regard.

Pauline McNeill: I am on record as saying that someone should certainly have control over the matter, and it is certainly something that I am willing to discuss. Not even the Westminster Parliament has control over energy prices.

That said, I am sure that the minister takes the most relevant point: more people are going to be living in fuel poverty as energy prices begin to rise. We can encourage people to switch to cheaper tariffs, but recent research by the consumer organisation Which? indicates that energy companies have dramatically reduced the number of cheaper deals that are available. Price is just one factor in all of this, but reducing the number of cheaper deals will mean that less cheaper fuel is available.

Like Graham Simpson, I do not see this bill as groundbreaking or revolutionary, but I think that we can get there by stage 3.

Labour welcomes the introduction of the bill, but we think that it falls short in many areas. It is narrowly drawn, which is a huge mistake. The Existing Homes Alliance Scotland has said:

“we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to tackle it and we must take it. We want to eradicate fuel poverty for good.”

I know that we all want that. I welcome what the minister said on the forthcoming amendments to the bill on interim targets and extreme fuel poverty. We wholly welcome that. However, I believe that the delivery section of the bill should reflect more of the format of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 by setting out areas where we can begin to improve. In the case of the bill, that would be improving energy efficiency to reduce householders’ energy costs. How else are we to achieve the targets? It has to sound more like a real ambition to prevent more people from living in cold and draughty homes. We need to know how the Scottish Government intends to achieve that.

We need delivery of help for poorer households. Citizens Advice Scotland has said that those who find it most difficult to afford their energy bills are less likely to have access to support. Ministers should be having discussions with the big six suppliers and others about improving emergency credit schemes and helping their most vulnerable customers—I see the minister nodding.

There is a lot of work to be done in the area. One of the most concerning issues is that, with yet another price hike, even more customers are struggling to pay their bills, particularly those who are already vulnerable. Ofgem is consulting on its consumer vulnerability strategy, and it is important that we see more standardisation across the sector. Energy companies are supposed to have a priority services register, but there are currently no standard qualifying criteria for vulnerable households to be placed on the register. More than ever, we need to find a way to ensure that companies take vulnerable customers off standard variable tariffs and place them on a more favourable deal. Simply through discussion, more could be done to force companies to do that.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way on that point?

Pauline McNeill: Very quickly—I do not want a long intervention like the last one.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You got there before I did, Ms McNeill.

Kevin Stewart: The Government has engaged with the big six suppliers and others on the issue. I would welcome cross-party support from across

the Parliament so that we can act together to put pressure on those companies to see sense in that regard.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you a little extra time, Ms McNeill.

Pauline McNeill: The minister will definitely have our support on that.

I want to say a little about rural communities, although that has been well covered by Graham Simpson and James Dornan. More than two fifths of Scots live in rural areas, and huge numbers of them are estimated to be suffering from fuel poverty. It is clear that an adjustment needs to be made to the definition of fuel poverty. I heard what the minister said on that, although we need to see the detail. That is to be particularly welcomed for people in rural communities, because it is clear that it is much harder for them to reduce their energy costs when they do not have the same access to the national grid. We also need to consider lifting the level of the warm homes discount for households in rural areas, to recognise the high levels of fuel poverty there.

Graham Simpson has spoken many times about the private rented sector, and I add my voice to his on that. Private renters are more likely to live in a house that requires critical and urgent repair and that does not meet the Scottish housing quality standard, which often means living in a home with insufficient insulation. People who live in the private rented sector are twice as likely to live in homes in the lowest EPC bands, and the rates of fuel poverty in the sector are above the national average. In the delivery plan, we need to focus on the private sector to see what action can be taken to lift those households out of poverty.

Furthermore, we need to make it easier for home owners who might be able to pay a bit towards home energy efficiency measures to get Government support. I confess that I find the myriad of loans and grants under the schemes complicated to follow—I have studied them—so goodness knows what householders make of it. We need to do more to give people confidence to apply to what I believe are very good schemes. I call on the Scottish Government to advertise its zero interest rate loan scheme and review how more people could be helped. I think that more people are able to pay and, with Government support, might be prepared to make the jump and make their houses more fuel efficient.

We must eradicate fuel poverty once and for all. We must be ambitious for the fuel poor. We are only at stage 1, and I believe that, by stage 3, with a consensus, we can achieve that.

15:44

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): As other members have done, I thank my Local Government and Communities Committee colleagues, the clerks, SPICe and everyone who gave evidence. I also thank the many groups who submitted briefings for today's debate.

As the minister did, I pay tribute to the Scottish fuel poverty strategic working group and the Scottish rural fuel poverty task force, which were chaired, respectively, by David Sigsworth and Di Alexander, whose work contributed so much to the bill.

We know the statistics from the Scottish house condition survey. A quarter of households are living in fuel poverty and about 7 per cent of households are living in extreme fuel poverty. That is unacceptable and we need to tackle the issue.

Although I welcome the Scottish Government's response to the committee's report, which says that if we reach the target, Scotland will be

"amongst the very best in the world in terms of tackling fuel poverty",

it is clear to me that we have an awful lot of work to do if we are to achieve that ambition. I will set out the Greens' position and talk about where we will seek to make changes at stage 2.

It is worth noting that a bill that focuses on targets, definitions and strategies takes us only so far. A number of members have mentioned the promise of a warm homes bill. Such an approach has been abandoned, and instead we have targets, definitions and strategies. Delivery against a target will require us to integrate policies around climate change, the built environment, energy, health and so on. I welcome the minister's commitment to align some reporting in that regard, which would be helpful.

The committee deliberated at length on the target, which was the focus of much evidence. In light of the failure to achieve the previous target, which was set in 2002, it is right that we take a more critical and sceptical view this time round. We welcome the commitment to interim statutory targets, but the 2040 target has been criticised for not being ambitious enough. The committee took the view that the target is okay, because it is pragmatic. However, with enhanced reporting and scrutiny, there should be the ability to consider whether progress can be made more quickly over the coming years. A 2032 target reflects the higher ambition and is preferable. If it cannot be achieved, we will know in advance.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): The member will remember an issue that was raised in the committee with regard to an earlier target, which was that emerging technologies need time

to be developed, to become available at a reasonable price to individuals in Scotland and to bed in. Are those factors in this debate?

Andy Wightman: I agree entirely that emerging technologies will be critical. They might be slow to arrive; they might be faster. We should not make predictions about how fast they might arrive.

There is an issue with the wording in the bill. The long title refers to the setting of

“a target relating to the eradication of fuel poverty”,

but given that the intention is to reduce the rate to 5 per cent, we should be more honest and say that the bill sets a target relating to the reduction of fuel poverty.

There has been a lot of talk about the four drivers of fuel poverty—the cost of energy, energy efficiency, household income and household behaviours—and how in Scotland we are in control only of energy efficiency and household behaviours.

In its response to the committee’s report, the Scottish Government said that it has “significant control” over only one of the four drivers, that is, home energy efficiency. The minister repeated that in an intervention during Pauline McNeill’s speech.

I disagree with that contention. The bill makes it clear that the definition of fuel poverty is based on a minimum income standard. Gross incomes are not within the significant control of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government or indeed the UK Parliament, but the definition of fuel poverty uses not gross but net incomes—that is, incomes after housing costs, fuel costs, childcare costs, council tax and income tax.

All those things are within the direct influence of devolved powers. We can enhance people’s net incomes by reducing housing costs, reducing taxation, enhancing childcare provision and so on. My view is, therefore, that the Scottish Government has significant control over that area; it has the power to adjust income tax levels to ensure that the most vulnerable are not driven into fuel poverty in the first place.

Annabelle Ewing: What about national insurance? This Parliament—sadly—does not have control over that.

Andy Wightman: That is absolutely true. I am not arguing that the Parliament has complete control over net income; I am arguing that it has substantial control over people’s net incomes.

Another aspect of the bill that has been much commented on is the question of minimum income standard uplifts for remote and rural Scotland. I welcome the minister’s commitment to look at options in that area and, in particular, to consult

the committee in advance of stage 2. That is a very productive way to proceed, and I hope that it will improve the bill.

Finally, I want to say a few words about scrutiny. Other members who have been in Parliament for longer than I have—I am looking at Jackie Baillie, among others—will have views on why the 2002 target was not met by 2016; for example, we know that rising fuel prices contributed. Failure to meet this target is also a possibility, for all sorts of reasons that we do not know about at the moment. The critical thing is to keep the target under review. Section 6 of the bill makes provision for reporting, but reporting is not scrutiny, especially when reports are laid by Scottish ministers who themselves have substantial responsibility for delivering.

It has already been mentioned that other legislation that enshrines targets, such as the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, embed independent, statutory scrutiny mechanisms. The committee recommends such mechanisms in paragraph 219 of its report and I am disappointed that the Scottish ministers do not accept it.

I am not precious about how such independent scrutiny is achieved. The suggestion from the committee that the fuel poverty advisory group be placed on a statutory footing might be one option, but there are others. However, it is critical to have independent monitoring and scrutiny, because it is really important for the public to be able to assess whether progress has been made and whether it could be made faster or slower in response to emerging technologies. I do not think that the Parliament alone can do that job of scrutiny.

To conclude, the bill represents an important approach to tackling fuel poverty, but it is not in a fit state to deliver what is required. I look forward to working with other members and to engaging with ministers at stage 2.

15:51

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank James Dornan and his committee for the report and for enabling me to play my part in stage 1 scrutiny of this important bill.

I am grateful to all those who gave oral and written evidence, which I found invaluable, not least in shining a light on ways to improve and strengthen the current bill and in giving greater urgency and ambition to our collective efforts to tackle a problem that blights too many households in too many communities across the country.

It will be a surprise to nobody that I intend to focus my remarks on how we might use the bill to address more effectively the issue as it affects

rural and island areas—a theme to which Kenneth Gibson and I gave a good and regular airing at committee.

First, it is worth reflecting on why this bill matters so much and why it is essential that we show more ambition in what we are seeking to achieve. As the Existing Homes Alliance Scotland reminds us, the benefits of reducing fuel poverty go far beyond simply removing the need for people to choose between heating their home or eating a meal. All the evidence shows that lifting people out of fuel poverty helps to improve their physical and mental health. Unsurprisingly, living in a warm and dry home also helps to increase educational attainment. Local jobs are created and skills are enhanced in the energy efficiency and low-carbon heat industries, while households have greater energy security and money to spend. Our ambitions for tackling climate change rely on us making progress on improving the energy efficiency of our housing stock. For all those reasons and more, the bill matters.

It matters, of course, to communities throughout Scotland; few, if any, are immune from fuel poverty. That said, rural and island areas are disproportionately affected, with Orkney suffering the dubious honour of having the highest proportion of households in fuel poverty and extreme fuel poverty in Scotland. It is an honour that we are keen to relinquish, but it underscores the particular importance of the bill and the fuel poverty strategy, and the need to recognise and take specific steps to address fuel poverty in remote, rural and island communities.

Although the change in definition contained in the bill makes sense, as things stand the bill does not adequately take into account the additional costs associated with living in remote and rural areas of Scotland. Indeed, the bill ignores key recommendations from the Government's own rural fuel poverty task force, ably chaired by Di Alexander, whose evidence to the committee on the matter was compelling. He set out in clear and cogent terms the rationale for using a separate minimum income standard for remote rural and island areas that reflects the additional costs that are borne by those living in such communities. It was a view shared by most of those who gave evidence to the committee on that part of the bill, and also universally supported by every council, housing association and fuel poverty group in the Highlands and Islands. The case is unanswerable, and I welcome the fact that the committee recognised that. I also welcome the minister's willingness in recent months to engage with me and others in a bid to find a solution.

The minister's commitment to undertaking an islands impact assessment is welcome in relation to not only this bill but, I hope, the future strategy

as well. I welcome, too, his commitment to an appropriate uplift for rural and island areas. I look forward to seeing the detail of that, and I agree with Di Alexander that there is a strong case for two separate uplifts, reflecting the additional costs that are associated with living on an island. He is also right in saying that we must find a robust, independent way of assessing the appropriate level of uplift now and into the future. Professor Hirsch and the team at Loughborough University seem to be key to achieving that, but that must be enshrined in legislation, and I look forward to seeing what work can be progressed in that area at stage 2.

Review and redesign of fuel poverty proxies, which tend to be urban oriented, are also needed and should be independent of Government. In the meantime, it is encouraging to see a consensus around the need to distinguish between fuel poverty and extreme fuel poverty. Despite the best intentions of successive Administrations, there has been a collective failure to make a meaningful impact on behalf of those in most need. That must change, and I support the call for a separate target for eliminating extreme fuel poverty by 2024.

On targets generally, there are concerns about what is seen as a lack of ambition in the bill. Energy Action Scotland suggests that the 2040 date is

“effectively a whole generation away, and feels like ‘out of sight, out of mind’”.

The Existing Homes Alliance Scotland also points out that reducing fuel poverty from 24 per cent today to 5 per cent by 2040 represents a reduction of around 1 per cent a year. That hardly feels like the level of ambition that we should be showing, and it would potentially condemn 140,000 households to remaining in fuel poverty until 2040. So, again, I support calls to bring forward the deadline, if not to 2032, then certainly to earlier than 2040.

In addition, the proposal for statutory interim targets makes sense, as do calls for changes to the household condition survey, which will give us early indications of where the strategy is and is not working, so that we can make changes.

I welcome the committee's call to see steps taken to ensure that progress is made by every local authority in Scotland. Although it might be impossible to ensure an entirely even rate of progress across the board, we cannot target investment and effort at areas with larger populations in a bid to hit the numbers rather than at communities where the need is greater.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Extremely quickly.

Kevin Stewart: Mr McArthur already knows that we spend three times more per head of population in the islands than we do in mainland authorities. That is something that the Government has continued to do, recognising the differences that exist. It is—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: “Extremely quickly” means quickly, minister.

Kevin Stewart: It is wrong simply to focus on that urban element.

Liam McArthur: I do not dispute the fact that additional investment is made but, in a sense, the levels of fuel poverty need to be brought down across the board and consistently, and the expectations of people in island and rural areas are every bit as legitimate as those of people living in urban areas.

I see no good reason why the advisory panel should not be put on a statutory basis, ensuring robust, independent and effective advice to ministers and the wider policy-making process.

Although this bill is narrower in scope than the warm homes bill that was originally promised, it has the potential to make a real difference to the lives of people across this country. As Parliament embarks on stage 2 consideration of the bill, we should resist the temptation to play safe, to build in wiggle room or to keep kicking the can down the road. We have an opportunity to be ambitious, to be bold and to eradicate the scourge of fuel poverty in this country. I look forward to working with the minister and colleagues across the chamber to that end, and we will support the bill at decision time this evening.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. You might have noticed that there have been a lot of interventions, some of them quite lengthy. That means that I have no spare time left, so I ask for speeches of six minutes.

15:58

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I am pleased to have been called to speak, not least as I have the pleasure of being a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee, which recently completed its scrutiny of the bill at stage 1.

At the outset, I remind everyone that Scotland is an energy-rich nation, yet we still see many of our citizens living in fuel poverty. That is as unacceptable as it is absurd. However, I note that, in terms of Government interventions, two of the key drivers of fuel poverty—energy prices and household incomes—fall broadly within the powers of the Westminster Parliament, not our Scottish Parliament, which is a situation that the unionist parties are, sadly, content to see continue.

Andy Wightman: Does Annabelle Ewing accept that the minimum income standard relates to net incomes and, while everyone's income differs, the difference between gross and net incomes is considerable and could be substantially affected by devolved powers?

Annabelle Ewing: I hear what Mr Wightman says, but as I said in an intervention, national insurance, for example, does not fall within the jurisdiction of this place and this Parliament has control over only 15 per cent of the total expenditure on social security—to name but two issues. I think that Mr Wightman would accept that this Parliament does not have all the economic levers that impact on individual household incomes. Nonetheless, we are determined to place Scotland among the best in the world in seeking to tackle fuel poverty. To secure that laudable and ambitious objective, the bill sets forth both a target for the reduction of fuel poverty and an expressed definition of fuel poverty. In that respect, it is worth noting that

“Scotland is one of only a handful of European countries”

to define fuel poverty.

As we have heard, the target is to reduce fuel poverty to no more than 5 per cent of households in Scotland by 2040. As the convener said, the committee considered that the 5 per cent target struck

“an appropriate balance between realism and ambition”

and in so doing, it recognised both the limited powers of the devolution settlement and the fact that individual households move in and out of fuel poverty as a result of changing circumstances.

However, I do welcome—in his response to the committee's stage 1 report—the minister's recognition of the need to work in the long term for “the eradication of fuel poverty”

to the extent that that “is realistically possible”.

As regards the period within which the target is to be achieved, it is worth noting, as has been mentioned, that there were differing views from those who gave evidence to the committee. While some people favoured the 2040 date, recognising, among other things—as I said in an intervention—that achieving the target will rely on emerging technologies that are still in development, others took the view that the time period was too long. That now seems to include the secret views of fellow committee member Mr Simpson. Therefore, it is to be welcomed that the minister has responded favourably to the committee's concerns and has agreed to introduce amendments at stage 2 to put interim targets in the bill. As the minister said, those will be that, by 2030, the fuel poverty rate is to be no more than 15 per cent and the

median fuel poverty gap is to be no more than £350 in 2015 prices, before inflation.

The revised definition of fuel poverty, based around the minimum income standard, that is set out in the bill was broadly welcomed, with the key discussions concerning the introduction of an uplift to the MIS to reflect the higher costs for those living on islands, in remote small towns and remote rural areas. I am pleased that the minister also listened to the committee on that important point and has confirmed that options as to how to achieve that objective are being considered. That is also the case with regard to the committee's calls to set a separate target for tackling extreme fuel poverty, which is defined as spending more than 20 per cent of one's income on fuel.

Given the position of many of my constituents in Cowdenbeath, I am also pleased to note that, although the age vulnerability threshold has been raised from 60 years of age to 75, nonetheless, those with disabilities and long-term illnesses will be recognised as needing enhanced heating. That recognition will capture a significant number of those in the 60 to 75 age cohort.

A draft fuel strategy has been published alongside the bill and, at this stage, is a work in progress. It is important that the Government proceeds to develop the strategy with the fullest engagement, not just with representative organisations, but with individuals who have experience of living in fuel poverty. That would ensure that the pivotal role that the fuel strategy will play in delivery can be secured.

In closing my remarks, it is important to recall that this is a framework bill and must be seen in the context of the suite of measures concerning energy efficiency and carbon emissions reductions that are planned or are in the pipeline. Working across portfolios is the only way to tackle both fuel poverty and climate change and to ensure that people can heat their homes affordably and with low-carbon heating technologies.

With the bill, we have an opportunity to reset the agenda and to make a real difference to the lives of not just my constituents in Cowdenbeath, but citizens around Scotland.

I am pleased to support the Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill.

16:04

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests in relation to energy efficiency. As my colleague Graham Simpson noted in his opening speech, this is an important bill for Scotland, but in its current form it fails to

outline how the Scottish Government will be held accountable if it does not meet the target.

Scotland has always been a country with great ambition, but right now the SNP Government is failing us with these targets. We are not alone in our thinking that the bill's focus is too narrow. The Existing Homes Alliance Scotland said that the scope should be widened to help to improve energy efficiency and to support the achievement of warm, affordable, low-carbon homes for everyone.

Members across the chamber will remember that last May, an amendment of mine was successfully passed with the support of Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. That sought to set the target of all homes reaching an EPC C rating, where feasibly possible, by no later than 2030, as opposed to the current target date of 2040.

At this time, the Scottish Government has failed to honour the will of the Scottish Parliament and is pushing ahead with the 2040 target instead. It might come as a surprise to SNP members, but we want to work with them to achieve ambitious but attainable targets.

It is not just the target date that we want to see improved; we also wish to see a review of the method by which EPCs are produced. In December last year, a Common Weal article stated that the method is fundamentally flawed, particularly due to the reliance on using modelled energy-consumption data rather than measured data. Just recently, a constituent was in touch about two EPC assessments that had been carried out for them within two years, by the same contractor, with completely different outcomes. Either we need to see a review of how EPCs are produced, or an alternative is needed to ensure that they are more accurate and standardised.

As the Common Weal article mentions, if a household is under or overestimated on their energy consumption by an inaccurate EPC rating, residents either face higher than expected energy bills, or it deters them from making behavioural changes and investing in making energy efficiency improvements.

As an MSP who represents a rural area, I must also add my concerns that the bill does not consider the added costs for people living in rural communities. I was pleased to see in the committee's report that that was requested of the Scottish Government. I hope that it will be acted on, as we heard the minister talk about it in his opening speech.

The minimum income standard is another important yet contentious point. A review is required for a Scotland-specific version, which would consider remote and rural households, but

we must also take into account concerns such as those raised by the Scottish older people's assembly that the new definition is likely to result in fewer households with older people being considered fuel poor. While I wish to see rural communities protected, that should not be to the detriment of other sections of society.

Herein lies the difficulty with the 5 per cent target. Yes, it is a great start, but it means that there is a risk of leaving in fuel poverty those who are at most need, such as the vulnerable in society, and rural communities. Therefore, I join my colleagues in calling for a separate target looking to eradicate extreme fuel poverty, to ensure that those who are hardest to reach are not left in the 5 per cent bracket. I would also be keen to see each local authority with its own 5 per cent target, so that no area of Scotland is disadvantaged by a national average that is weighted in favour of the predominantly urban central belt.

Andy Wightman: Will the member take an intervention?

Alexander Burnett: No, I will not. I have a number of points to make.

While the bill brings about lots of good action points on how to reduce fuel poverty, I am concerned that the financial memorandum does not estimate the cost of eradicating fuel poverty. Surely the bill should allocate extra costs in order to tackle the issue. If the Scottish Government does not even think that the bill merits additional funding in order to achieve its goals, that shows exactly why it is not going far enough. The committee reported that it was surprised that, while the Government provided estimated costing for meeting climate change targets, it chose not to take the same approach for this bill.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member take an intervention?

Alexander Burnett: I will not, as the minister also has a closing speech. I recognise the points that he made in response to the committee's report and we look forward to seeing them when they materialise.

The Scottish Conservatives' proposal is to invest up to 10 per cent of the Scottish Government's capital budget allocations in energy efficiency measures. That policy would make more homes warmer, eradicate fuel poverty at a greater rate and reduce carbon emissions faster than the SNP proposals, all while growing businesses and the economy across the whole of Scotland.

While this bill is a step in the right direction and we fully support its principles, it still needs to do more. At this stage, my colleagues and I look to support the bill, but we wish to continue working

with members across the chamber to ensure that it can be strengthened.

16:10

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): As other members have mentioned, fuel poverty remains a significant problem throughout Scotland, despite the £1 billion investment that SNP Governments in past sessions of the Parliament have committed to energy efficiency measures to deal with it.

I make no apology for pointing to the particular problems that face my constituency and, I am sure, other island constituencies. In 2016, the rate of fuel poverty in the Western Isles was calculated at 56 per cent, according to the Scottish housing condition survey. Some of the reasons for that are obvious: the wind-chill factor, which is not recognised in the system of cold weather payments; the ageing population; and the preponderance of detached houses. Perhaps as significant as anything else, however, is the unavailability of mains gas anywhere in the islands except in one relatively small area of the town of Stornoway.

Neither is history irrelevant here. In the 1930s and 1940s, Government assistance was aimed at getting people out of thatched black houses. That resulted in a generation of self-built houses made of poured concrete, which was generally mixed with shingle from island beaches to form walls with no cavities. Another wave of kit house building took place in the 1970s and 1980s. In short, few of the houses that were built in the islands in the greater part of the 20th century are anything like thermally efficient.

On the face of it, many people in such a situation may be home owners. However, as often as not, the reality in the islands is that they might own the house but not the land underneath it—a feature of crofting tenure that is too complicated to explain to virtually any building society, which means that many people live in houses that they simply cannot afford to repair. Then there are all the usual problems with which people have to contend, and which are by no means specific to the islands: low incomes; the roll-out of universal credit; a shortage of affordable rented housing; and, above all, the spiralling cost of energy over the past 15 years or so, which the minister has pointed out. I see from the Local Government and Communities Committee's report that its members saw all those problems for themselves at first hand when they visited my constituency recently. I very much welcome their having done so.

I warmly commend, too, the minister's commitment today to recognise rural—and perhaps specifically island—factors in the future

and the fact that the bill will be subject to an island communities impact assessment. I hope that, in his closing remarks, the minister will say whether the strategy following the bill will be subject to a similar island-proofing process and which distinctive island factors it might be possible to recognise in our future policy on fuel poverty.

For example, I hope that, as has been indicated today, in defining an acceptable standard of living once fuel costs are met, there might be room to take account of the extra costs that are involved in living in an island area. Not least among those is that, in many island areas, it is simply not a realistic option not to have a car. Many people in island communities would consider themselves unable to afford a car if they lived elsewhere but feel that they have no choice but to have one if they wish to look for work—and that is before higher food, petrol and other prices are considered.

There are other factors that people in most parts of Scotland—both rural and urban—take for granted. Most Scots can easily visit a relative in hospital who has suddenly been taken seriously ill, or go to a funeral in another part of the country. In the islands, because plane fares go up exponentially if bought a day or two before travel, making such a visit can often cost as much as going on a foreign holiday.

It is right that the Parliament is held responsible for the factors that are within our control. Of those, the major investments in energy efficiency, particularly in older people's houses, should be recognised and welcomed. However, as other members have mentioned, it is also right that we scrutinise areas that are outwith our devolved control, such as the significant rise in the cost of fuel in recent years, and the fuel poverty that is directly traceable to changes in the benefits system.

I end, however, by expressing a hope that island proofing will come to recognise another specific problem that all off-grid areas have. Why are the energy efficiency ratings that are used on EPCs measured in pounds sterling and not in kilowatts of energy used per square metre? By definition, being off the gas grid makes costs higher, but it says little about the energy efficiency of the building. The result is often that, compared with people who are on grid, home owners in off-grid areas face an impossible task in getting to band C.

All that said, I very much welcome the bill and the Government's clear commitment to making it work in the islands and across Scotland to tackle what remains, despite substantial and welcome efforts by the Scottish Government, one of the single biggest problems that my constituents face.

16:15

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I start by declaring an interest as one of the honorary vice-presidents of Energy Action Scotland.

As the minister in the first Labour-led Scottish Government who was responsible for establishing the fuel poverty target, I am pleased to take part in this debate. Members will perhaps forgive me if I therefore look back, because I think that we can always learn from history.

It was section 88 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 that committed Scottish ministers to ensuring that, by November 2016,

“so far as reasonably practicable, ... persons do not live in fuel poverty”.

That was an ambitious target and one on which all parties across the Parliament agreed. Indeed, Stewart Maxwell, who served as the SNP Minister for Communities and Sport from 2007, said:

“We signed up enthusiastically to the previous Administration's target, which was bold when it was established in 2001.”—[*Official Report*, 13 March 2008; c 6914.]

That was the right thing to do, and successor Administrations agreed. We do not often find issues that transcend the political divide, so it is disappointing that, with that level of consensus, we singularly failed to meet the target.

Where did it go wrong? Back in March 2008, speakers in a members' business debate on fuel poverty thought that the target was tough but achievable. Later that year, Nicola Sturgeon, as Deputy First Minister, reconvened the Scottish fuel poverty forum to advise ministers on how to refocus the policy and better use the resources that were available to achieve the target. We were all still talking about eradicating fuel poverty and achieving the target. Of course, there were increases in fuel prices and factors that we did not entirely control, but we did not think that that was a barrier to doing all that we could to achieve the target. Not one SNP member or member of another party in the Parliament raised that as an issue when we set the original target.

Three years later, in 2011, five years before the target date, members of the Scottish fuel poverty forum were telling anyone who would listen to them, from ministers to parliamentary committees, that unless there was a substantial increase in resource, we would fail to meet the 2016 target. The spending level back in 2012-13 was £65 million. Following its budget scrutiny, the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee believed that the budget needed to be of the order of £100 million to £170 million per year if we were to succeed in eradicating fuel poverty. Unfortunately, the Government decided that it knew better. In budget after budget, Opposition

members made the point. I recall Patrick Harvie bringing down the budget one year on this very point. In some years, there were even underspends, but the sums fell well short of what was required. By 2012, few people believed that the target could be met and ministers did little to try to change that.

Annabelle Ewing: As we have heard, the increase in energy prices was not a de minimis increase but an increase of 158 per cent. Is the member trying to suggest that that had no impact at all on the issue?

Jackie Baillie: I am not suggesting that, but we ignored the fact that the increase had had an impact and we failed to address what we then needed to do to recalibrate in order to meet the target. It is not good enough to say that it is somebody's else's fault and do nothing to try to change that.

On reflection, I am clear that we need to start with an ambitious target, to have a route map for how to achieve it and to monitor implementation closely. We also need to have enough money in the budget to realise our ambitions, to have parliamentary ownership and maybe even to have some independent oversight so that ministers' feet are held to the fire when necessary.

The bill's target of taking fuel poverty down to 5 per cent by 2040 is lacking in ambition. Taking the number of fuel poor down between now and that target date means a reduction of 1 per cent a year, which makes a snail's pace look fast and condemns another generation to fuel poverty. The target should be 2032. Changing the definition is also very troubling. The Scottish Government has changed its methodology and analysis at least four or five times and on each occasion more people in fuel poverty got measured out. With the greatest respect, redefining fuel poverty or changing the methodology to simply take people out of the equation fiddles the figures while Rome burns.

Kevin Stewart: That is nonsense.

Jackie Baillie: It is not nonsense.

People tell me that pensioners and people living in rural areas suffer most from fuel poverty, but the Scottish Government has moved the qualifying age from 60, where it currently is, to 75. The minister will be aware that many people in Scotland, particularly those in disadvantaged areas, do not reach the age of 75, but they still live in acute fuel poverty. At stage 1, the minister said that he would consult on that in bringing forward regulations, but we should know now what the Government's intentions are. I am interested to know whether he would rule out shifting the qualifying age as high as 75.

Other members have touched on minimum income standards, and I agree with Andy Wightman's comments in that regard. I will spend the short time remaining to me to talk about monitoring. Parliament must, of course, have an active role, but I suggest to the minister that, rather than having the Scottish fuel poverty advisory forum on an ad hoc basis, it should be given statutory underpinning and be independent of ministers. I listened carefully to what the minister said, but I am not persuaded by his argument. We should give the forum the tools and the teeth to do its job.

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to alleviate and eradicate fuel poverty. I welcome the steps that are being taken in the bill, but there is an opportunity to do so much more. When this Parliament was created, it seized those opportunities to be bold and ambitious, to change the policy landscape and to be positive about the future for the people of Scotland. Twenty years on, we should not be timid about this or condemn another generation to having to choose between heating and eating. We should seize the opportunity to eradicate fuel poverty in Scotland.

16:22

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): My region of the Highlands and Islands is where fuel poverty, by any reasonable definition, is most pronounced. As many members will be aware, a number of factors contribute to the problems that the region faces in that regard, including a slightly less hospitable climate in some seasons, the limitations of the mains gas network, the wider economic challenges of the region and an ageing population. When considered against the backdrop of higher living costs in less densely populated areas—a problem that the region shares with other remote and rural parts of Scotland—fuel poverty clearly has a regional element to it and is an issue of particular relevance to my constituents.

I will illustrate that with some examples. Orkney Islands Council and Western Isles Council have the sorry record of being the local authorities in Scotland where over 50 per cent of households are in fuel poverty under the current definition. The five local authorities with the highest proportion of households without mains gas are all in the Highlands and Islands, and those councils also find themselves near the bottom of the table for energy efficiency measures. Setting aside the island authorities, which have their own particular needs, it is the Highland Council and Moray Council areas that experience the highest levels of fuel poverty in mainland Scotland.

Dr Allan: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I would like to get on.

Where levels of fuel poverty are that high, fuel poverty can become less visible. Many people in those communities—particularly older people—would not immediately identify themselves as being in fuel poverty, regardless of where statistical definitions place them. High energy costs and lower disposable incomes can often be treated as a fact of life. Policy makers may think that that makes them a less pressing problem, but individuals, families and the wider economy are impacted just the same. Individuals are left making the same unpleasant and undesirable trade-offs in order to heat their homes adequately.

Before I turn to some of the conclusions of the stage 1 report, I extend my thanks to the committee for a comprehensive and informative piece of work. The report identifies and notes a number of the localised concerns that I have raised.

One area that the committee was right to highlight is extreme fuel poverty. As members have observed, there is a risk that targets at a national or even a local authority level could create perverse outcomes whereby the low-hanging fruit are tackled first while those in the greatest need are abandoned. I therefore welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to lodge stage 2 amendments. We will look at them in some detail.

The committee's report quotes from the evidence of Alasdair Calder of Argyll and Bute Council, who spoke about the need to avoid a situation in which the 5 per cent of homes still in fuel poverty in 2040 are all located either on the islands or in rural areas in his council area. It is a question not simply of deprioritising the worst cases but of failing to address areas whose geography makes them more difficult and potentially more expensive to reach.

The committee also addressed local issues with the use of the minimum income standard. The fact that remote and rural areas have particular problems is not controversial, but the Scottish Government's early conclusions that those problems will be accounted for in the MIS and that the additional costs of gathering better data would be prohibitive seem to have been largely contradicted by the committee's evidence. I therefore welcome the minister's comments about the islands MIS. He assured the committee that he would

"look seriously at ... an uplift ... for remote rural areas".—
[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 19 December 2018; c 3.]

I am pleased that he appears to have done so, but it is important that his assessments be scrutinised effectively by Parliament. If he wants to build cross-party support, that work needs to be

undertaken seriously, because such changes are not to be taken lightly.

Let us consider the relative impact of the proposals. The number of older households in fuel poverty will be deemed to have fallen by 137,000 at the stroke of a pen, while some 60,000 people with a long-term sickness or disability will be removed from the statistics. Many people who are removed from the fuel poverty statistics will be in my region. Unsurprisingly, that has caused local organisations alarm, and I have heard from housing associations, local authorities and individuals on the point. It is important not to send a message to people in rural Scotland that we think their problems have been solved even though their circumstances remain the same.

I also welcome the Government's commitment to carrying out an islands impact assessment on various aspects of the bill, which is important to meeting its commitment to the islands. In a policy area in which the islands are so clearly distinct from mainland Scotland, it is extremely important that that process be undertaken and that it command the confidence of those communities.

Like other members, I express disappointment about the bill's downgrading from a more rounded warm homes bill, which represents a missed opportunity to take a comprehensive approach to tackling the issues. Unfortunately, the Scottish Government's efforts have often appeared—at least to Conservative members—to be unfocused. Major policies such as the creation of a publicly owned energy company seem to have been created as soundbites first, with key details and direction to be ironed out later.

There is a pressing need to further address energy efficiency and its considerable regional disparities. It is welcome that the Government is willing to move on the bill, and I will join Scottish Conservative colleagues in seeking to strengthen it, but I emphasise that the issues raised by the committee must be considered seriously if ministers want wider support.

16:28

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): As a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee, I was pleased to work with colleagues on our stage 1 report on this important bill, which has the potential to have a hugely positive impact on the lives of thousands of households across Scotland.

In 2017, a quarter of Scottish households—613,000—were classified as living in fuel poverty. The previous Scottish Executive had hoped to eliminate fuel poverty, but, despite its best intentions and those of its successors, its efforts were stymied by increases in fuel prices, over

which it had no control: they rose by 155 per cent while wages grew by 38 per cent. That was highlighted by the £110 increase in the default tariff 13 days ago, which Pauline McNeill mentioned.

The bill's principal aims are to set out a new target for a dramatic reduction in fuel poverty that is both ambitious and achievable; to introduce a new definition of fuel poverty so that support can reach those who need it most; to produce a new long-term fuel poverty strategy; and to oblige the Scottish ministers to publish reports and lay them before Parliament every five years. Stakeholders have agreed that enshrining a target in legislation will provide a clear end point against which to measure progress.

Some people may ask why the aim is not to completely eradicate fuel poverty. The 5 per cent target takes into account the Scottish Government's limited influence over two of the four main drivers of fuel poverty: household income and energy costs. Another factor is the transient nature of fuel poverty, because some households move in and out of the definition due to circumstances that, again, this Government cannot control.

Setting a realistic target for 2040—I understood that all the committee members agreed to that; there was certainly no dissent in the report—while laying the groundwork with a sustainable and well-designed long-term strategy provides an opportunity to reduce fuel poverty even further.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government has agreed to enshrine interim target milestones in the bill at stage 2 so that we can assess how well the strategy is working.

Andy Wightman: Kenneth Gibson has been an MSP for quite some time and will be well aware that, although committee members do their best to produce reports that we all agree represent the will of the committee, that does not mean that members of various parties do not take a different view when it comes to stage 1 debates, stage 2 amendments or stage 3 debates. He seems to insinuate that we should not be doing that.

Kenneth Gibson: No—what I am saying is that, to my understanding, all seven members of the committee agreed to the 2040 date without a scintilla of dissent, yet some of them have come to today's debate pretending that they supported the date of 2032 all along. That is fundamentally dishonest. If someone is against something in a committee's report, they should dissent from it. For example, Andy Wightman's colleague on the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee dissented when six other MSPs supported a view and another two MSPs abstained. That is how to do it. Members should

not say, "Oh aye, 2040 is great," then come to the chamber and say that that date is not radical enough—that is dishonest. I disagree with Andy Wightman on that.

Our evidence taking was not limited to hearing views in this building. Members visited Dundee and the Western Isles to hear at first hand from people about their lived experience of fuel poverty.

On Lewis, we heard from a woman who had three part-time jobs and relied on her credit card just to get by. Her traditional single-skin breeze-block cottage had a wood-burning stove and storage heaters. She was not on the gas grid, which is limited to Stornoway, as Alasdair Allan said. She left the island for work and rented out her home, and, on her return, the house was in a poor condition because the tenants could not afford to heat it. The result was damaged white goods and dampness in the walls. However, the woman received excellent support from local organisation Tighean Innse Gall, which arranged for external wall insulation. That remedied a situation that was quickly becoming unbearable for her.

We also heard from a man who lived in a 100-year-old croft house with thick stone walls and small windows. He reported that, once he had cavity wall insulation and new storage heaters, it felt like a new home, and those measures made a significant difference to his fuel bills. The experiences that were shared by people in fuel poverty demonstrated the harsh reality of being fuel poor and reaffirmed the committee's view that the proposed legislation is essential.

We know that fuel bills are generally higher in island communities—not just in the Western Isles but on Arran and Cumbrae, in my constituency, and on other islands. That can be for a variety of reasons, including a lack of connection to the gas grid, increased exposure to wind and weather, overreliance on electricity and unregulated fuel types, and the presence of older, hard-to-heat homes.

As we have heard, the starkest disparity between regions is between the Orkney Islands, where 58.7 per cent of households are in fuel poverty, and Edinburgh, which has the lowest proportion—20.1 per cent—of such households. That is why, although the committee welcomes the revised definition of fuel poverty that is set out in the bill, which is based around the calculation of a minimum income standard that takes account of daily living costs, the MIS definition may not adequately take into account the reality of living on islands or in remote rural areas that are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty. Therefore, I welcome the minister's commitment to an additional minimum income standard ahead of

stage 2, as well as his commitment to publishing an islands assessment by the end of April.

Delivering a meaningful reduction in fuel poverty requires a concerted effort from everyone, including local government, businesses, the third sector, landlords, tenants and home owners.

No legislation exists in a vacuum, and this bill intersects with the aims on climate change, the new energy efficient Scotland programme, the energy efficiency route map and the draft fuel poverty strategy that is mandated by the bill. That suite of policies will reduce fuel poverty and improve home energy efficiency while reducing carbon emissions. Indeed, by the end of 2021, this Government will have allocated more than £1 billion since 2009 to tackling fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency. Jackie Baillie talked about £65 million being invested in 2012, but £113 million was invested last year, so there has been a significant increase in investment despite a challenging financial situation for this Government.

Jackie Baillie rose—

Kenneth Gibson: If Jackie Baillie had intervened earlier, I would have taken her intervention, but I am now over my time.

By achieving our challenging target of reducing fuel poverty to 5 per cent, we will not only be one of just a handful of countries around the world to do so, but, more important, we will draw ever closer to a fairer Scotland where nobody is forced to choose between eating and heating.

16:34

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): This has been a significant stage 1 debate in which many important issues have been highlighted by members across the chamber. As colleagues have done, I welcome the bill.

It occurs to me that Parliament has countless times denounced fuel poverty as Scotland's shame, yet hundreds of thousands of households still battle against its effects. It is unacceptable that people across Scotland sit down of an evening and weigh up whether they should warm their homes or fill their stomachs.

Liam McArthur stressed the range of health and education downsides of living in fuel poverty. How is an elderly person to protect their health in a draughty room? How is a child to excel at school when their home is distractingly cold? How can a carer support their loved one in a home that has pitiful insulation? I remind Parliament that our right to adequate housing is enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We clearly feel the changing seasons in Scotland, so "adequate" here must mean "warm".

As Jackie Baillie stressed, there was consensus about eradicating fuel poverty by 2016. Her historical analysis was chilling. Where is the recalibration that is needed? To its eternal shame, the Scottish Government has not done enough on that.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Claudia Beamish: I will not. I have made the point and so did Jackie Baillie. It has been well made.

We now have a bill on fuel poverty, but I share the serious concerns of my colleagues that the 5 per cent of households that will be left in fuel poverty will be those that are most difficult to tackle, and which have already suffered for decades. I therefore welcome the minister's commitment to producing a definition of "extreme fuel poverty".

The Existing Homes Alliance Scotland is a broad and significant coalition. It has stressed—and I quote—

"the need to take the higher cost of remote and rural living into account."

Frankly, it is a relief that the stage 1 report recognises that the new definition that is proposed in the bill does not adequately take that into account. I strongly welcome the minister's commitment to lodging an amendment on rural living at stage 2. It is vital that we ensure that there is an uplift for rural dwellers. That the bill will be island proofed—which has been committed to by the minister today and the need for which was previously stressed by Liam McArthur, Alasdair Allan and others—is vital.

As an MSP for South Scotland, I am keenly aware of the challenges that are faced by people who live in rural fuel poverty, who are often off-grid and living in hard-to-heat old stone houses. The Scottish Government might consider how help could be given to collective or co-operative rural support. That could be part of the strategy, if it is not to be in the bill, especially in relation to low-carbon energy solutions such as biomass.

More widely beyond the bill, co-operative and mutual models of energy production, distribution and sale have a role to play in tackling fuel poverty. When Britain's energy system is not working for consumers, those models are means by which to empower fuel-poor, disadvantaged and excluded communities. I accept that that involves reserved issues.

However, Pauline McNeill highlighted the problems that exist for larger families who can see their annual bills rise by up to £184 per year. The market might be broken, thanks to a combination of lack of competition, which results in market

dominance by a small number of large vertically integrated companies, unsustainable and short-term decision making by big business, and housing stock that ranks among the least energy efficient in Europe.

However, consumer, local government, community and employee ownership models have been shown to offer behavioural benefits, as people show more consideration of their own energy use. The models also offer economic benefits by helping with job creation and with returns from them remaining in the locality through reinvestment.

We need a fuel poverty bill, for sure—for the sake of people's health, wellbeing and financial equality, and for the sake of our efforts to tackle climate change. The narrow scope of the bill means that it will not deliver specifically on lowering climate change emissions from housing. However, I welcome the minister's commitment to finding the way forward, with COSLA and the committee, on reporting duties that would run in parallel with the current climate change reporting duty.

In her opening remarks for Scottish Labour, my colleague Pauline McNeill explored the private rented sector. There has long been concern about homes in which the opportunity to improve energy efficiency does not lie wholly in the hands of residents—for example, in the private rented sector. I welcome the work of the Scottish Parliament's working group on tenement maintenance, of which energy efficiency in common improvements is an important part.

I highlight that I tried in 2014 to amend the Housing (Scotland) Bill at stages 2 and 3 to add a duty to make provision for energy efficiency standards in the repairing standard, but the Scottish Government did not support that. At that time, I withdrew my amendments on the understanding that the issue would be tackled with other energy efficiency concerns. The issue is complex, but I hope that that will not be used as an excuse to avoid tackling it. Stage 2 and beyond should be seen as an opportunity.

I hope that the Scottish Government will engage with those of us who are keen to address multi-occupancy and the private rented sector. I understand that members across the parties are keen to do that.

Scottish Labour welcomes the bill and supports its general principles, but there is a lot of room for improvement. The minister has acknowledged that, on the basis of the Local Government and Communities Committee's report. However, in the view of Scottish Labour, we still have a considerable way to go.

16:40

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to have the opportunity to close this stage 1 debate on the Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill for the Scottish Conservatives.

Our manifesto in advance of the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections made it clear that the Scottish Conservatives are committed to ensuring that no one lives in a hard-to-heat home, and to reducing fuel poverty. We are therefore happy to support the broad principles of the bill.

More specifically, we pledged to make the case to transform investment in the energy efficiency of homes across Scotland. We suggested that that could be done by investing up to 10 per cent of the Scottish Government's capital budget allocations in energy efficiency measures. That could lead to thousands of jobs across Scotland, make homes easier to heat, and reduce energy bills and carbon emissions. The bill is certainly needed at this time to tackle that issue, which is driven by a complex combination of energy costs, energy efficiency, household incomes and energy use.

At present, a quarter of households in Scotland live in fuel poverty. We have heard that today, and we have also talked about rural and island communities. The convener of the Local Government and Communities Committee, James Dornan, commented on that. I am delighted that Kevin Stewart will lodge amendments at stage 2 to cover issues in our rural and island communities.

It has been a real privilege, as a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee, to have heard from groups, individuals and organisations that have ensured that we have heard their views and opinions. Prior to the debate, many members received useful briefings that gave those views and opinions.

Previous attempts by successive Governments to address the issue have been unsuccessful. We heard from Jackie Baillie about what the target that was set out back in 2002 attempted to do, and that the Government wanted to ensure that it was reached by 2016. We have heard that, for various reasons, that did not happen.

It is important that the Local Government and Communities Committee and communities across civic Scotland support the bill because they see the need for things to happen. However, the bill does not include any accountability mechanisms. That was one of the key flaws in the 2016 target. In other words, consequences are needed for the Scottish Government if there is failure to meet the targets in the bill, otherwise the ambitions will not be met and we will simply end up with simple and meaningless propositions.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Alexander Stewart: I would like to make progress.

I do not want targets not to be met. We want to ensure that the bill is successful, so there will need to be amendments and changes to it.

It is disappointing that interim targets are not set out. That was talked about in the draft fuel poverty strategy. The committee and stakeholders who responded to the consultation made clear their support for the statutory underpinning of such milestones—indeed, the committee requires them to support the target date of 2040. I note that the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning has proposed to lodge amendments at stage 2. As I said earlier, I welcome that. We need them to ensure that that happens.

By using a nationwide target, the bill could ensure that there are regional disparities. The committee suggested that the Scottish Government amend section 1 and put in place for each local authority statutory targets to reduce fuel poverty in their areas. That should also be considered.

We have heard from many members this afternoon. Graham Simpson said that the bill should help to eradicate fuel poverty, but it will only set a target, so there is a lack of ambition. The bill is a step in the right direction, but it is a step in the right direction only at this point.

My colleague Alexander Burnett talked about the bill's focus and the need for the targets to be valid and obtainable. He also spoke about standardisation and the support for rural and remote households.

Many members have made valid contributions to the debate, which shows the depth of feeling about the issue across the chamber and across Scotland. Jamie Halcro Johnston talked about missed opportunities. He said that the rate of fuel poverty is highest in his Highland region and that people need to accept that as a fact of life. Fuel poverty should not be a fact of life for individuals and communities the length and breadth of Scotland.

Pauline McNeill talked about the bill falling short, in that it does not provide the ambition that she and the Labour Party had hoped for. Andy Wightman talked about the unacceptable level of fuel poverty, which we all need to acknowledge. Therefore, it is vital that we look at how we can enhance reporting and support.

Liam McArthur talked about the lack of ambition in addressing the problems in rural and island areas. He talked about the choice between heating a home or eating, which is a fact of life for some people. They are put in that situation.

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to tackling fuel poverty and to reducing the level of overall carbon emissions. As I have indicated, although we support the general principles of the bill, a number of important changes are required. We shall support the bill at stage 1, but we will lodge amendments that will strengthen the bill at stages 2 and 3. That is the right thing to do, and we should ensure that we all work together to achieve that.

16:46

Kevin Stewart: As I said at the outset of the debate, the Government is ambitious in its desire to tackle, reduce and, ultimately, eliminate fuel poverty in Scotland. Beyond that, we need to ensure that we reduce the rate of carbon emissions in our country, and we need to move forward in delivering technologies to ensure that that becomes a reality.

The bill is not a stand-alone measure. It goes hand in hand with the carbon reduction bill, which will be introduced to Parliament very shortly, and with the bill that Mr Wheelhouse will introduce on district and local heating strategies.

Beyond those bills, I draw members' attention to the draft energy strategy and to the energy efficient Scotland pipeline. In the energy efficient Scotland route map, we lay out our ambitious targets on EPC ratings to deal with fuel-poor homes. Fuel-poor homes should reach EPC band C by 2030 and EPC band B by 2040. Those targets will act as a guide for our programmes, to ensure that delivery to fuel-poor households is prioritised.

Graham Simpson: During the debate, the minister will have heard concerns from a number of members, including Alasdair Allan, about EPC ratings and their effectiveness. Is he willing to look at that issue on a Scotland-wide basis?

Kevin Stewart: Building standards officials are looking at EPC ratings—that is part of the Government's on-going, day-to-day work. We keep all such matters under review, and I am happy to hear members' views. I remember receiving Mr Burnett's letter about his constituent's situation in relation to EPC assessments. If folk want to feed into the process, I will ensure that their views go to building standards officials so that they can play a part in the work that the officials are doing.

As I have said, this is not a stand-alone bill but part of a suite of legislation and regulation that we must bring forward if we are to do our level best for the people of Scotland. I do not want anyone to live in a fuel-poor household. I remember as a child living in a house that was heated by a two-bar fire in the living room and a Superser heater

upstairs, with the bedroom doors open to let the heat get through—

Pauline McNeill: You were lucky!

Kevin Stewart: I was lucky, compared to some.

We had ice forming on the inside of the windows—through no fault of my parents, who were doing their level best. I do not want anybody to live in those circumstances, and I want to move as quickly as we can on these issues, but we have to be realistic about what is deliverable and what can be achieved in certain timescales. I have heard a lot today that differs from the committee report in relation to moving further and faster on some of the targets, but I have not heard anything about how we deliver things quicker or how we achieve that deliverability. I have said time and time again that what we are putting in place is ambitious and deliverable—just—but it is also stretching, and folks who are thinking of lodging amendments to bring targets forward will have to look at how those can be delivered.

Pauline McNeill: The minister has asked the parties to think about how we can deliver that aim, but I ask him to consider the suggestion that I made in my speech. The delivery aspects of the bill could do with a bit more content. If the minister is indeed open minded about accepting amendments on delivering on the detail of reducing fuel poverty, will he consider substantially amending those aspects of the bill?

Kevin Stewart: The delivery aspects are not necessarily in the bill; they relate to delivering the energy efficient Scotland programme, adapting things as we move forward and ensuring that the draft fuel poverty strategy becomes something that works for all. Sometimes in the Scottish Parliament we get a little bit fixated with primary legislation, but it can be very difficult to create primary legislation that focuses on delivery. The documents that I have mentioned and the scrutiny of these matters as we move forward will be extremely important and key to ensuring that we reach the targets to which we aspire.

Claudia Beamish: Will the minister give way?

Kevin Stewart: Very briefly.

Claudia Beamish: Does the minister agree with the importance, as highlighted in my speech, of local energy production and work by co-operatives in not only supporting local jobs but helping people in fuel poverty to tackle the situation?

Kevin Stewart: Absolutely. I believe that if we get progress on the matter absolutely right, we can create jobs. It will be a matter not just of handing jobs to multinational companies, as has happened often in the past, but of local delivery.

The prime example of that can be found in Orkney. When I first came into my post, civil servants told me that Orkney was unable to spend its area-based scheme money. It was suggested that I take the money back, but I did not do that, because I saw that Orkney required more time than other authorities to set up the supply chain and the skills to deliver what it needed.

I would like to see the same kind of thing happen across the country, but if we are pushed to move too quickly on the matter, local authorities might not be able to do what Orkney did and might be pushed into procuring things elsewhere—perhaps from places where Ms Beamish would not want them to be procured. There is absolutely a logic to taking some time to get certain aspects of this right. However, as I have said, if anyone comes forward with a delivery plan that works in bringing targets forward, I will certainly look at it.

Having listened to the committee, I have made some moves on interim targets and minimum income standards that—I am pleased to hear—folk are happy about. One of the key things is the tackling of extreme fuel poverty, and I will without doubt bring forward amendments on that at stage 2.

I will continue to listen. Movement has happened not just because of the committee's work but because of the engagement between members and me and with stakeholders at large. That will continue as we progress with not just the bill but the energy efficient Scotland programme, the right fuel poverty strategy and the other bills that are to come.

Liam McArthur: Following Pauline McNeill's point about access to the available funds—*[Interruption.]*

Kevin Stewart: I am sorry, Presiding Officer, but I cannot hear Mr McArthur.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Can we have a bit of order in the chamber and fewer conversations, please? Let us listen to Mr McArthur.

Liam McArthur: Pauline McNeill highlighted some of the difficulties in accessing funds. Some people who live in listed properties find it exceptionally difficult to introduce measures. Will the minister speak to his colleagues to ensure that heritage and fuel poverty objectives are better aligned than they appear to be at present?

Kevin Stewart: I will certainly do that. I am well aware that, in Mr McArthur's constituency, there are council houses that date back to the Napoleonic era, and those are difficult to deal with.

On Ms McNeill's point about a joined-up approach, I suggest that everybody talks to home energy Scotland. Its award-winning helpline is

absolutely fantastic and it will guide people to the right places and give them the right advice. I am more than willing to speak to Ms McNeill and others about where they think that the difficulties lie for folks in accessing grant and/or loan funding. I want to make that journey as easy as possible for people so, if Pauline McNeill wants that conversation, I am more than happy to have it.

There have been a few myths today, which I need to touch on. Ms Baillie talked about modelling and analysis being changed four or five times and said that each time more households were taken out of fuel poverty. The changes in the modelling and analysis have happened only to reflect the changes to industry standards and energy modelling, and for no other reason at all.

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister take an intervention?

Kevin Stewart: I will take a very brief one, although I really feel that I should not.

Jackie Baillie: When I accused the minister of changing the methodology and analysis, he said that that was nonsense, but he is now admitting that I was right. Will he tell the Parliament that, on each occasion, more people were taken out of fuel poverty, even though their experience continued to be one of being in fuel poverty?

Kevin Stewart: What I said was nonsense was Jackie Baillie's point that the changes in modelling and analysis took more folk out of fuel poverty—that was the absolute nonsense that Ms Baillie was speaking. She introduced the original bill on fuel poverty, which was the Housing (Scotland) Bill, and perhaps then there was no foresight about possibilities and scrutiny, so she should reflect on that. We need to get this absolutely right.

I will finish with a point that some members have touched on but which seems to have been lost to others. We do not have control over all the levers that lead to fuel poverty. We do not have control of energy prices, although I wish that we did, and we do not have control over incomes. Even though Mr Wightman attempted to say that we have a small amount of leverage in that regard, we do not have the ability to deal with things that the UK Government does, such as the changes in VAT, the poor roll-out of universal credit and the slashing of social security—the list goes on. As a Parliament, we should unite on those issues to ensure that we have control over every aspect of the matter so that we can truly move forward and do our very best for the people of Scotland.

I am grateful to the committee for its efforts. I found it a bit surprising that many speeches today did not reflect the committee's report. However, we are where we are, and I am grateful to members for sharing their views.

I will continue to listen to members and stakeholders as we move forward to stage 2. I hope that we can do that in a logical fashion, lodging workable amendments that have no unintended consequences.

Business Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-15899, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 26 February 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Ministerial Statement: Patient Safety within the NHS in Scotland
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Scotland) Bill
followed by Financial Resolution: Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Scotland) Bill
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 27 February 2019

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Communities and Local Government; Social Security and Older People
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 28 February 2019

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Ministerial Statement: UK Immigration Policy after Leaving the EU: Impacts on Scotland's Economy, Population and Society
followed by Ministerial Statement: Delivery of Devolved Benefits
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Census (Amendment)

(Scotland) Bill

followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body: Appointment of a Member of the Standards Commission for Scotland

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 5 March 2019

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 6 March 2019

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 7 March 2019

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Rural Economy

followed by Scottish Government Business

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, in relation to any debate on a business motion setting out a business programme taken on Wednesday 27 February 2019, the second sentence of rule 8.11.3 is suspended and replaced with "Any Member may speak on the motion at the discretion of the Presiding Officer"; and

(c) that, in relation to First Minister's Questions on Thursday 28 February 2019, in rule 13.6.2, insert at end "and may provide an opportunity for Party Leaders or their representatives to question the First Minister".—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item is consideration of business motions S5M-15901 and S5M-15902, on stage 1 timetables for two bills.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Target) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 5 April 2019.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Transport (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 5 April 2019.—[*Graeme Dey*]

*Motions agreed to.***Parliamentary Bureau Motions**

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-15900, on the draft Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that motion S5M-15617, in the name of Kezia Dugdale, on the Hutchesons' Hospital Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Hutchesons' Hospital Transfer and Dissolution (Scotland) Bill and that the bill should proceed as a private bill.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-15892, in the name of Kevin Stewart, on the Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Fuel Poverty (Target, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-15900, in the name of Graeme Dey, on the draft Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2019 [draft] be considered by the Parliament.

St Rollox Railway Works

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S5M-15541, in the name of Bob Doris, on efforts to save the St Rollox railway works. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament expresses its dismay and disappointment at the reported proposal by Gemini Rail Services to close the St Rollox Railway Works, which threatens the employment of up to 200 highly-skilled workers in Springburn; considers that the St Rollox site has had a proud history within the world locomotive industry since 1856 and is still affectionately known as "the Caley"; understands, however, that its future is now under threat as a result of Gemini serving a statutory notice regarding redundancies, and that a 45-day consultation period has now commenced; regrets that the company has taken this course of action, which it believes is likely to reduce the time period within which to identify and implement solutions to save both jobs and operations at the site; acknowledges the formation of a stakeholder group in December 2018 by the Scottish Government, chaired by the transport secretary, which aims to save St Rollox Railway Works; notes that this stakeholder group was established following representations made to the First Minister on 13 December 2018 at First Minister's Questions, and understands that there have been proactive efforts to save St Rollox Railway Works, including the Unite campaign, Rally Roon the Caley, which has made a number of suggestions such as the electrification of the track into the site to reduce business costs and the identification of contract work for the order book to allow the lifespan of St Rollox in its current form to be extended, and allow time for further work to restructure or diversify activities at the works.

17:04

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): It is a privilege to lead this members' business debate on the future of railway operations at the historic St Rollox site in my constituency, which has been a global player in the locomotive industry since 1856.

What is important is that we still have 200 jobs at the site, with 120 people directly employed and 80 agency workers. Those jobs are under imminent threat. New owner Gemini prematurely issued workers with a statutory 45-day consultation notice in January this year. That is a prelude to redundancies and closure. There is an order book until June this year, so such notices would not have been required until April this year, if they were required at all. That would have afforded precious time to work together to find solutions.

I thank the many MSPs from across the chamber who have signed my motion. I also thank Unite the union for its determined and challenging campaign to save both jobs and a railways future in Springburn. It is the job of unions to offer

challenges and defend their members and I commend it for doing so. Many have decided to rally roon the Caley, as St Rollox is affectionately known, including Glasgow's *Evening Times* newspaper, which is also championing the campaign. I warmly welcome its support.

This is the second debate of two debates on the matter and I thank all of those who contributed to yesterday's debate, in which I reflected the anger and disillusionment that the workforce feel towards Gemini, as well as outlining the compelling reasons why many of us feel that it has not acted in good faith.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am a member of Unite the union, but it would also be good to recognise that the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—the RMT—has staff at the facility and also has an interest. I am sure that Bob Doris would like to join me in doing that.

Bob Doris: I associate myself with those remarks. That is now on the record. I thank Ms Smith for that intervention.

Anger and disillusionment are absolutely justified, but such emotions alone do not save jobs. However, they can drive innovation and new ideas, and necessitate robust business planning and subsequent strategic action. Working in partnership with the rail industry, our public sector can secure both jobs and a long-term future for St Rollox.

I spoke yesterday about a pipeline of work that is available for railway engineering, repair and maintenance. However, the complex and, frankly, ludicrous system by which rolling stock is owned, leased, tendered and funded across the UK does not serve us well. I understand that Gemini has bid for all possible work, yet it has indicated that it would be likely to close Springburn even if all potential work were secured. I described that as a dereliction of duty. I request details of whether Scottish Enterprise has discussed the pipeline of work with Gemini in any detail and has sought to explore how that work could be viably procured and carried out at St Rollox; what work has taken place to define how many workers would be required for each contract; the skills mix that would be needed; and the length of time that each contract would run for. Such analysis would require a full understanding of overheads for materials, wages and site rent, and of how appropriate it is for Gemini to apportion central costs from its Milton Keynes headquarters on top of those overheads. Those costs included an eye-watering £1.16 million for 2018.

Such a detailed and costed business plan would be important, not only for Gemini to keep a presence at St Rollox but for any alternative

company to seek to carry out operations at the site. Is such a pipeline of work, projected over several years, captured in any one document, and is that publicly available?

Any strategic approach to the Scottish railways sector must take a systematic look at the likely pipeline of work over the long term and look at capacity in the Scottish sector. Given that 60 per cent of that capacity is at St Rollox, the loss of the site would be a strategic blow to our economic infrastructure interests.

We know that Unite has made some specific proposals. I hope that the cabinet secretary can update us this evening on his most recent engagement with the union and discuss those proposals with us.

I have no idea whether the suggested transfer under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations is feasible or whether a workers buyout is a realistic prospect, nor do I know the shape of, or timescale for, the strategic railway hub at St Rollox that has been suggested. However, if those are achievable, we must try to secure them.

A key question is this: if Gemini is not bidding for work to be done at St Rollox, who will bid for that work and how can that be facilitated? For instance, has Unite asked for support to develop a business plan for a workers buyout or have third parties been actively approached and encouraged to bid for work to be carried out at St Rollox? I would welcome an update.

Let me refer to one contract in particular. I understand that Gemini bid for the refurbishment of 33 170 class trains for both ScotRail and Northern Rail. Unite speculates that that work could keep around 40 skilled workers employed at St Rollox for up to three years. That would retain a foothold at St Rollox for a meaty period of time and allow the possibility of a railway hub to be explored. However, there is concern that Gemini will win that work and carry it out at Wolverton in England. I urge Gemini and its parent company, Mutares, to ensure that, should that work be successfully procured, it will be carried out at St Rollox. Mutares cannot stay silent, and I hope that it can be a key player in helping to reset the relationship between Gemini and workers, Unions and other stakeholders. Gemini might be painting itself into a corner and perhaps Mutares can assist in finding a solution.

Yesterday, I claimed that Gemini was inflexible, unimaginative, unambitious and lacking in good will. I asked it to prove me wrong. It appears that it now has an opportunity to do that.

I hope that we can reset our relationship with Gemini. I have sought to do my bit, by helping to establish a stakeholder group, which will meet for

the third time tomorrow; by trying to help reduce the cost base in relation to the lease; by seeking to reduce overheads and increase the range of work that can be carried out by pushing for electrification; and by urging that every delivery model to save jobs should be explored.

Yesterday, I mentioned that companies expand and contract depending on their order book and projected future business. Perhaps a railway hub at St Rollox, fully under public sector control, and with several companies operating from it, might emerge in the future. However, the imminent future that workers are concerned about involves two factors: their jobs and the continuation of a railway works at St Rollox. No matter what happens with Gemini, we must ensure that a railway works continues to operate at St Rollox. We must also maximise the opportunity for as many workers as possible to retain their skilled employment in Springburn and ensure that any worker who cannot do so has our utmost support to secure similar skilled employment in the west of Scotland.

Crucially, this must be a turning point for the railway industry in Springburn and for Scotland. Let us secure the long-term future of St Rollox, and its expansion in the years ahead. These are difficult and distressing times for the workers and their families, and we owe it to them to make that vision a reality.

17:11

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I thank Bob Doris for bringing the debate to the chamber. Passionate work has been done on the issue, as everyone has seen. I am sure that others will mention yesterday's debate on a motion lodged by James Kelly, which I was in the chamber for the vast majority of. The fact that we are having two debates in one week on the issue demonstrates its importance.

There are a few reasons why I have chosen to speak tonight, not least of which is the fact that I have constituents who work at St Rollox, some of whom have contacted me on the issue. In particular, I mention Kevin Paterson, who got in touch to let me know about the devastating impact on him and his family if the works close—Bob Doris ended his speech by talking about that devastation. That gentleman is one person who has contacted me to tell me about the impact on him and on other workers in my constituency.

Yesterday, there was a good demonstration outside the Parliament and I thank the unions and others for organising it. I was glad to attend it, along with Bob Doris and others.

All of Scotland will be impacted—Alex Neil summed that up well in his speech yesterday.

There are ties to our industrial past and, through that perhaps, solidarity between Glasgow, Lanarkshire and other areas that have the same rich heritage. As people know, such communities are intertwined and have a shared history and culture. Like others—I note James Kelly's moving speech yesterday—I have often talked about that in the chamber; I have mentioned with pride my grandfather's involvement in the heavy industries in Coatbridge and Lanarkshire as a whole. If he had still been here today, I know that he would have been fully behind the workers at St Rollox—there is absolutely no doubt about it.

Soon, the cabinet secretary will visit the Freightliner company in my constituency and I am sure that he will have a good experience. When I visited it, it was very enlightening. People at that company, too, will have full solidarity with the workforce at St Rollox, who are in a similar line of work.

I listened carefully to what Bob Doris said in his speech. Rather than knowing the ins and outs of the business model and what has happened at the works, I come at the issue more from the point of view of standing up for those of my constituents who have contacted me and for the interests of Scottish industry. It is clear that the company has not treated its workers fairly at all. There might be various solutions, some of which have been bandied about, and I am not sure what the best option would be, but I think that we are all agreed that every attempt should be made to save the jobs of the workforce, and my voice will be joining the voices of those who are calling for Gemini to do the right thing, to engage with the stakeholders group that Bob Doris and others have set up and to treat their workers fairly.

This is a massive moment for the rail industry in Scotland and the United Kingdom and for our industrial heritage and past. Although the operation is based in Glasgow, the situation has touched the hearts and minds of people around the country—it has definitely touched people in Coatbridge. We are all united in calling on the company to do the right thing and to stand by its workers.

17:15

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank Bob Doris for bringing his motion before the Parliament and I am pleased to participate in the debate. The site is not in my region, but the subject matter is very close to my heart and I have taken a great interest in it when meeting stakeholders in the rail industry over previous months.

We should congratulate both Unite—the union mentioned in the motion—and the others that

members have mentioned who are standing up for the workforce in this matter. There have been serious communication problems in how it has been dealt with.

I followed yesterday's debate. I did not participate in it, but I listened to some of the speeches and to the comments that my colleague, Annie Wells, made around the significant emotional attachment that many people in the Glasgow area have to the site. We heard stories of family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues who have worked at the site and been part of what has been a stronghold of Scotland's rail industry for decades; at one point, it produced 60 per cent of our locomotive engines. We cannot deny that the Springburn site is a strategically important part of the Scottish rail industry and should remain so.

I listened with great interest to some of the discussions around why the site does not have a future, because of the types of contracts that it is getting. We have heard that the Scottish rail industry is undergoing a step change, and that is true; there are many positives, as we change technology and new carriages are introduced to the network. It is no secret that, in the coming year, more than 150 new electric carriages are coming on to the Scottish rail network from a number of providers and will be used on local, regional and cross-border services.

With that comes the electrification issue, and a site that is not adequately connected to the electric network will always suffer from a downturn in heavy maintenance in the diesel market. However, the downturn in heavy maintenance in the diesel locomotive market is UK and Europe-wide, and what strikes me is how other sites have been able to deal with that. The light maintenance site at Craightinny, for example, has had to invest significantly in its infrastructure to accept different types of locomotives and has had to upskill its workers—and future-proof those skills—so that it can deal with new and emerging technologies.

As we start, I hope, to see hydrogen and battery-operated carriages coming online for the network, we will also see changes in how we get those carriages on to the sites. They should no longer have to be taken off electric networks and taken by road, which is unprofitable, difficult and cumbersome and will be the reason why many operators, inevitably, are not giving business to the Springburn site.

I will not touch too much on the politics of the issue, because a lot has been and will be said on how the issue has been handled. However, will the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity think about what conversations ScotRail has had with the current owners about how it could use the site?

There is a general, wider question about capacity on the network. Where will the maintenance work be done? There are competitors who are well equipped to take on some of the work, but they will have capacity issues. Are they willing to take on some of the St Rollox workforce? What are the opportunities from some of that work?

Bob Doris raises some fair points about other uses for the site. Will they require any form of intervention? Is intervention a possibility? What about the owners of the site, which I believe is under leasehold? Is there an appetite among the owners to work with the Government? There are intercity diesel and high-speed train refurbishment contracts coming up and I share the view that work on any of the ScotRail contracts should stay in Scotland.

I appreciate that we are short of time this evening and that a lot has already been said, but it is saddening that we are at this stage. It could have been possible to see this coming; the industry has been changing for a long time and it is unfortunate that we have ended up where we are.

I would like to think that the Government and its agencies are working not just with the current owners but with all potential owners, and with users of the site, to do everything that can be done to ensure that the workforce still has work for many years and decades to come.

17:19

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I repeat what I said last night: I congratulate Bob Doris on securing the debate tonight and James Kelly on securing the debate last night. The message that has been coming out last night and tonight is that we are united across the chamber in our determination to try to save not just the jobs but the operation at St Rollox, if possible.

I spoke last night, too, so tonight I want to concentrate on the practicalities of what we might be able to do to achieve the objective of saving the jobs and operation at St Rollox. There are two crucial issues. The first is the need to secure breathing space. We need Gemini to extend the deadline so that it does not pull out in the next two or three months, but at the end of the calendar year at the very earliest, to give us time to find a way forward that will secure the future operation of St Rollox. It will be extremely difficult to do that in the next few weeks: we need breathing space to put certain things in place in order that we can achieve our objective.

Elaine Smith: I do not disagree with Alex Neil. Does he agree that the Government could look at a public-ownership model, as part of that?

Alex Neil: I am just coming to that very issue.

First, we need to buy time. The cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government should be using our influence and leverage indirectly in procurement of rolling stock to put pressure on the Gemini of this world to live up to our expectations of them. I do not see why we should continue to fund an operation in which companies treat us with contempt, with there being no price to be paid by those companies.

The second and more important issue is the options that we should look at. As I said last night, the transport hub option is worth looking at in detail, but there is a second model. I draw attention to two companies—one that is owned, and one that it is planned will be owned, by the Scottish Government. Unknown to many people, we have in the national health service a commercial subsidiary that is wholly owned by NHS Scotland. Its purpose is to commercialise the research and development that takes place in Scotland's great health service. Although it is a small company, in principle it is a model that could be used to try to save St Rollox for the longer term. Also, the Government is planning a national energy company: that model might be applicable.

As well as considering the transport hub and any other ideas, we should also look at the idea of creating a company that is dedicated to the St Rollox works producing not just for the Scottish market, but for the wider market, in the future. Let us see whether we can put that together with investors from the public sector—Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Government being two examples—by bringing in private investment where necessary, if we can, and by bringing in the workers and the unions for part ownership.

That would create a company that would be well capitalised and able to take over the St Rollox works and turn it into a long-term viable business. It would not be done just to safeguard existing jobs but to look towards expansion in the future, so that we can take full advantage of the work that will be coming down stream in years to come. It will require a lot of detailed work to establish whether that can be done—whether it would be financially viable and, if so, what we would need to do to make it happen.

I believe that such a public-sector-led model can work if we do our homework on it. However, we need time to put the business plan together, to raise the equity, to prepare the proposition and to ensure that we can make it viable. That is why the prerequisite now is to buy from Gemini the time that it owes the workers at St Rollox, and that it owes Scotland. If we can do that, we can turn the site into a phoenix rising from the ashes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am being quite lenient with time, because not many members have requested to speak. Therefore, I am quite content for you to take an extra minute or so, Mr Kelly. I will not be bothered.

17:25

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): I congratulate Bob Doris on securing the debate, and compliment him for the work that he has done in support of the workforce at St Rollox. I again record my thanks to Unite the union and the RMT for the successful campaign that they have run. The depth of feeling and the emotion that we saw from the workers who were in the chamber and around Parliament last night are testament to the strength of those trade unions and to how important the issue is in the local community.

In speeches last night and tonight we have heard a lot about the case for retaining the plant at the Caley. We have heard about its strong history and traditions going back to 1856, about the many families who have worked at the site right up to the current day and, crucially, about the skilled workforce—the 200 people who are employed there. Important points have also been made about the rail industry in Scotland—how it has a very strong future and how it would make no sense at all to see the plant close when we need an industry that provides efficient and smooth-running rolling stock.

As I have mentioned, this is the second debate that has taken place on the matter. That allows us to press home some pertinent points that were perhaps not fully outlined in the chamber last night.

The issue that I would like to raise directly with the cabinet secretary is a contract in relation to ScotRail class 170 trains. It has been put to me that that contract has been set up to be awarded to the Wolverton works. If that is the case, it is wholly unacceptable. The contract for 33 trains is worth £8 million; it would start in December 2019, run for a three-year period and secure at least 40 of the current jobs at St Rollox.

The bulk of that work relates to ScotRail trains. On the subject of procurement, Alex Neil made the point that if work that is being bid for relates to ScotRail trains, it should be carried out in Scotland, at the Caley site; it should not be passed down to Wolverton. That is a matter of deep concern, so I ask the cabinet secretary to clarify the precise position on that contract. The Government must ensure that the contract remains at the St Rollox site. It should not be set up to go to Wolverton.

Bob Doris: Before I put my point to James Kelly, I record my thanks to him for securing

yesterday's debate. It was remiss of me not to have done so at the time, so I hope that he will let me do so now.

Mr Kelly made an important point about the class 170 work. There will also be work in six months, a year, two years and three years. However, there seems to be a guddle about what the pipeline of work will look like. There needs to be much more openness and transparency across the railway sector on what work is likely to emerge, in order to allow for forward planning in the industry more generally, and for St Rollox in particular.

James Kelly: Bob Doris makes the valid point that a pipeline of work exists. There is also a skilled workforce at the site. There is broad agreement across Parliament: it is absolutely paramount that the Government ensures that, come 4 March, when the consultation ends, we do not see the site begin to close down. We need to keep it open.

That brings me to my final point. Bob Doris said that motions on their own do not save jobs. That is correct. What are needed now are not motions or warm words, but specific actions from the Government to ensure that, come 4 March, we still have the time, as Alex Neil said, to develop the models and ensure that work is in place, going forward. The Government needs to look not just at intervention, but at public ownership—if not on a permanent basis, at least on a temporary basis from 4 March. That would allow work to be done to assess the viability of the transport hub and how we can take forward electrification, which would ultimately save a lot in costs and make bidding for contracts more viable in the longer term. It would also allow us to look at how we can ensure that we get contracts in place.

It is crucial that the cabinet secretary give such assurances in his summing-up speech. I reiterate that if work for ScotRail is being awarded in contracts, we must intervene immediately to ensure that they are awarded to the St Rollox site, not to Wolverton.

17:30

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I add my thanks to Bob Doris for bringing this evening's debate to the chamber and to James Kelly for bringing yesterday's debate on the subject. I signed both motions but, sadly, I was not able to stay last night for James Kelly's debate. I am pleased that I have been able to stay for this one.

As others have said, the unions should have all our thanks and support for the work that they are doing to respond to the immediate threat to about 200 highly skilled jobs. We need to do whatever we can to prevent that threat from becoming a

reality and not only campaign against the planned closures, but find opportunities for the site to go forward with a stronger future ahead of it.

However, the debate also forces us to confront some deeper issues about the nature of ownership in our modern economy and the role of the private sector. Very few of us would suggest that the private sector should have no role at all in a modern economy, but too often at present private ownership comes with rights and not responsibilities, and we do not expect enough in terms of the commitment that owners need to show to the communities that they are engaged with. That applies whether we are talking about land ownership, housing, other buildings or ownership of companies.

As was remarked in yesterday's debate, we are in a situation where a company that has owned the asset for not much more than five minutes can recognise it not as an asset that is of importance to the community and the economy but merely as part of its economic portfolio, and can decide to dispose of it in this way. To announce that in the run-up to Christmas showed nothing short of contempt for the community that is affected. We need to challenge the notion that private ownership confers absolute rights but not responsibilities to invest in and protect the people who are affected by the decisions that owners make.

We should also recognise the positive advantages that can come from public ownership, particularly in a situation such as this one, where there is no simple, continuous throughput of work. We should all be pleased that there are fewer very old carriages running around on Scotland's railways, and we should all be pleased—I think that most of us are—that we are seeing upgrades and new rolling stock. Although that might mean a change to the amount of refurbishment work that will happen, that will not be forever. New rolling stock does not stay new and capacity to do the maintenance work that is required will continue to be needed.

The site has the skills, but it needs the infrastructure to be able to access the work that will be required in future to refurbish not only Scotland's rolling stock, but that of other areas as well. Having travelled on a Northern train in the past week or so, I can confirm that some refurbishment work is needed there as well.

Jamie Greene: My question is on the point about continuous work on rolling stock. Given that two other businesses operate in the same space at the Springburn site, what effect would public ownership of one business have on the two privately owned businesses' ability to accept contracts? It is a genuine question regarding Mr Harvie's thoughts on that.

Patrick Harvie: It is a serious question and I am sure that it is the kind of serious question that would have confronted the Scottish Government when looking at taking public ownership of Prestwick airport. There is another airport on the west coast of Scotland and there is the potential that a publicly owned airport might change the economic context of a privately owned airport. However, our objective and priority in making those kinds of decisions should not be to ask what is in the best interests of the shareholders who own the privately owned part of the economy; it is about what is in the best interests of the whole of our economy and the people who work in it, as well as the communities that are affected by that work.

I will reflect on some of the points that Alex Neil made about ownership in his speech, which I welcome. It was good that he took this opportunity to remind the Scottish Government that it already has a record of seeing opportunities for the role of public ownership in parts of the economy where the private sector is also active. Some of us would like that role of public ownership to be bigger than it is now, but the Scottish Government has a record of seeing opportunities for the role of public ownership. I encourage the minister to respond to those points in summing up.

I read the *Official Report* of yesterday's members' business debate and it seemed that the minister wanted to give more emphasis to the wider issues around the rail industry. I hope that he will take the opportunity when closing today's debate to respond specifically to the two objectives of the Unite campaign. First, the minister reflected briefly on the electrification measures that the Scottish Government is looking into. Can he tell us what certainty that work is giving to the owners? Are they responding to it? Are there any signals that that will change their decision? Secondly, there is the wider point about a public intervention from the Scottish Government. Prestwick airport might not be the ideal model and perhaps, as Alex Neil suggested, there are other models. However, we need to hear a response from the Scottish Government on that specific proposition in order to know how we are going to move forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Bill Kidd will be followed by Neil Findlay, who will be the last speaker in the open debate.

17:37

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): When we come in near the end of a really classy—I say this in all honesty—thought-out, intelligent debate, particularly one that stretches across the chamber, we sometimes feel as if most of what we want to say has already been said. However, I want to

speak specifically to show the weight of support in the Parliament for St Rollox and the workers there. I am not saying that because I will bring weight to the debate, but because the numbers who speak in the debate should show that the Parliament cares a great deal about St Rollox.

I recognise the efforts of Bob Doris MSP, transport secretary Michael Matheson, and others to ensure that the voices and hopes of the workers at the St Rollox railway works are heard and prioritised at this very difficult time. In order to achieve the best possible outcome for the highly skilled and specialised workers at the Caley, good faith must be shown on all sides as well as a genuine commitment to honouring the years of high-quality efforts that the workforce at the site has shown. We must maximise the time available to ensure that all viable avenues are assessed and given due consideration.

St Rollox is a historic site, as has been said, and its loss would leave a gaping hole in the community. From 1856, the site powered the industrial revolution, with 60 per cent of the world's locomotive engines being built at the Caley. It is a significant part of 19th century Scottish industrial history and its significance resonates to this day with the workforce. There might be operational changes to be made, but with reports of contracts having been turned away, there must be life left yet.

As I said, good faith must be shown and I urge Gemini to accept an independent review of its finances concerning operations at St Rollox, because independent analysis could lead to new approaches to business plans for the site and business going forward. I believe that that is the least that a responsible company could do as an employer.

The workforce at St Rollox comes not only from the Springburn area, but from across Glasgow and the west of Scotland, including my own area, Anniesland. The quality of work that it produces could not be easily replicated anywhere else. It is not just those who are directly employed at the Caley, but many others in the surrounding community, who rely on the viability of the working site.

A good and competitive business is built with planning, management and a skilled workforce. It would be a foolish investor who put money into a company that did not recognise that. I believe that Gemini should remember it, because I am sure that it would not want allegations that it appears to be driven by asset stripping.

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity has played a key role in chairing the working group. I know that the Scottish Government will do its best to secure a

viable St Rollox site and continuing jobs for the valuable workforce, and I think that the speeches in this debate will help to achieve that.

17:40

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Bob Doris and James Kelly for securing debates on St Rollox. The site is not in my region, but it is a national asset and an important piece of our infrastructure, so I have an interest in it. When the plant was founded 160 years ago, I am sure that there were businesses making penny-farthing bikes. If those businesses were unable to keep up with the times and diversify into new products when penny-farthings went out of fashion, they would have failed and probably deserved to fail. However, that is not what is happening at St Rollox. The plant has kept up with the times—it has been able to keep up production throughout the whole period—so the analogy does not fit.

The workers do not need warm words or sympathy from us; I am sure that they have had heaps of that from others. What they need is action to protect their jobs and their futures. We cannot allow hugely important industrial sites to be passed on by company owners, time and again, with little care or regard for the wellbeing of those who produce the profits that generate shareholder dividends. That has happened more than half a dozen times to this company. It is not a lame duck, but a profitable business, but, as with the east coast line, a profitable business comes into public ownership, and what happens? It gets flogged to the private sector again. If it is profitable, what is the barrier to taking it into public ownership to generate profits for the industry, the sector or indeed the wider economy? If it were a lame-duck asset, I would see the point of shirking away from that approach, but it is not; the sector is profitable.

This could be the first part of bringing the rail sector and network back under public control. If it is too big an apple to eat in one bite, let us take it a wee bit at a time; this could and should be the first step in that process. Time and again, Scottish Enterprise provides grants to businesses that are absolute chancers, in my opinion. Look at what happened in my area over Christmas with Kaiam. Kaiam was given money by Scottish Enterprise time and again with very questionable conditions attached: it got support, but within a few years it was off, leaving 300 workers with no job. The St Rollox plant has been around for 150 years—surely it deserves the same support.

We know that our railways are run by the Dutch, but we could take the St Rollox asset under our control and run it as part of an incremental move towards full public ownership of the rail network. That is what we should be doing, particularly at a time when we are supposed to be moving freight

and passengers off roads and on to rail, with all the implications that that has for our health, the environment and the economy. It would be absolute madness if we were to leave the plant to wither on the altar of laissez-faire economics, in which the market rules over long-term planning and sustainability.

I say to the cabinet secretary that sympathy is fine—I am sure that we all have sympathy for the workers—but that will not cut it. What the workers at the plant need is action from the cabinet secretary, and I hope that he will tell us tonight what that action will be.

17:45

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): I congratulate Bob Doris on securing the debate. As I said in last night's debate, Bob Doris is the local constituency MSP for the works and, on behalf of his constituents, he has been diligent in pursuing the issue and that of the future provision of a railway works on the St Rollox site. I will certainly continue to work with him on those matters through the stakeholders group and in the work that continues to be taken forward by Scottish Enterprise and Transport Scotland in partnership with the unions.

In last night's debate, I highlighted to members the value of the railway industry to the Scottish economy and the fact that we are going through a period of unprecedented investment in the railway sector in Scotland. That is why it is particularly disappointing that Gemini has chosen to end its involvement at the St Rollox site. The Scottish Government is determined to do what it can to build up the sector. As I mentioned last night, the sector has often been overlooked and undervalued, but work is now being undertaken by Scottish Enterprise—with the sector—to build it up and sustain it. The attraction of Talgo to the Longannet site is a practical example of the work that we are doing to build up the railway industry in Scotland.

Having said that, the industry faces significant challenges because of the new rolling stock that has been introduced, as a number of members have pointed out. Some sites are largely dependent on undertaking heavy rail refurbishment work on British Rail rolling stock that was in the network prior to its privatisation, but the amount of stock that requires refurbishment is in decline, which is having an impact not just in Scotland but right around the UK and beyond.

A key part of our role is to do what we can to ensure that, when work is required to be undertaken on rolling stock, as much of that work as possible is done in Scotland. However, there

are specific challenges to our achieving that. Bob Doris referred to the complexity of the rolling stock environment in the railway industry, which creates considerable challenges to ensuring that the work is undertaken in Scotland. Jamie Greene also highlighted the challenges in the sector and its changing nature.

Alongside that issue, the Springburn site is more than 160 years old. It was designed when the needs and demands of the industry were different, and it was designed in a way that does not reflect the needs and demands for the maintenance and refurbishment of modern rolling stock. That is why the hub idea, which I will come to later, is extremely important.

The reality for the site, as operated by Gemini, is that the work will be finished at the end of July. That deadline has been extended by additional work, as four trains have been put in by ScotRail for heavy engineering work. However, I echo the point that Alex Neil made: time is very limited. An issue that we have been discussing with Gemini is the need to build in more time to give us the opportunity to pursue wider options for providing sustainable employment on the site and ensuring that it can still be used for heavy rail work in the future.

That is why Scottish Enterprise and Transport Scotland have been involved with the whole rail sector in Scotland in considering how we can repurpose the site to give it a sustainable future and provide employment in the rail industry. However, that will take us some time to achieve. A key part of that work is considering how the existing site can be reconfigured to attract other interested parties to base themselves on that particular site.

The question of whether the line into the site could be electrified has been highlighted as an issue. It would mean the electrification of around 4km of line. I have directed Network Rail to look into undertaking that work, and the scoping work has started on whether that is one of the key things we need to deliver a new rail hub at the site. It will take time for that work to be carried out, but the feasibility and assessment work is already being undertaken by Network Rail.

Patrick Harvie: I thank the minister for giving us some more information about that. We all understand that that work cannot be done at the snap of our fingers but will take some time. However, can the cabinet secretary tell us about the financial context of the decision that Network Rail may need to make? Or will the Scottish Government make the final decision? Would the money come from the Scottish Government's budget or from Network Rail funds? Who will decide and who will pay once the feasibility work has been done?

Michael Matheson: In effect, the Scottish Government would have to pay for that through its contribution to Network Rail. The average cost is around £1 million per kilometre, so the electrification of the line into the site could cost us in the region of £4 million. That is why it is critical that, before we commission that work, we first consider how we can reconfigure the site and whether we can get rail industry work undertaken there.

Patrick Harvie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Matheson: I will give way to Patrick Harvie again. However, I am very conscious of the time, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If members and the cabinet secretary are content, I am content to let the debate run a little longer. I will just check with the cabinet secretary about timings, as he may have other engagements. Are you content for the debate to run a bit longer, cabinet secretary?

Michael Matheson: I will continue as best I can, Presiding Officer.

Patrick Harvie: Very briefly, does that cost not reinforce the need to find some way of recouping the public investment in the site—which will increase the value of that privately owned asset—either through a public ownership option or in some other way?

Michael Matheson: The site is owned by a private company at present—the leaseholder is Hansteen Holdings—and it is only fair to note that it is currently undertaking work on how it can reconfigure the site to make it more viable for the rail industry going forward.

As we consider the options for redeveloping the site, it is important that we focus on making it viable for the railway industry and its future needs as well as on creating sustainable employment for people on the site. That is central to the work that Scottish Enterprise and Transport Scotland are undertaking.

James Kelly: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Michael Matheson: I will give way briefly. However, I want to make progress, because I am very conscious of the time and I have other matters to deal with.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thought that, cabinet secretary. The chamber will note that. Briefly, Mr Kelly.

James Kelly: Briefly, will the cabinet secretary address the point that I made about the ScotRail class 170 Turbostar contract—

Michael Matheson: Yes—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you wait until I call you, cabinet secretary? Just a moment—sit down, please. I know that you are desperate to answer, but I do not want to have two of you on your feet at the one time. Just sit down now, Mr Kelly. I call the cabinet secretary.

Michael Matheson: I will address that point if the member lets me make progress on the issue.

Bob Doris raised the question of who, if not Gemini, will be on the site. It has been put to us that ScotRail or Network Rail should step in and take over the site. At the request of the Scottish Government, both parties have considered the matter in detail and have engaged with the trade unions on it. Neither ScotRail—which has existing capacity in its own engineering workshops—nor Network Rail requires the site at present. There is, however, the potential for them to be interested in being involved in some form of hub if that idea is progressed. That is why the work that we are doing with the industry to understand its needs in relation to the potential use of the site is critical to finding a sustainable future for the site.

The hub idea could see public and private sector involvement in creating the type of environment that would allow us to develop a sustainable future for the site, and that is exactly what we are working on. The hub idea would also meet the challenge that Alex Neil set, but it would take us time to do that. That is why we are applying as much pressure as we can to Gemini and Mutares, and it is why we are looking at other rolling stock providers to see whether there is any other work that can be put into the site in order to sustain it. We will continue to do that. We will not give up on the site. We will do everything that we can, but the time that we have is limited.

James Kelly raised the issue of the class 170 trains and the ScotRail element of them. Those trains are not owned by ScotRail; they are owned by a leasing company called Porterbrook, which has rolling stock leasing arrangements with ScotRail and another route franchise in the north of England. Part of the challenge is that the franchising nature of the industry means that the rolling stock is often owned not by the service provider but by private companies. Therefore, the decision on where the work should go is for Porterbrook, not ScotRail, as it owns the rolling stock.

We are trying to ensure that as much of that type of work as can be undertaken in Scotland is undertaken in Scotland.

Neil Findlay: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Matheson: I am afraid that I need to make progress.

As has rightly been pointed out, a key part of that is recognising that several other companies in Scotland that employ significant workforces in the sector are involved in bidding for such work.

I think that Neil Findlay said something about franchising. We do not have any option on franchising. Legally, we have to franchise because of the Railways Act 2005. That continues to be the case. However, that is a debate for elsewhere, and it does not address the issue relating to Springburn.

In the limited time that we have had, we have worked very closely with the unions and the whole industry in Scotland to find a way to repurpose the site. We believe that the hub is the most effective way of achieving that, given the site's design, and we are looking at how electrification of the site could meet the needs of the industry in the years ahead. We will continue to work with everyone to achieve that and, at the same time, we will press Gemini and others in the industry to give us more time to develop that work.

As things stand, all the Scottish Government's agencies, from Scottish Enterprise to Transport Scotland and partnership action for continuing employment, are doing what they can. PACE stands ready to offer support and advice to the workforce as and where necessary. I assure members that we will continue to do everything that we can, within our limited abilities, to ensure that the site continues to be used for heavy rail purposes and that it continues to serve the industry in Scotland in the years ahead.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank all members for their contributions to this very important debate. I extended the time for the debate because it is important. I also thank the cabinet secretary for extending his time.

Meeting closed at 17:58.

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