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Official Report

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Tuesday 10 June 2014

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Scottish Parliament

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth.

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis (Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you very much for the opportunity to address you today.

A week ago, Jews around the world celebrated the festival of Shavuot, or Pentecost. As we marked the anniversary of the giving of the ten commandments by God to Moses at Mount Sinai 3,300 years ago, we recalled the response of the Israelites immediately after this epic historic event. They unanimously and enthusiastically declared:

“All that the Lord has said we will do.”

That was a call to action. The children of Israel highlighted for us the essence of Judaism—a life that is devoted to the pursuit of constructive, meaningful and positive deeds. Our great book of the Talmud, the Ethics of the Fathers, puts it this way: it is not the talking that is important; it is the doing.

A religious life must embody good deeds, and faith must lead to responsible living. The people who change the world are not the dreamers and thinkers. The people who change the world are the doers, and the sincerity and integrity that accompany their actions are crucial. Abraham Lincoln commented:

“The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just”.

In a quiet reflective moment, when we look deep within ourselves, we know whether what we have done is the right thing for the right reason, no matter what the consequences.

With all that, reasonable, simple action is not enough. Through his revelation to his people at Sinai, God was going one step further through setting a seemingly unattainable goal. A group of slaves, liberated from Egyptian bondage just weeks before, were invited to embrace a moral and legal code that would transform mankind, but only if they were willing to open their hearts and

reshape their lives and conduct accordingly. That is the very approach that the Israelites adopted, as they went on to achieve the seemingly unachievable.

As public representatives, members of this Parliament will have many ambitions and aspirations for Scotland. For the sake of bettering this country, we should constantly challenge ourselves and seek to do more and to achieve more. Let us set our sights high. As Pablo Picasso said,

“I am always doing things I can’t do, that’s how I get to do them.”

May God be with you in all your noble endeavours to achieve truly great things for Scotland.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Street Safety

1. Anne McTaggart (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to improve street safety in cities at night. (S4T-00732)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): The vast majority of Scotland's communities are good places to live and work. Violent crime is down and is currently at a 38-year low. However, a minority of individuals inflict harm in our communities through crime and antisocial behaviour. The distressing sexual assaults that have taken place recently in the Glasgow area, including the incident last Sunday, are very concerning. I cannot comment on on-going cases, but action is being taken. Police Scotland immediately launched an extensive inquiry and deployed a large team of specialist investigators supported by local officers. Police Scotland has since deployed extra foot and car patrols in the city centre and in the areas where the other attacks took place.

The Scottish Government is committed to tackling all forms of abuse or violence. We want a Scotland in which resilient communities, families and individuals live their lives free from crime, disorder and danger. Through partnership working with Police Scotland, local authorities and a range of wider agencies, a number of initiatives have been delivered in towns and cities across Scotland to help people to stay safe during a night out and to get home safely. Those measures range from SOS buses to closed-circuit television, street pastors and taxi marshals.

Anne McTaggart: Last night, I took part in the midnight march that was organised by two astonishingly brave young women residents, marching in solidarity in Govanhill against the series of rapes and sex attacks that have recently taken place across Glasgow. I joined thousands of Glaswegians who want to reclaim their streets from sex offenders and who object to the idea that they should have to stay indoors for their own safety. Can the cabinet secretary detail the additional measures that have been put in place by Police Scotland to apprehend those responsible for the recent crimes? Further, can he advise me whether greater numbers of police officers will be on patrol on our streets in Glasgow until the perpetrators of those crimes are caught?

Kenny MacAskill: I join the member in paying tribute to those who organised and participated in last night's demonstration. It is important that our

streets should be capable of being walked on without fear by anybody irrespective of their gender, age or disability.

On the question of police operations, as I indicated, there has been an increase in the number of foot and car patrols not only in Govanhill but elsewhere where incidents have taken place, and the major investigation teams are there to provide additional specialist support in dealing with those who are being pursued. I do not think that it would be appropriate for me to go beyond that to operational matters, which are for the police. It would not be appropriate for me to compromise what is an on-going operation.

What I can say to the member, though, is that tomorrow I am meeting Rape Crisis Scotland, as I do regularly. If there are additional issues that that organisation feels should be taken on board by the Government or the police, I will happily feed those back.

Anne McTaggart: I am grateful for that response, but I remain concerned that the number of police patrolling our streets has been negatively affected by the backfilling of administration and clerical roles following the introduction of Police Scotland. We know that, under this Government, there are at least 1,727 fewer police support staff than there were in March 2010. Current statistics do not take account of the increase in the number of backroom officers and the Government does not make information available on the number of officers who are patrolling our streets. Will the cabinet secretary work with Police Scotland to ensure that the number of police officers on our streets is accurately recorded? Further, will he commit to a permanent increase in the number of officers actively patrolling our streets after the perpetrators of these vicious crimes have been caught?

Kenny MacAskill: It is important that we allow the police to get on with the job of apprehending those who have carried out these appalling acts, so that they are brought to justice through law enforcement by the police and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. I think that all of us in the chamber, irrespective of our political views, abhor what has taken place in Glasgow and give our full support to law enforcement. I am not going to bandy around statistics on who voted for what or on the 1,000 additional officers, because what we are here to do is to give our support to those who are carrying out the current investigations.

The benefit of having Police Scotland is that we now have a national rape task force and major investigation teams in geographical areas. That did not exist before. I appreciate that such expertise did exist in Strathclyde because of the size of its police force, which covered 50 per cent of Scotland, but the expertise is now available

nationally. Equally, when there are abhorrent incidents such as the recent one in Glasgow it is appropriate that officers are deployed to the area from wherever to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

Much of what the member refers to is an operational matter for the police and the Scottish Police Authority, whose members are in the building as we speak at an event that is being hosted by Hugh Henry and Christine Grahame, so the member may care to speak to them. In the interim, what I can say is that the Government will give Police Scotland full support to ensure that the culprits are apprehended and the full weight of the law is used against them.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I, too, congratulate the many people who gathered last night to reclaim our streets. I represent and live in the merchant city, so I know how well policed it is, as is the centre of Glasgow with CCTV cameras.

I am sorry that Anne McTaggart chose to politicise such a horrific crime in some of her questions. The cabinet secretary mentioned—

Anne McTaggart: Will the member take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): No, I am sorry, the member cannot.

Sandra White: The cabinet secretary mentioned the rape crisis task force. I have just been at a meeting with Christine Grahame, Hugh Henry and the Scottish police force. I asked a question about what specialist units are available to Police Scotland to react quickly to this type of crime. What other specialist units are now available to Police Scotland that were not, according to what I have been told, available before?

Kenny MacAskill: There is a variety of specialist units. Indeed, Sandra White and I were at a meeting in which her colleague Bill Kidd was advised about the dedicated aircrew; obviously, we pay tribute to those who lost their lives in the Clutha tragedy.

It may be useful for me to explain about the specialist unit relating to sexual assaults. Glasgow, in common with all territorial policing divisions in Police Scotland, has a dedicated divisional rape investigation unit, which provides a specialist response to rape and serious sexual crime at a local level. From an investigatory perspective and where required, such units can be supported from other specialist areas, including the national rape task force and the major investigation teams. That broader support from business areas, including operational support division and SPA forensic services, is available when required.

I am not sure precisely which groups are involved at the moment—it is an operational matter—but I can assure the member that Police Scotland, both locally and nationally, is viewing this with the utmost seriousness. In fact, I discussed it with the chief constable when I met him at the serious organised crime task force yesterday, so I know that action is being taken.

Greenhouse Gas Inventory 2012

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a statement by Paul Wheelhouse on the publication of the 2012 greenhouse gas inventory. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement and there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions. I will give Mr Wheelhouse a few seconds to gather his water, his papers and his thoughts—and, of course, the important card.

14:12

The Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Paul Wheelhouse): I advise members that the 2012 Scottish greenhouse gas emissions statistics were published this morning. The data indicate that between 1990 and 2012 Scotland saw a 29.9 per cent reduction in emissions of the basket of six key greenhouse gases. On a comparable basis, using data published today, that contrasts with reductions of 23.9 per cent for England, 17.7 per cent for Wales and 15.0 per cent for Northern Ireland. Over the same period, emissions among all 28 European Union member states fell by 18.5 per cent, and among the EU 15 member states by just 13.9 per cent.

However, progress towards Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions targets is formally measured against the level of the net Scottish emissions account. That account incorporates Scotland's source emissions; international aviation and international shipping emissions; relevant emissions removals through carbon sinks such as forestry; and the use of emissions allowances by Scottish industries that are participating in the EU emissions trading scheme. Our annual targets were set using the 2008 inventory. At the time, Parliament envisaged that a 24.2 per cent reduction in net emissions should be achieved by 2012 after adjustment for emissions trading. In fact, in 2012, Scotland's net greenhouse gas emissions had fallen by 26.4 per cent since 1990. In other words, our emissions trajectory is showing a steeper percentage decline than Parliament expected—we exceeded the percentage target by 2.2 per cent in 2012.

Nevertheless, the challenge to Scotland's performance is in terms of measurement against fixed, statutory annual targets that are measured in tonnes. In 2012, unadjusted Scottish greenhouse gas emissions were estimated to be 52.9 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. That is marginally higher than the 2011 figure of 52.5 mtCO₂e but, as I stated earlier, it is 29.9 per cent lower than in 1990. As the Scottish climate change target for 2012 was designed to deliver a specific percentage reduction en route to a 42 per cent decrease by 2020 but was set as a fixed

value in tonnes, at 53.226 mtCO₂e, Scottish emissions in 2012 exceeded the level required by the annual target that was set under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 by just over 2.4 mtCO₂e.

That must be considered in a context of significant changes in how historical data are calculated as well as new data that combined to add around 5.4 mtCO₂e, or a 7.7 per cent increase to the baseline against which all targets were set. That is more than double the amount by which the 2012 target was exceeded. Frustratingly, we have been informed of the changes only now and could not have been aware of them back in 2012. Details of how the data have been updated and improved are set out in the statistical release.

Our targets are challenging—that is deliberate—and year-to-year fluctuations in factors beyond our control are inevitable, but it is worth noting that, if the same percentage reduction of 24.2 per cent that had been envisaged when the 2012 target was set was applied to the updated baseline using the 1990 to 2012 inventory and the annual target was recalibrated accordingly, the benchmark of success would have been 57.3 mtCO₂e in 2012. On that basis, we would now be celebrating Scotland's emissions being 1.6 mtCO₂e below a revised target of 57.3 mtCO₂e.

In the annual progress report on Scotland's performance that it published in March, our independent climate change adviser, the Committee on Climate Change, acknowledged that good progress has been made in Scotland on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, particularly in the energy sector and on energy efficiency. In particular, our record on leading the United Kingdom on renewables—in 2013, 46.5 per cent of Scotland's gross electricity consumption was generated from renewables—is one that we can be proud of.

Crucially, the CCC noted that, despite the first two statutory targets having been missed,

“underlying progress appears on track in most sectors.”

I believe that Scotland's Parliament and Scotland's people should take heart from that. The trajectory is key. Now that the latest data have been analysed, Parliament can be assured that we are more than halfway towards our interim target of achieving a 42 per cent reduction in emissions by 2020.

In addition to significant baseline adjustments, an increase in the net Scottish emissions account, which resulted from the operation of the EU ETS, added 2.8 mtCO₂e to the 2012 account. That, too, is more than the amount by which the target was exceeded. In 2012, as a result of poor weather, residential emissions increased and energy sector emissions were also affected. That is a regular

vulnerability that we are determined to design out through tackling energy efficiency and decarbonising electricity and heat generation.

There are hard yards ahead. The second report on proposals and policies—RPP2—sets the strategic direction for meeting our interim 42 per cent target by 2020 and annual targets to 2027, but section 36 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 requires that, if Scottish ministers lay a report that states that an annual target has not been met, they must, as soon as reasonably practicable, lay before Parliament a report

“setting out proposals and policies to compensate in future years for the excess emissions.”

I plan to address that by providing an annual report on the 2012 target by the end of October. The current RPP remains relevant and shows that it is possible to meet every annual target. Some policies and proposals will be easier to implement than others. Technology is changing all the time. If individual measures do not work out, we will need to examine alternatives.

We are also focused on negotiations leading up to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change conference of parties in Paris in 2015. As Yeb Saño of the Philippines has asked, we need to demonstrate the Scottish Government’s commitment to delivery of our stretching targets as our contribution to the necessary global action and to encourage others to higher ambition.

We have engaged in discussions with Stop Climate Chaos on next steps for several weeks, and I am grateful for the fact that the Opposition parties seem keen to find consensus on new measures that arose from discussions with stakeholders. That positivity offers a hope of maintaining our common purpose as a nation in the face of what is perhaps the greatest global challenge.

Therefore, I am pleased to announce the establishment of a Cabinet sub-committee on climate change to ensure co-ordination of our strategic response at the highest level within Government. The sub-committee will complement the new public sector climate leaders forum and the Scottish Government’s climate change delivery board. To assist that process, I am making available a monitoring framework for delivery of RPP2 policies and proposals on the Scottish Government website, and I thank the climate change delivery board for its work on that.

Members can be assured that this Government’s ambition is resolute. I am confident that our world-leading targets are driving the changes that are required for a smooth transition to a low-carbon Scotland. Scottish ministers remain fully committed to meeting Scotland’s

ambitious greenhouse gas emission targets, and the economic advantages of an early transition are clear. I meet my ministerial colleagues regularly, and I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the significant contributions that they have made to the implementation of the delivery framework that is set out in RPP2.

For example, through the heat network partnership, the Scottish Government and our agencies will build on the work that underpins the Scottish Government’s draft heat generation policy statement to commit resources to supporting delivery of district heating projects, and we are actively engaged with projects across Scotland.

The Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism, Fergus Ewing, has committed to set up a working group under the expert commission on district heating to consider the existing regulatory context and to develop proposals for a regulatory framework. As part of that work, it will investigate how best to ensure that public sector buildings connect to district heating networks, where they are available and when that is cost effective.

In March, new energy efficiency standards for social housing were launched, and last week my colleague Margaret Burgess announced the final home energy efficiency programmes Scotland—HEEPS—allocations of £60 million for 2014-15, which will result in remote local councils receiving £5.3 million more in funding for energy efficiency measures for off-gas-grid homes than in 2013-14.

We will work with stakeholders to take forward our commitment to target the most fuel-poor areas in the years ahead, including remote rural and hard-to-treat properties.

On sustainable and active travel, we are committed to achieving our target of almost total decarbonisation of road transport by 2050. This morning, the transport minister announced a further £15 million package for 2014 to 2016, which includes an allocation of an additional £10 million to cycling infrastructure in 2014-15 and funding for more rapid deployment of electric vehicles and associated charging infrastructure throughout Scotland, made up of £7 million for cycling and walking infrastructure, which attracts match funding, £2 million for electric vehicle rapid chargers and £1 million for up to 30 electric vehicles for car clubs.

The transport minister proposes to allocate £5 million in 2015-16 to develop behavioural change aspects of the smarter choices, smarter places programme. There will be a focus on locally designed initiatives, including travel planning. The approach will be designed to attract local match funding. It is worth noting that the funding of £15 million that is targeted at reducing carbon emissions from the transport sector is 50 per cent

more than we had discussed with key stakeholders such as Stop Climate Chaos. That indicates our determination to rise to the challenge.

On agriculture, we have recently expanded the farming for a better climate programme, and we have worked with Scotland's farmers to encourage the mutual benefits from the greening elements of the common agricultural policy. The full detail of the CAP package will be announced by cabinet secretary Richard Lochhead tomorrow.

It is no doubt because of that package of measures that Stop Climate Chaos Scotland this morning commented that this Government is showing "serious intent" in tackling climate change.

Our climate challenge fund enables communities throughout Scotland to take action, and we support international action on climate justice through our climate justice fund. It does not stop there. Our new cabinet sub-committee and the climate change delivery board will develop policies and financial mechanisms to enable people, organisations and businesses to reduce their emissions while reaping other benefits. Through the public sector climate leaders forum, we have committed the Scottish Government to becoming an exemplar organisation on climate change.

Climate change is a truly global challenge, and tackling it is a moral imperative. With the Parliament's support, Scotland will continue to lead by example and encourage other nations to raise their ambition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The minister will take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. If questions and answers are succinct, I might be able to call everyone who wants to be called.

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

This is the third year in a row in which I have stood before the minister and been disappointed by the Government statement on achieving our year-on-year emissions target, and this is the third year in a row in which I have heard the same excuses and spin from the Government. That is not acceptable.

The minister highlighted the general trend, but progress has stalled since the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 was passed and statutory targets were introduced, and this year there has been a rise in emissions. The Government defends the lack of progress by focusing on the shifting baseline, but such adjustment was not unexpected. In relation to the 2010 figures, the then minister, Stewart Stevenson, said that the early experience highlighted the need not just to

plan to meet the targets but to build in contingency. If that had been done we might not be in the position that we are in today.

There is a need for action, which is why Opposition colleagues and I wrote to the minister to support Stop Climate Chaos's policy asks. We made clear that such policies are only a start. I am pleased that the minister has responded to the suggestions today, but they will not achieve the step change that is needed.

Today's announcement means that it will be much more difficult to achieve our target in subsequent years. Does the minister share my concern about our ability to meet the 2013 target, which demanded a significant drop in emissions, given that it will be based on past and current activity, and given that today's announcements will have no impact on our ability to deliver on the target?

We are playing catch-up. The small measures that the minister announced are welcome, but will the minister commit to producing a substantial annual report in October, which will fully compensate for the excess emissions?

Paul Wheelhouse: As I said, we will produce a report by the end of October on the need to pick up slack, in terms of emissions.

I welcome Claire Baker's welcome for the measures that we have taken. I hope that she recognises the serious commitment of resources from this Government today and, last week, from Margaret Burgess and Keith Brown, and I hope that she acknowledges that our setting up a cabinet sub-committee shows our serious intent to keep the Government's and the Parliament's ambitions on climate change on track.

I highlight to Claire Baker, who talks about the Government's ambition and—in her terms—our seeming inability to meet targets, that I have checked with John Swinney and in the seven years since 2007 the Labour Party has never asked in the budget process for low-carbon ambition to be one of the budget's priorities. She ought to address that issue to her colleagues. It has not featured in those discussions. Let us have a little bit more honesty and openness about this. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Paul Wheelhouse: I hope that we can have—

Claire Baker: Three years in a row, and the same excuses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Paul Wheelhouse: Claire Baker talks about excuses. Let us get this straight. Each year, I or my predecessors have been here and she has criticised the Scottish Government's performance

on climate change. In each year, the Labour Party has failed to make any further requests in the budget process, but we have—*[Interruption.]*

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): You are responsible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order! Minister, please continue.

Paul Wheelhouse: I am trying to listen to the dialogue and to you, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If I may stop you for a moment, minister, I remind members that sedentary contributions are not acceptable. This is a statement and questions.

I would be grateful if you would continue answering the question, minister.

Paul Wheelhouse: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I assure Claire Baker that we are serious about hitting our targets, if we can, between now and 2020, but as I said in my statement, the underlying trend should give us confidence. Both the Committee on Climate Change and our analysis suggest that we are on track to achieve a 42 per cent reduction. It is difficult because there have been sizeable adjustments to the baseline; 5.4 mtCO₂e is a 7.7 per cent adjustment to the baseline, which is not easy to overcome when we find out about it retrospectively, but we are working very hard to ensure that we deliver on our targets.

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): It is not third time lucky, is it?

Given that the emissions from homes appear to have risen substantially in 2012, does the minister believe that enough is being done to support consumers, particularly elderly residents and those who live in remote and rural communities, to insulate their homes to prevent heat from being wasted? How will he increase awareness of the schemes that he outlined, particularly among hard-to-reach groups such as elderly people who live alone and are not online?

Does the minister feel embarrassed that the Government has missed its fixed annual emissions targets for three years in a row? Is he aware that the UK's expert Committee on Climate Change has said that additional opportunities to reduce emissions that go beyond current and proposed policies will be necessary? Is he confident that the additional measures that he set out today are adequate to prevent us from missing our targets yet again in future years?

Paul Wheelhouse: On the targets, I merely highlight to Jamie McGrigor that the targets that the Scottish Parliament collectively set—we

agreed them unanimously—are more stretching than those of the UK. We have a 42 per cent target for 2020 whereas the UK target is 34 per cent. On the basis of the evidence that was published today, I hope that Jamie McGrigor can at least accept that Scotland's performance is far better than that of the UK—it is far better than that of England, of Wales and of Northern Ireland. We are making good progress.

On the issue that Jamie McGrigor fairly raises about energy efficiency, which is extremely important, I accept the point that he makes about the need to help those who are vulnerable and in harder-to-treat properties. I mentioned in my statement that Margaret Burgess announced £60 million under HEEPS last week, and £5.3 million of that is being specifically targeted through discussion with stakeholders such as Stop Climate Chaos to hard-to-treat properties that are off the gas grid in remote and rural areas such as the area that Jamie McGrigor represents. I hope that Jamie McGrigor will find something in that which is of potential benefit to his constituents, as it will be to all remote and rural areas across Scotland. People who currently find it hard to have their properties treated will have additional support through local authorities, funded by this Government through our HEAPS programme.

Rob Gibson (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): In the light of the Opposition parties' contributions today, I ask the minister how he intends to engage elected representatives in our Parliament and in local government to play their part in meeting the targets that we all agreed to. All the parties require to contribute ideas if we are to succeed in meeting our stretching targets.

Paul Wheelhouse: Rob Gibson is absolutely right. I suspect that the issue is bigger than normal politics and it requires a consensus, so I am disappointed by some of the remarks that were made earlier and I hope that we can have a more positive tone throughout.

I say to Rob Gibson that we all have a role to play in reducing carbon emissions. We are engaging with families throughout the length and breadth of Scotland through our greener together campaign and we are engaging people with positive messages about creating a cleaner, greener Scotland, linked to actions that we can all take.

We know that about half of what we must achieve will come through behaviour change, so it is significant. We are engaging communities through the climate challenge fund and the junior climate challenge fund, with the support of £11.8 million this year, which will enable communities to deliver the climate change ambitions that meet their needs. We are engaging local government and the wider public sector through the public

sector climate leaders forum, and we are targeting the private sector through the resource efficient Scotland programme.

As I said, this morning, my colleague Keith Brown announced £5 million for the smarter choices, smarter places initiative. That is a significant investment to tackle behaviour change in transport use and to reduce emissions.

We are taking the decisive steps that we need to take. I hope that we can get a consensus across the Parliament that this serious issue requires mature debate and an understanding of the figures and that we can take appropriate action.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):

Climate change is a worldwide issue, as the minister said. It is also deeply relevant in Scotland, as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and others have stressed. In view of that, what is the minister doing to support economically challenged communities and households in Scotland to tackle emissions and fuel poverty and to have a better quality of life?

Paul Wheelhouse: I welcome the tone of Claudia Beamish's comments. We have a serious challenge. I acknowledge that genuine equalities issues, in which she has expressed an interest before, relate to climate change policy.

We have taken action on adaptation and mitigation to support communities that are at a disadvantage, perhaps in their internal capacity to apply for funding, by providing development grants under the climate challenge fund. The communities in the bottom 15 per cent of the Scottish index of multiple deprivation are supported to have the capacity to make an application and draw down funding from the fund. That is bearing fruit and a broader range of communities is coming forward, including communities from areas that have high levels of deprivation.

More generally, we are tackling adaptation issues. I am sure that Claudia Beamish is aware of the study that we have commissioned from the University of Dundee on the impact of flooding on lower-income groups.

Our view is that there is a climate justice agenda at home, as well as abroad. We are tackling the needs of our more deprived communities. I would be happy to engage with Claudia Beamish on those issues.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Whatever else the figures tell us, they surely reinforce the need to get the private sector and all public bodies properly engaged in the drive to create a truly environmentally responsible Scotland. How can we do that? I do not mean getting chief executives

committed to doing the right thing; I mean embedding from the top to the bottom of organisations the behaviour that will ensure that Scotland hits future targets.

Paul Wheelhouse: Graeme Dey raises an important point. We must ensure that a culture change occurs in business, local government, the public sector more generally and the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government is showing what it can do and leading by example. I am confident that local government is taking the issue seriously; I have had positive discussions about the issue with Stephen Hagan, who is my counterpart in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

We have opportunities through the deployment of measures in RPP2, the low-carbon behaviour framework and the individual, social and material tool, which allows us to design policies across the Government that will work with and influence aspects of people's consumption behaviour. We can deploy a number of tools.

We can look at providing resources and materials to local government through the sustainable Scotland network and other vehicles—such as resource efficient Scotland, which I mentioned—to ensure that people have access to the information that they need to make decisions for themselves. As I said, the climate challenge fund provides another way of helping individuals. Individuals may take the message from the workplace into other environments. We need to take a number of approaches to behavioural aspects of tackling climate change.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): I, too, am disappointed that we have yet again missed our targets. I am also disappointed that I detected no great urgency from the minister. The first half of his statement could be summarised as saying that, if only we had set different targets or measured things differently, we would not have been found wanting.

The issue is serious. Consensus will be won only when we all believe that the Government is doing its utmost, which is not the case at the moment.

One way to tackle emissions is to increase low-carbon transport. The Scottish Government should be leading the way on that. Will the minister give details of the fleet of electric cars that the Scottish Government uses?

Paul Wheelhouse: I am disappointed by that line of questioning. Keith Brown has just announced £15 million of investment in electric vehicle infrastructure, sustainable and active travel and smarter choices, smarter places. It would be good of Alison McInnes at least to acknowledge that, rather than make a cheap point.

We have just installed a sub-committee of the Cabinet to tackle climate change. The member accuses the Government of not showing the necessary urgency in tackling the problem. We have more ambitious targets than her own Government at the UK level has. Our target is a 42 per cent emissions reduction by 2020. Where is the UK Government's similar ambition?

I challenge the member to come forward with positive solutions instead of cheap points. We have made sincere commitments today on low-carbon transport, electric vehicle infrastructure and sustainable and active travel. It would be more fitting if she acknowledged that point in her line of questioning.

Nigel Don (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): I shall resist the temptation to go where the previous question went. I would like to extend what Graeme Dey commented on.

England, Wales, Northern Ireland and probably Europe seem to be behind us, but there are, of course, many businesses that work right the way across the area. To what extent do we need to influence businesses and other private activities in such a way that what they do impacts not only on us but on the other countries in which they are placed?

Paul Wheelhouse: Obviously, Nigel Don has made some useful comments. We have to try to use the regulatory powers that we have across Europe to influence business behaviours, and it is clear that the regulation of key markets is a key issue. The emissions trading scheme and the trajectory that the European Union has set us on are also extremely important in driving business behaviour, particularly that of businesses that are in the traded sector and emit significant amounts of greenhouse gases.

In the context of Europe, our performance is good. We have seen a 29.9 per cent reduction in emissions. As I said in my statement, EU 15 emissions fell by 13.9 per cent and EU 28 emissions fell by 18.5 per cent. We will not necessarily always be at the forefront of all the countries in Europe, as there will be chopping and changing, but we are very much at the frontier in European ambition.

We need the UK to stick to its guns in its fourth carbon budget, which influences UK policy and businesses that operate within the UK; we need the EU to move to a higher ambition for its 2020 target; and we need at least a 40 per cent carbon mitigation target for the 2030 target—I hope that there will be a 50 per cent target if a global deal can be struck in Paris in 2015.

By comparison, Scotland's target for 2027, which is clearly earlier than 2030, is 60 per cent or thereabouts. Therefore, we are showing much

more ambition than our colleagues in Europe are, but we support the European Union and the UK when it comes to international negotiations. They can play a big role in creating the right environment for business to take the appropriate action.

Cara Hilton (Dunfermline) (Lab): If we look at emissions by sector, we see that agriculture has the second highest, at 11.2 per cent. Given the failure to meet our emissions targets and the five asks that Stop Climate Chaos has put forward, why is the Government's response on agriculture not much more robust?

Paul Wheelhouse: Cara Hilton may have missed a point that I made in my statement. My colleague Richard Lochhead will tomorrow make an announcement on the common agricultural policy. I encourage her to listen to and read that statement to see the detail in it. She is being overly pessimistic—perhaps that is a trait of her Labour colleagues—about the Scottish Government's performance. She should have every confidence that our Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment will be helpful in that regard.

We have worked very closely with Stop Climate Chaos to ensure that we understand what it believes we need to do to get back on track. We have made our own input; we have put in more money than that organisation asked for for sustainable and active travel. That is a serious sign of the Government's intention to tackle the challenge.

Christian Allard (North East Scotland) (SNP): I thank the minister for the copy of his statement, which I read before he made it.

I congratulate the minister on the 29.9 per cent reduction in emissions in the basket of six key greenhouse gases between 1990 and 2012—especially when we compare that figure with the figures for the rest of the UK. Will the minister expand a little on how the emissions trading scheme has affected carbon emissions?

Paul Wheelhouse: The emissions trading scheme is extremely significant, because approximately 40 per cent of our total emissions are through the traded sector. The emissions trading scheme's performance and impact on our figures are therefore quite profound.

Under the current proposal across Europe, the cap will decrease by 1.74 per cent a year, which will result in a reduction in ETS emissions of 21 per cent in 2020 from the 2005 amount. The European Commission has proposed that emissions should be 43 per cent lower by 2030. It is clear that we have a higher level of ambition than that for 2030. We are talking about achieving a reduction in emissions of 60 per cent, or

thereabouts, by 2027, after taking into account our new baseline.

We need Europe to go faster, so we are constantly pushing it, and we support the UK's line in Europe to try to get the ETS to be more ambitious and to have a steeper trajectory for the traded sector in order to help to keep us on track to meet our targets. In RPP2, we have shown that we will, from 2021 onwards, move to recording actual emissions rather than the ETS, because we are concerned that the European Union might not get to the level of ambition that we want to show.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I am afraid that when you turn away from your microphone and do not speak through the chair, not only can I not hear you but, worse than that, the official reporters might not be able to pick up what you are saying.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The first three targets—the failed targets—are the easy ones. They come before a big step change for 2013 and an expectation of a reduction of something like 1 million tonnes every year after that, which is substantially more than has ever been achieved.

Given that most of the initiatives that the Government has announced today—which are welcome—have come from non-governmental organisations with the support of the Opposition parties, are we really to expect that big step change in our emissions trajectory without a big step change in policies?

Paul Wheelhouse: I welcome Patrick Harvie's positive comments about the initiatives that have been announced today. His comments are in contrast with the comments of other members.

We have put in place the Cabinet sub-committee to reflection the fact that we realise that we have a serious challenge ahead of us. The continual change in the baseline figures has made the challenge more difficult, as the Committee on Climate Change has acknowledged. I am sure that Patrick Harvie is aware that that change makes it more difficult.

The drop-off between 2012 and 2013 is a substantial issue of which we need to take account. We are pushing the UK Government; we have not yet seen what cap it will set for the ETS and we need to know what allocation we will have. However, we are trying to reflect the need to up our game as a society. I hope that all members will engage in that positively—as, I am sure, Mr Harvie will. We can try to achieve that.

We are confident that the underlying trajectory for 2020 is still on track. As I have acknowledged all along, we may have challenges from year to year, but we are taking decisive action today to try

to step up our efforts and ensure that we accelerate investment in low-carbon technologies. I welcome Mr Harvie's warm welcome of that.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): The reduction in emissions in Scotland of about 30 per cent since 1990 is almost double that which has been achieved across Europe. What can the Scottish Government do to encourage other countries to match our ambitious targets on climate change?

Paul Wheelhouse: Willie Coffey has made an important point. That encouragement is part of our role, and one of the reasons why the NGOs have been so supportive is that so few Governments throughout the world are showing the degree of ambition that we are showing. To be fair to the UK Government, it is more ambitious than some others, so I give it credit for that.

We do not have a direct voice at the negotiating table, but we can exert influence through bilateral engagement with international NGOs and Governments to make them aware of what we, as a developed country, are doing on climate change mitigation and climate justice. The importance of that cannot be overstated, because it is about trying to build trust among developed and developing nations so that the latter can trust developed nations and groups, such as the EU and the US, when they make pledges on climate change.

We play an important role in demonstrating that it is possible to address climate change. It is not without its challenges, but it can be done. That is good for the economy; we have positive evidence from Scotland about how our doing so has helped to support the low-carbon economy and sustain jobs at a time of otherwise reduced investment across the UK economy, and how important it is to deliver on climate justice.

Jayne Baxter (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Given the contribution that the public, community, voluntary and private sectors can make to achieving our targets, does the minister see a role for community planning partnerships in taking forward the work and engaging with all the stakeholders?

Paul Wheelhouse: I agree with Jayne Baxter that there could be an important role for all forms of community planning. The work is an important part of the planning process for social and community infrastructure and investment in services. Clearly, that feeds through into some of the messaging that would influence individual partners within community planning partnerships. I recognise that that is an important area on which we can work.

I have no doubt that my colleague Derek Mackay is, through bilateral talks, taking a close

interest in low-carbon investment and its impact. That is reflected in the draft Scottish planning policy and the national planning framework 3, as Jayne Baxter saw, and has fed through the consultation into the finalised documents.

We realise that there is a tie-up between the planning system and our low-carbon strategy through RRP2. Community planning has an important role to play in both.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, and to the minister for missing his opening remarks.

I welcome the minister's comments on district heating—in particular, the announcement on the expert commission, which will clearly require collaborative working, not least with planning and development officials.

The minister has assured us of co-ordination at the highest level. There will need also to be co-ordination at a local level. Will he set out a timeframe with specific targets for district heating schemes?

Paul Wheelhouse: Mr Finnie might be aware that that matter is in the ministerial portfolio of my colleague Fergus Ewing, who has been very supportive of this agenda. I want to thank him for the action that he has taken.

We have an opportunity to consider the current regulatory framework, how it influences take-up of district heating and what kind of regulatory framework we might need in the future. I encourage those who have an interest in the issue to engage in that process. I will ask Fergus Ewing to address the point that the member raises in due course, once further information comes forward about the process.

Older People

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): The next item of business is a debate on motion S4M-10257, in the name of Shona Robison, on celebrating the contribution of older people to Scottish society.

Before I call the cabinet secretary, I warmly welcome back to Parliament Nanette Milne, who will lead the debate for the Conservatives today. Members will see that she is using a stick but I am assured that, in the near future, she will be gambolling along like a spring lamb.

We have a bit of time in hand today, so the Presiding Officers will be generous with time.

14:46

The Minister for Commonwealth Games, Sport, Equalities and Pensioners' Rights (Shona Robison): It is good to see Nanette Milne back in the Parliament. Becoming like a spring lamb is something to live up to, but I am sure that she will cope.

I am pleased to open today's debate, which marks the valuable contribution that older people make to life in Scotland. In April, the First Minister invited me to join the Scottish Cabinet as Cabinet Secretary for Commonwealth Games, Sport, Equalities and Pensioners' Rights. The introduction of a specific brief on pensioners' rights is a practical demonstration of the importance that this Government places on older people in Scotland. We want Scotland to be a place where everyone has the opportunity to make the most of their talents. As the new cabinet secretary with responsibility for pensioners' rights, I am committed to ensuring that the rights of our pensioners are fully protected, respected and realised.

I want today's debate to be very much focused on the positive role of older people in society. Our older population is a critical driver for creating the Scotland that we want to see in the coming years. We want our people to be able to maintain their independence as they get older and to be able to access appropriate support when they need it. As well as being the right thing to do, that will enable older people to maximise their contribution to Scottish life and to play an active, healthy role in our communities and our rich cultural life.

When we talk about older people, we are not just talking about health and social care services. Older people have a valuable role to play—they have families and neighbours and make a positive contribution to their local community. They use services such as housing, transport, leisure, community safety, education and arts, and they

also use shops, banks and other commercial enterprises.

It is vital that we recognise the valuable contribution that older people make to the economy and to society more widely. We have more older workers than ever before, a rising state pension age and too many people dropping out of the workforce well before they are entitled to a pension. Early exit from the labour market can have serious implications for the health, wellbeing and incomes of individuals, and comes at a significant cost to the economy, business and society as a whole. We want employers to embrace the challenge of retaining older workers, and services such as the Scottish centre for healthy working lives can help employers get information and advice on the steps that they can take to support older people in the workforce.

We should acknowledge the vital and important role that grandparents play in the upbringing of children and young people—I certainly would not have managed without my parents' help. The contribution of wider family and of grandparents in particular in the day-to-day care of children and in providing practical, emotional and often financial support to their own children is hugely significant.

Of course, with this week being carers week, I cannot forget that many older people are caring for those who are closest to them. I pay tribute to them, and reiterate this Government's strong commitment to ensuring that all carers are supported. We are providing unprecedented levels of support, including at least £46 million between 2012 and 2015 from the reshaping care for older people change fund. Specifically, we are investing nearly £14 million for short breaks, as we recognise the difference that a good-quality short break can make to carers and those whom they care for. So far, more than 25,000 carers and young carers have benefited from those resources.

Shortly, we will introduce legislation to support carers and young carers. Of course, under independence, we would be able to increase the carers allowance by £575 a year. By increasing carers allowance to the same rate as jobseekers allowance, we will bring to an end an unacceptable anomaly that sees carers—many of whom have had to give up work to care for a loved one after an accident or illness—awarded the lowest income-replacement benefit.

As newly appointed cabinet secretary for pensioners' rights, I will ensure that support for pensioners is a priority for this Government. As I said, I acknowledge the positive contribution that older people make to the economy. Where people want to remain working beyond retirement age, they should be able to do so. However, for many that is a significant challenge.

Last month, the Scottish Government published research showing that because of lower life expectancy, people with identical state pension entitlement but average life expectancy would receive substantially less over a lifetime in Scotland than in the United Kingdom—a situation that has been exacerbated by decades of Westminster industrial and social policies that have ravaged many communities throughout Scotland and, according to the previous chief medical officer Sir Harry Burns, led directly to the lower life expectancy that we see in too many parts of Scotland.

If we compare Glasgow with the highest life expectancy areas of the United Kingdom, the differences are stark—£50,000 less for a man and £46,000 less for a woman. The UK plan to speed up the increase in the state pension age to 67 by eight years, from the original timetable that was set out by the previous Labour Government, will only make the situation worse. Today's publication of lifetime state pensions value by local authority area has revealed exactly how much Scottish pensioners are losing out compared with their peers south of the border. I am struck that, in my home city of Dundee, men are on average receiving £80,000 less and women £15,000 less.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Clearly—

The Presiding Officer: We have a card malfunction.

Dr Simpson: My apologies, cabinet secretary.

Clearly, the fact that life expectancy in Scotland is lower than that in the UK as a whole is a matter of considerable concern. However, I would ask the cabinet secretary to make her comparisons with areas of deprivation and early death in England, where the results are exactly the same. Her comparisons are surely parochial and false.

Shona Robison: I do not believe that they are. It is our responsibility, as the Scottish Parliament, to want to do something about that. I would have thought that Labour members would share that aspiration.

I am therefore very disappointed that, on the state pension age, all three unionist Opposition parties in the Parliament choose to ignore the interests of their constituents and instead take their lead from Westminster. Before the most recent UK election, the then Labour Government proposed a much longer timescale for increasing the pension age. However, once the coalition had accelerated the process, Labour fell silently in behind the Tories. The result is a pensions pay gap for the vast majority of pensioners in Scotland. For future pensioners in Scotland, a no vote at the referendum on 18 September will cost an average of £10,000, as people will have to work longer and

longer. The simple message for future pensioners is that if they vote no, they will be worse off.

In “Scotland’s Future”, we have committed to establishing an independent commission to consider the appropriate rate of increase in the state pension age. The commission will consider fairness, life expectancy, affordability and equality issues in the round. It will reach a decision that genuinely suits Scotland’s circumstances—hopefully, everyone in the Parliament could welcome that.

We know that social protection is more affordable for an independent Scotland. Over the past five years, total expenditure on social protection, which covers pensions and broader welfare spending, has been lower in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. Social protection expenditure in 2012-13 was 15.5 per cent of GDP in Scotland and 16 per cent in the UK; 42 per cent of Scottish tax revenues were spent on social protection compared with 43 per cent in the UK, so a better deal for pensioners is affordable. A number of commentators, not least the UK Government’s pension minister, Steve Webb, have confirmed that in an independent Scotland, pensions would be safe.

We are taking action to mitigate the effects of the UK Government’s welfare reforms, which affect many older people. The estimated cumulative impact could result in a reduction of £6 billion in the Scottish welfare bill by 2015-16. The solution, of course, is for the Scottish Parliament to have full control over welfare so that it can put in place policies that benefit the people of Scotland. At present, all that we can do—as we have strived to—is mitigate the effects of those UK Government welfare reforms.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister explain the theory behind her proposals? She asks us to believe that we can cut taxes, improve services and increase benefits. What is the logic behind that?

Shona Robison: For Labour, the issue always seems to be the messenger rather than the message. When Gordon Brown cut corporation tax, that was apparently a good idea. Perhaps, following Gordon Brown’s demand for David Cameron to come north of the border and debate with the First Minister, members on the Labour side of the chamber will change their position on that, too.

We are committed to upholding the rights of pensioners in an independent Scotland. In the meantime, we continue to demonstrate our commitment to pensioners’ rights through our actions using the devolved powers that we have, with a focus on social and public health policies to address the underlying causes of poor life

expectancy, whether that involves supporting the smoking ban or reducing alcohol consumption.

Providing high-quality health and social care is critical to ensuring that the contribution of older people to society can be maintained and enhanced, and to protecting the gains that the Parliament has made under devolution on policies such as concessionary bus travel and free personal care for the elderly.

I will outline some of the things that the Scottish Government has done. We have maintained the national health service resource budget in real terms and not wasted time, money and energy on unwanted market reforms. I give older people this reassurance: they can be sure that, with this Government, the NHS will remain a public service that is publicly funded and free at the point of need.

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): Does the minister accept the response that I received in writing from the cabinet secretary that all the additional funds that are being put into the national health service in Scotland between 2011 and 2016 consist entirely of consequentials arising from Westminster additional spending? There is no additional spending from the core Scottish budget—it is all coming from Westminster. Will the minister confirm what the cabinet secretary has said in writing?

Shona Robison: Of course, all that resource is money that Scottish taxpayers have contributed to the London Treasury. It is not unreasonable to ask for our fair share back.

We have maintained and fully funded the concessionary bus scheme for older people throughout Scotland. For us that is an entitlement and a right for older people; it does not represent a something-for-nothing society.

We have increased funding for free personal and nursing care, and continue to regard it as one of this Parliament’s major achievements. We have not placed it on the chopping block as part of a cuts commission, as Labour have done.

We have increased funding on fuel poverty and energy efficiency by 40 per cent in cash terms since 2007, and we have installed more than 600,000 energy efficiency measures since 2008 while Labour and coalition Governments south of the border have cut spending on fuel poverty.

We do not believe that those social protections should be dismissed as something for nothing. While Johann Lamont’s cuts commission continues to cogitate—it is taking rather a long time, but I am sure that we will see the results soon enough—we do not believe that those entitlements should be axed, as they are important gains that this Parliament has made. The

Government is clear that we will not only protect those entitlements but, with independence, go further in providing the support that our older people deserve.

I am proud of our record, but there is much more that we could do on jobs, pensions and welfare with the full powers of independence, in order to build a fairer country for all our people, young and old alike. I have no doubt that many of the themes that will be raised in today's debate will be part of that day, and I hope that members will engage with the issues that are discussed. I invite members to support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament celebrates the valuable contribution that older people make to life in Scotland today; welcomes the publication of *Somewhere to go and something to do - Active and Healthy Ageing: An Action Plan for Scotland 2014-2016*; recognises the contribution that older people have made to society and believes that entitlements such as concessionary bus travel, free personal care and the winter fuel allowance should be not dismissed as "something for nothing"; welcomes the report of the Expert Group on Welfare and the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the carer's allowance by £575 per annum; further welcomes the fact that life expectancy in Scotland has improved in recent decades, but questions the decision of the UK Government to increase the state pension age to 67 from 2026, and supports the proposal that, in an independent Scotland, a commission should be established to examine the state pension age, taking account of Scottish circumstances.

14:59

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): What we have just heard was not so much a speech about older people as another speech about independence.

I am very aware of the important role that older people play in our society. In my seven years working in the social housing sector, which included a spell in sheltered housing, and in my nine years as a councillor, I witnessed at first hand the massive contribution that older people make in our communities. Older people are often the glue that binds towns and villages together, through their paid and unpaid work. Through their volunteering, care and commitment, they are a great example to young people; they show them that community activism, participation and solidarity make our society better and stronger.

Speaking personally, throughout my working life, within my circle of friends and family and throughout the Labour movement, the advice, guidance and encouragement of older people have helped me greatly. From their lived experience, older people bring a perspective that is vital to our collective wellbeing and to our understanding of society and how we develop it in future. Indeed, I believe that we do not tap into that experience enough and that too little intergenerational work is being done. Such

initiatives ensure that older people are able to speak to, and interact with, younger generations, which builds community cohesion and understanding.

Older people also contribute economically. Many work longer in years, enjoying new opportunities and filling the skills shortages that we have. Rather than being a financial burden, as they are often portrayed, they are a financial asset as well as an outstanding social asset.

It is important that we consider whether the Parliament, the Government and our society are doing enough for our older people. Indeed, it is imperative that we consider whether we are planning well enough for future challenges, not least the demographic challenge posed by the predicted increase in older people, and whether we are making our older people aware of the consequences that could lie ahead should Scotland separate from the United Kingdom.

Often today, grandparents, aunts and uncles or other older relatives are for various reasons being left to raise their grandchildren or relatives in place of parents. Such older people are often in the twilight of their lives and they are among the heroes of our society. They need our support, yet Scottish Labour's attempt to end the postcode lottery of financial support for kinship carers was rejected by the Scottish Government during consideration of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. How much value did the Scottish Government place on those older people who currently provide care and a home for their vulnerable grandkids or young relatives?

Let us look at health inequalities. What substantive action has the Government taken to tackle Scotland's shame, which sees so many of our older people not reaching retirement or being in such poor health that they are unable to enjoy their remaining years? We know that £1 billion has been cut from anti-poverty initiatives aimed at our most deprived communities, where males have 23 fewer years in good health, compared to 12 years in the least deprived areas. For females the figures are 26 and 12 years respectively. Is it not to the minister's shame that when she came into her post, her first statement was about whether people should be entitled to more pension because they die younger, rather than about why they die younger? That is what we should be addressing.

Shona Robison: Does Neil Findlay agree with Harry Burns, the previous chief medical officer, who said that life expectancy is low in many communities because of the decades of deindustrialisation under the hands of the Westminster Governments? Surely he would want the relevant powers to be in the hands of this

Parliament, rather than see more of the same from Westminster.

Neil Findlay: I agree with a great deal of what Harry Burns says. Unfortunately I agree with very little of what the minister says.

Scotland faces a serious demographic challenge, with the number of over-75s set to double in the next 25 years. As people live longer, demands on our services—particularly health and social care—will rise. Already we have seen an impact—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: One moment, Mr Findlay. Mr Macintosh, you will have your turn in due course, so shush.

Neil Findlay: Already we are seeing an impact. Across NHS Lothian there are 26 general practitioner patient waiting lists that are either full or restricted. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay, could you sit down a minute? Ms McMahon, I will not have you berate me in this chamber. If you cannot behave yourself, please leave.

Neil Findlay: We see accident and emergency departments full to bursting; in Glasgow last weekend, people, including older people, were issued with apologies for their overnight trolley waits. Nurses in Glasgow complain that boarding of older people is an everyday occurrence.

Our social care system is in crisis. In some areas up to 20 per cent of care home places are out of commission due to concerns over poor levels of care. In home care, we know that seven or 15-minute visits are now the norm. What level of care is being provided to our older people in seven or 15 minutes?

We know that staff budgets are being cut and standards are being affected. Of course, that all takes place against a backdrop of local authority budgets being slashed, with 40,000 jobs lost—many of them in services delivered to our older people. Councils are forced into making those decisions, and all the while the Government ignores their call.

Peter Johnston—I used to serve with Mr Johnston on West Lothian Council—who is the SNP group leader on the council and social care spokesperson for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities said recently:

“Councils have been doing everything they can to protect social work services, but a difficult financial climate and a year-on-year increase in demand cannot be overcome through efficient and effective budget management alone.”

For once in my life, I agree with Councillor Johnston.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I agree with him.

Neil Findlay: I am sure that he is delighted at that, Mr Stevenson.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Stevenson, please do not make remarks from a sedentary position.

Neil Findlay: Stewart Stevenson and Peter Johnston—what a double act!

Pensioners need a health and social care system that is fit for purpose and fit to meet the demands of the 21st century. Why will the Scottish Government not rid itself of its complacency and do what Labour has called for by producing a Beveridge-style review of our health and social care services? Pretending that everything is okay when we have daily reports of unprecedented pressure just will not cut it.

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): The member mentioned health and social care services. In April 2016 there will be integrated health and social care across Scotland—there was cross-party support for that from across the chamber. Would Mr Findlay put on hold health and social care integration? That would be the consequence of what he is suggesting.

Neil Findlay: Health and social care integration has been happening. Mr Doris should come to West Lothian and I will show him how it has been happening for the past 10 years. We do not need legislation to make it happen; we need a cultural change to make it happen.

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

The Presiding Officer: The member is not giving way again, Mr Doris.

Neil Findlay: What about fuel poverty? Choosing between heating and eating is a daily choice for many Scots pensioners during the cold weather.

We see an extra 2,000 deaths among the over-65s—many of those deaths are cold related—yet it was this SNP Government that cut Labour's policy, which was introduced in 2000, to provide free central heating and other cold-related benefits and improvements for our pensioners. That policy benefited around 80,000 Scots by reducing fuel poverty, but there was no mention of it by the minister.

What about independence and its impact on older people? We know that Scotland gains from seeing our resources pooled and redistributed; we pay less in than we get back and the risks are spread across 50 million rather than 5 million. Of course, the finance secretary, Mr Swinney, has already admitted that there would be a pensions black hole under independence, and he is right—of course we know that he is right.

Then there is the latest cynical bribe to our army of carers. A press release claimed that 100,000 of

them could benefit from an increase in carers allowance, despite the fact that only 57,000 receive the benefit at present and many would not gain anything due to the rules applying to other benefits.

Add to that the increased cost of a 3 per cent corporation tax cut—equivalent to the entire amount that councils spend on services provided for older people in their own homes—and the question has to be, how will those deep black holes be filled in trickle-down Scotland under the SNP?

Rather than raising phoney scares in her motion, why does the minister not congratulate Labour on the policies that she highlighted and which we introduced? Why stop at free personal care? Why stop at bus passes or winter fuel allowance? What about pension credits, introduced by Labour? What about free TV licences or eye tests; an increase in the number of nurses and spending on the NHS; or the extension of lifelong learning?

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

Neil Findlay: No thank you.

What about free central heating or Labour's energy price freeze, which the SNP opposes because it would rather give a tax cut to its corporate donors?

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

Neil Findlay: No thank you.

Labour has a track record of commitment to older people. It is for that reason that today I am delighted to announce that the provost of Fife, Jim Leishman, has been appointed as Labour's older people's champion and will sit with us in our wider shadow Cabinet. I look forward to working with Jim Leishman and the older people of Scotland to develop a programme for a Labour Government in a further devolved Scotland.

I move amendment S4M-10257.3, to leave out from "and believes" to end and insert:

“; acknowledges that concessionary bus travel, free personal care and the winter fuel allowance are all policies introduced by Labour or Labour-led UK or Scottish administrations; notes that the policy of free central heating and the warm deal schemes that benefitted 80,000 pensioners and reduced fuel poverty in pensioner households were cut by the SNP administration; recognises the role of older people as carers; believes that Scotland faces a serious demographic challenge and that the predicted rise in the number of older people needs to be addressed and planned for and that an independent Scotland would have to raise taxes and cut public spending to be able to pay for the SNP's pensions plan and that this could not be achieved while cutting corporation tax for the biggest businesses; recognises the huge pressure on hard-working health and social care staff and the services that they provide and calls for a review of the NHS in Scotland

to ensure that services for older people are fit for purpose, and notes that, while life expectancy has increased for some, health inequalities in Scotland mean that far too many people are not reaching, or able to enjoy, their retirement as they are living fewer healthy years than others.”

15:09

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): Presiding Officer, I thank you and the cabinet secretary for your kind words at the start of the debate, and congratulate the cabinet secretary on her recent elevation and extended role.

It is perhaps fitting that the first debate that I am involved in since my recent hip surgery should be about celebrating the contribution of older people to society, because it gives me the opportunity to congratulate my husband, elderly like me, on his very effective role as carer in the early days of my recovery.

Members: Ah. [*Applause.*]

Nanette Milne: I have no doubt, however, that he is relieved that the role was a temporary one, because not all cared for people are easy to please, and I will leave members to guess where I stand on that one.

Today's debate is right to acknowledge the very significant contribution that older people make to our society as paid employees, entrepreneurs, taxpayers and consumers, and as volunteers and carers, which is particularly appropriate at the start of carers week. I was therefore a little disappointed, although I suppose not really surprised, as the referendum debate drags on, to read the sting in the tail of the Government's motion, questioning the need that has been identified by the UK Government to increase the pensionable age in future.

Of course, Scottish Conservatives continue to support free personal care, as we have done since the outset, and we want to see the concessionary travel scheme continued and extended to include community transport because the present situation is unfair to many pensioners who cannot benefit from free travel because they do not have access to standard bus services. We also agree that carers should be financially and otherwise supported in their very valuable role, and welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the carer's allowance, as we state in our amendment. However, if all that is to be possible and sustainable into the future in the face of a burgeoning elderly population, any sensible Government must plan ahead for its funding, and that is why changes to the pensionable age will be required. The UK Government is quite right to take that on board. That Government, as we heard in last week's Queen's speech, is also committed to introducing a private pensions bill and a pensions

tax bill to help the pensioners of the future in planning for their old age. Most people realise that there really is no such thing as a free lunch and simply do not buy into the SNP's myriad uncostered promises.

We will support the Liberal Democrat amendment, but we cannot support Labour's amendment, simply because of its call for a review of the NHS in Scotland, which we have already opposed.

I now turn to the celebratory part of the debate, and acknowledge the immense contribution that older people make to Scottish society. The Royal Voluntary Service has estimated that the economic contribution of over-65s in 2010 was worth £40 billion, and that that will rise to £77 billion by 2030; an enormous sum in anybody's book. Employers are increasingly recognising the value of older workers and encouraging their employment, to the extent that Age Scotland has this year created an employer of the year category in its annual awards scheme.

Many professional people continue to play a valuable role after their retirement. In the NHS, for instance, particularly in general practice, retired doctors working as locums plug many staffing gaps, covering for holidays or allowing GPs time off for training or professional meetings. That benefits the NHS and allows the doctors to continue the medical work for which they were trained without the burden of administration that besets so many senior GPs in the modern world. My colleagues who have locum experience all say how enjoyable it has been.

We are all familiar with the contribution that is still being made in the field of bacteriology by Professor Hugh Pennington, using his knowledge and experience in the battle against campylobacter and E coli 0157. Just the other evening, I learned that Professor John Mallard, the inventor of the magnetic resonance imaging scanner went on after retirement to develop the positron emission tomography, or PET, scanner that is so widely used today. I was also delighted to learn that John's prototype MRI scanner is to be preserved and displayed permanently within Aberdeen royal infirmary, which is a fitting tribute to a man whose immense contribution to society worldwide has never had the public recognition that it deserves.

Volunteers are essential to our society and older people are widely recognised as some of the most active local volunteers, as good neighbours or active residents. The 2008-09 citizenship survey found that a third of people aged 60 to 74 and a fifth of those aged 75 and over undertake some formal volunteering in their community. That led me to think about my contemporaries in my local area in Aberdeen. My next-door neighbour joined

the children's panel when he retired from the oil industry, and a close friend continues her long involvement with Citizens Advice Scotland. Other neighbours run our local neighbourhood watch schemes or play an active role as community councillors, and others produce and deliver our regular community newsletter. A group of older people run our annual community festival.

Cancer patients rely on the support of volunteers who work as Friends of Roxburghe House or with Cancer Link Aberdeen & North—CLAN—a well-known and active local cancer charity. Many of my age group do regular fundraising for those and other charities, such as Marie Curie Cancer Care, Friends of Anchor or the Maggie's centre, not to mention Guide Dogs, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Cyrenians and many other organisations. Hospital patients and housebound people have come to rely on the RVS for the provision of refreshments in wards and clinics and the social contact that is provided by volunteers, many of them retired, who deliver meals on wheels to people who rarely have visitors from the outside world.

I have given just a few examples of the extent of volunteering in my area, so just think of the contribution of volunteers to Scottish society as a whole when such activities are multiplied across all our local communities. If we add to that the enormous contribution that grandparents make to childcare in Scotland and the number of older people who willingly and lovingly care for their partners, friends or neighbours, we will realise just how much we rely on older people to support the fabric of our communities and how much resource they save the public purse. We should not regard the elderly as a burden; rather, we should celebrate their role in contributing to a cohesive and caring Scottish society.

I move amendment S4M-10257.2, to leave out from "and believes" to end and insert:

"; understands that changes to the pension age are required as a result of the aging population; commends the UK Government's commitment to introducing a Private Pensions Bill, to allow employees to contribute to "collective pension" funds, and a Pensions Tax Bill, to give those who have saved discretion over the use of their retirement funds; believes that a solution must be found to the issue of community transport being excluded from a concessionary travel scheme; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the carer's allowance, and urges the Scottish Government to address the underlying social issues that lead to such poor life expectancy rates in some parts of Scotland."

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Milne—it is good to have you back.

Before I call Jim Hume to speak for the Liberal Democrats, I give an indication to back bench speakers that we can give you each seven

minutes and, if you take interventions, you might get a bit longer.

15:17

Jim Hume (South Scotland) (LD): I, too, state that it is good to see Nanette Milne back in the chamber.

As members have said, older people enrich our communities. They contribute a wealth of knowledge and support to family life and, as the population grows, it is incumbent on us all to ensure that older people are looked after as they become more reliant on healthcare and other support services. The Scottish Government is correct that we should celebrate the contribution of our older people. This year's Normandy commemorations were an emotional reminder of what older people bring to society, as a living link to our past.

It is correct to acknowledge the positive impact of concessionary bus travel and free personal care—policies that were brought about under the Liberal Democrat-Labour coalition. However, the Scottish Government motion would have us believe that all is well in the care of older people when, sadly, that is not the case, as highlighted by the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland's depressing report into the care of dementia patients.

For far too long, Lib Dems have been warning that older people are being let down by the Government's confused priorities. Figures that we obtained recently show that emergency admissions for older people are increasing while the number of staffed hospital beds has plummeted. In an answer to a parliamentary question, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing confirmed that the number of geriatric beds is at its lowest level in more than 10 years while emergency admissions for older people are at their highest in more than 10 years. That is a huge imbalance between supply and demand.

The Government is failing to meet the national indicator to reduce emergency admissions to hospital. The figures came just one week after an Audit Scotland report found that at least 90 per cent of patients who experience a delay of more than three days are aged 65 and over. Sadly, older people are being let down by the Government's confused priorities. At a time when people are living longer lives and for longer in periods of ill health, the Government continues to slash the number of staffed beds for older people, despite the fact that the number of unplanned emergency admissions for people aged 65 has increased by around a fifth.

Given that we have an ageing population, it is not surprising that emergency admissions for older

people have increased. The Scottish Government is cutting the number of beds drastically without improving social care and support, which only puts more pressure on an NHS that is already being asked to do more and more. The SNP's short-term approach to the stewardship of our NHS could have a long-term negative impact on patient care. It is bad for patients and for our NHS's resources when beds are used by patients who are clinically ready to leave hospital.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): The member will be aware that the Department for Work and Pensions has kept back £270 million from the Scottish Government since we introduced free personal care. Does the member think that we should have that paid back to us so that we can help provide better support for our pensioners when they become frailer?

Jim Hume: I will come to many points at the end of my speech on exactly how much support the Lib Dems in coalition have been giving to all the people in Scotland, but it amounts to nearly three quarters of £1 billion.

The health secretary's position on continuing care is hugely disappointing. He has refused to admit that changes to the policy announced in May would mean that people will qualify for free accommodation only if they are being cared for in an NHS hospital. The Government's own independent review, which was published at about the same time as the policy announcement, recommended that any patients receiving NHS continuing care after 2015 no longer be able to have costs for accommodation in care homes paid for, which could affect hundreds of patients.

In England, more and more people are qualifying for NHS continuing care. That contrasts with the position for patients in Scotland, where health boards have seen a year-on-year decline, leading to claims that many people with complex care needs were paying for care homes when they were entitled to have that paid for by the NHS.

Many people do not want to spend lengthy periods or, in some cases, the rest of their lives in hospitals. If it is the case that patients with complex care needs will no longer have costs for accommodation in care homes paid for, then people will be astonished. If anything, that will mean that people will have every incentive to stay in a hospital bed. That is completely at odds with the Scottish Government's claims that it wishes to transfer care into the community.

When it comes to tackling health inequalities, the SNP has a stop-and-start approach, with a two-year break between updates on the progress report and no updates in nearly a year from the ministerial task force. The statement published

recently by the Scottish Government on health inequalities failed to mention any specific projects that it is funding to reduce inequalities in Glasgow, where life expectancy is among the lowest in Scotland.

Shona Robison: Can the member reconcile what he says with welfare reform, which is reducing the money that people have to support them? Does he think that that helps or hinders health inequalities and the tackling of them?

Jim Hume: The minister will be well aware that the amount of funding for pensions, which I will come on to soon, has been increased by nearly three quarters of £1 billion in Scotland alone.

The SNP seems to have got its priorities confused again. People are dying earlier in Scotland, but instead of coming up with solutions for how we can help more people live longer, healthier lives, ministers hit the calculator to work out how much pension people will miss out on. The Liberal Democrats warned the Scottish Government that it needed to do more after it put its equally well action plan on the back-burner for five years.

We will support the Conservative's amendment, but we will not support the Labour amendment, because we do not think that the NHS should be put on hold while there is a complete review of it.

Dr Simpson: Ha!

Jim Hume: Richard Simpson knows that that is my position.

By anyone's standards, it is a pretty bleak aspiration to simply lower the pension age rather than tackle our health inequalities. The Lib Dems have tackled age discrimination in the workplace by abolishing the compulsory age of retirement, which means that workers can no longer be forced to retire just because they have reached their 65th birthday, and allowing people to have more control of how long they work. That change sends a powerful signal that older people should be valued at work and that they can share their important work experience with colleagues.

If the Scottish Government wants to see how to celebrate our older people it should just look to the Lib Dems in coalition, who have delivered a triple-lock guarantee to pensions that amounts to £800 more per year for 890,000 pensioners in Scotland, which puts some £712 million back in the pockets of our older people.

I move amendment S4M-10257.1, to leave out from second "welcomes" to end and insert:

"notes the increase in cold weather payments by the UK Government, which now stand at £25 per week, up from £8.50; welcomes the re-establishment of the link between pensions and earnings through the triple lock, which means that pensions will continue to rise by whichever is the

highest of earnings, inflation or 2.5%, giving UK pensioners, for the first time, the certainty that their pensions will increase annually by a significant amount; notes with concern the findings of the Mental Welfare Commission on the treatment of dementia patients; further notes the loss of a third of geriatric beds while emergency geriatric admissions are at a 10-year high, and condemns the Scottish Government's decision to remove future continuing care funding for people being treated in the community; recognises that meeting the challenge to increase healthy life expectancy will require cross-party commitment in order to guarantee continued action from government to government over time; believes that the Scottish Government should focus on reducing health inequalities as a means by which to increase life expectancy, rather than calling for a reduction in the state pension age; notes that costs relating to the recommendations of the Expert Group on Welfare were not included in the white paper on independence, and, therefore, calls on the Scottish Government to publish revised costings for its independence plans to include the selected welfare recommendations and the transition and set-up costs that have so far been concealed."

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Hume. We move now to the open debate. I call Sandra White, to be followed by Margaret McCulloch.

15:24

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I, too, welcome Nanette Milne back to the chamber and to the Parliament and I thank her husband for looking after her so well. Welcome back, Nanette.

The debate is about acknowledging the contribution that older people make to Scottish society, be it through the economic contribution that they make to caring or through the civic contribution that they make to local organisations, through their work in the community. Also, as has been said previously, older people are able to carry on working if they want to—perhaps some people in the chamber are in that category—and contribute to the economy in that way.

However, I want to touch on something that came from the Labour benches. I do not think that we in this place need to take any lessons from the members on the Labour benches—look at Gordon Brown and how he raided the pension pots. We can talk about concessionary fares, which are absolutely fantastic, and everything else that has been introduced for older people—yes, I pay tribute to Labour for the introduction of free personal care. I am not being political in this particular—

Neil Findlay: Oh, no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith): Order, please.

Sandra White: I pay tribute—free personal care was introduced—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Sandra White: However, we cannot say to the Labour Party, “Well done for doing that,” when Johann Lamont and the cuts commission then said that we should take all that away. You have to be absolutely honest with yourselves—the cuts commission is about taking all that away, so please do not lecture us on anything at all.

If I can just carry on with that theme, which I did not want to do—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Carry on through the chair, please. Thank you.

Sandra White: Sorry, I did not want to carry on with that theme but I do not think that I can let it go. It saddens me that the amendments that are before us—and some of the members that we have heard from—far from celebrating the contribution of older people, seem intent on continuing to focus on older people as burdens and as a problem, with little respect for the countless older people who make an invaluable positive contribution to our society each day.

Also, I was a wee bit confused by Jim Hume’s speech—he mentioned that people are not living long enough but then said that people are living too long. I would like to question—

Neil Findlay: The member says that the Labour amendment does not refer to the contribution of older people, but we left that part of the motion in. Does the member understand that our amendment did not delete that part of the motion?

Sandra White: I agree that it is in the motion, but it is not what Labour members said. The fact that people are living longer is something to celebrate. Is it not positive that we are living longer? There is, though, a contradiction in the fact that people have been dying younger for decades. In my home city of Glasgow, where the council has been Labour controlled for decades, nothing has been done to get rid of the poverty.

Jim Hume: The member mentioned my name and said that she was a little confused. I am sorry that Sandra White is a little confused, but we are really concerned about health inequalities. Health has been a devolved matter for 15 years. Does she recognise some of the good that the coalition Government has done in allocating an extra £712 million to 890,000 pensioners in Scotland?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you some time back for that intervention, Ms White.

Sandra White: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

As I said before, I am not being political on this subject, but the Liberal Democrats have never congratulated the Scottish Government on what it has done to alleviate not just the problems that pensioners have but the problems that are faced by households in poverty. If more money is being

spent and people’s health is getting better, people will live longer. I think that we should celebrate that—I do not mind saying that. At the heart of the debate is the fact that we need to change the way in which society perceives older people—they are an asset rather than a burden—and we have a chance to do that today, which I sincerely hope we take.

Two weeks ago, I had the pleasure of hosting a reception for the Annexe Communities connects project, which is based in my constituency. It was one of the first projects to receive a grant from the Big Lottery Fund’s investing in communities fund, way back in 2011. It was a fantastic day and we all ended up outside singing and waving flags. I enjoyed it very much. The project works with vulnerable and isolated older people in the local area, helping them to reconnect to their community through various activities. It has been such a great success that it has been emulated by others.

Some of the comments that I heard that day were fantastic. People talked about the friendship and love that they had found. They said that they did not need to sit in the house any more but were able to get out. One elderly lady said that she goes to meditation classes and gets reiki treatment every day. Why should she not? She should be able to do that. It is fantastic to see those older people so full of life.

Although much of today’s debate has focused on the economic arguments to do with an ageing population, I believe that it is equally important to look at and learn from projects such as those that I have mentioned and the tangible ways in which they benefit the lives of older people. Older people are not just assets or burdens to be bandied about; they are real people, whom we should respect. We need to remember that.

That is another reason why I welcome the publication of the action plan, which identifies the need to share examples of projects that work and that people benefit from. We can learn from those examples. However, although all the priority themes and actions that are identified in the plan will benefit older people, I am bit concerned about how projects such as the Annexe Communities connects project that I mentioned will fit into it. Members will have visited many grass-roots community-based projects that assist older people. We need to learn from those hundreds of examples and identify how they can feed into the plan.

I acknowledge that it is important to take a top-down approach to address certain issues that older people face, but I think that we need to make more effort to ensure that as much focus is given to a bottom-up approach. That is an issue that, as convener of the cross-party group on older people,

age and ageing, which is one of the oldest—pardon the pun—cross-party groups in the Parliament, I will raise with the group, with a view to our exploring it at future meetings. I would be happy to look at the findings of that project and to report back on them to the minister, if she so wishes.

Tomorrow, the cross-party group will hold its AGM so, like someone who is shamelessly plugging their new book, I invite members who are interested in issues that affect older people—I know that several members who are in the chamber are—to come along and listen to us discuss our future work programme; they will be more than welcome.

We will all be old one day—some of us sooner than others—so when we debate the issue we should treat it with respect because, one day, we will be the people who will be discussed.

15:32

Margaret McCulloch (Central Scotland) (Lab): Older people are not a homogenous group of people who are defined simply by their age or their pension. They are carers, activists, volunteers, workers, grafters, students, teachers, employers, investors, artists, engineers, makers and creators. They are also mothers and fathers and sons and daughters.

Many of them have already played their part in shaping our society and, given that older people are still consistently more likely to vote than any other age group, they continue to do so. If any message goes out from the Parliament from this afternoon's debate, let it be not only that we recognise the contribution older people make but that we are thankful for it. They are an asset, not a burden. By valuing their skills, their talents, their potential and their experience, we can enrich our society, better educate the young, and provide dignity, opportunity and fulfilment well into later life.

I want to bring to the chamber's attention an example from Germany of how the oldest generation can make a difference to the youngest. It is a unique example with a beautiful simplicity behind it. It is called—please excuse me if I do not pronounce it properly—the Mehrgenerationenhaus, which, translated literally, means multigenerational house.

In our towns, cities and villages across the country, we have community centres that host all kinds of activities and which provide all kinds of facilities, such as day centres for pensioners, nurseries for children, meeting points for communities and family centres to give advice to parents on the health and wellbeing of their

children, but is it always right to compartmentalise the community in that way?

Since 2006, people in Germany have been considering how to bring just some of those different services that are aimed at different groups of people under one roof. One article that I read tells the story of a young girl called Emily and her great-grandmother. They both make the same journey to the same place every week, but while Emily goes to the Salzgitter childcare centre, her great-grandmother receives treatment for dementia at a day centre across the hall in the same building. There is an open-door policy between the two.

Salzgitter was the model for the multigenerational house. It is a model that is now growing and developing all across Germany. Pensioners can volunteer to get involved in the kindergarten by looking after the children, reading books, playing and singing, thereby bridging the gap between the generations. In a world in which families increasingly live further and further apart, children who might not see their own grandparents can learn from other older people, who act as positive role models.

As the model is spread out in Germany, common public places—bistros, cafeterias, libraries and lounges—are emerging where the different generations can socialise and interact. The knowledge and experience of the older generations does not have to be lost to the next generation. Likewise, the knowledge and experience of the young does not have to remain alien to older people. That is the lesson from Germany, and it is one that we would do well to learn here in Scotland.

Of course, we cannot debate the future of older people in our society without dealing with the choice that we will all have to make on 18 September, to which the clear and comprehensive Labour amendment alludes. When it comes to dealing with health inequalities, life expectancy, the stability of our pensions system and the resourcing of our public services, devolution provides the best way forward. We have a strong Scottish Parliament, which is growing stronger and which takes decisions here about health and social care, and we share risks, rewards and resources across the whole of the United Kingdom as part of a redistributive social union. That is the best of both worlds for Scotland's pensioners, and the best of both worlds is best for Scotland.

Sandra White: Will the member take an intervention?

Margaret McCulloch: I am just finishing.

We all age, but with innovation from Government, creativity in our public services and the pooling and sharing of resources to provide

strength, security and stability for Scotland's pensioners, I hope that more and more of us can age well—and age well together.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that they can speak for up to seven minutes and that there is a little extra time for interventions.

15:36

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I can add to Margaret McCulloch's list of the diverse activities of pensioners: member of the Scottish Parliament.

I am pleased to take part in the debate and I declare an interest, because I am an older person—ich bin ein pensioner, if I may plagiarise—of the Elvis and Beatles vintage. Yes, I once wore a miniskirt; that has changed, but the hair has not.

Although there has been some mention of benefits and assets, the Labour amendment refers to a “demographic challenge”. I do not see myself or my generation as presenting any kind of challenge; I think that we are an asset—or rather, we are no more a challenge or an asset than is any other age group.

I think of Saturdays in B&Q, a company which obviously sees pensioners as an asset, and not just because it gives them a 10 per cent discount on Wednesdays—by the way, I do not mention that because I want a 15 per cent discount. I have even been asked whether I want to join the band of pensioners who work there part time. Those staff are excellent—the retired electrician and the retired joiner, who can tell customers what to buy. There is no vacancy for me there at the moment, but if there should be in the future I could see myself being useful in the plants and gardening section—albeit that that is not an intimation of a plan for the coming years.

On Sunday I was in charge of my three-year-old granddaughter for five hours—a marathon, I assure members. My repertoire of finger painting, drawing, cutting out, storytelling, seed planting, plant watering and more storytelling was occasionally and mercifully interspersed with rest periods watching “Cinderella”—or, as she will have it, “Cinderellie”—for the umpteenth time. Like many grandparents, I am the child-caring asset that the cabinet secretary and others mentioned.

The great concern for pensioners and elderly people is their pension, now and in the future. We had scare stories from Westminster that, in the event of a yes vote, state pensions would be at risk. No sooner was that out in the ether than, as the cabinet secretary said, we had Steve Webb saying, “No, your state pension will continue to be

paid, because it is an entitlement, not a benefit”—an approach that we have subscribed to.

As I was speaking to my gas engineer as he assessed my combi boiler yesterday—I lead a very exciting life—he asked me about his occupational pension in the light of a yes vote. Of course, occupational pensions are a matter of contract, and whether somebody is living in an independent Scotland or seeking summer climes to get away from those debilitating energy bills, both state and occupational pensions will be paid. Sunny Cyprus or less sunny Scotland—it is all one and the same. Pensions are a contract and they are payable, so let us put that to the side.

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): Much as I agree with the general tenor of what Ms Grahame says about older people being an asset to our society, does she not accept that there is an issue about the dependency ratio that we have to face up to? Scotland is going to have a worse dependency ratio than the rest of the UK unless we address that issue.

Christine Grahame: No, and the member is also not putting into the mix the free services that pensioners give, some of which I have just listed. That is on the plus side of the balance sheet.

There are 1 million or so pensioners in Scotland, and the white paper has made it plain that they will receive their state pensions, as now, on time and in full. In the event of a yes vote, there will be a full overhaul of the pension age and also pensions and benefits.

I heard what Neil Findlay had to say about pensions and pension credit. I think pension credit is a disgrace. People should not have to apply for a pension credit to bring themselves up. We should have a decent basic state pension from the start. As from 6 April 2016, if we are independent, new pensioners will receive a single-tier pension of £160 per week. The fact is that 30 per cent of those who are entitled to pension credit do not claim it, and they never have. It is bewildering and the forms are difficult. Let us get rid of the pension credit and give pensioners a decent pension from the start.

Neil Findlay: Will the member advise us, then, what John Swinney was on about in his famous leaked memo to the Cabinet when he raised these issues himself, saying that there would be a black hole in an independent Scotland?

Christine Grahame: These have been dealt with ad nauseam. I want to go back to Labour's track record, which the member mentioned.

Gordon Brown, the man of the moment, has a track record on pensions. In 2000, he announced that he was raising petrol tax and pensions in line with inflation, but he failed to explain that he was

using 3.3 per cent for petrol and just 1.1 per cent for pensions. The result was a basic rise in pensions of 75p per week. No wonder 10 million pensioners were up in arms.

Jim Hume *rose*—

Christine Grahame: I ask the member to let me finish this bit.

Gordon Brown had previous form, which Sandra White alluded to. In 1997, he changed the advance corporation tax of private pension funds. The effect was to take £5 billion a year out of those funds—the figure is now £10 billion a year. Of course, the result is that people who contracted into those pension funds are getting less of a pension. We need no lessons about that.

There are very few advantages in getting on in the Parliament, but I have been here for 15 years and I have to say to Labour members that I remember people on the Labour benches who resisted free personal care. One thing that I will give the Liberal Democrats credit for is that, as part of the coalition, they managed to get Labour to change its tune on that and the whole Parliament voted for it.

Labour spent time before the most recent Scottish Parliament election telling people that we were thinking of getting rid of concessionary bus fares. We are not—no way—as they are a health and a social asset, but Labour has form. Who started the whole thing about a winter fuel allowance in Scotland? I bet Labour members do not know. Margaret Ewing did that when she was an MP at Westminster, long before anybody else ever thought about it. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order, please.

Christine Grahame: The difference between me and members on the Labour benches is that I remember history as it happened, not revisionist history that they hope happened.

15:44

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I apologise for being, like Christine Grahame, part of the demographic challenge that the Labour Party has identified. There are one or two others of us who may yet speak in this debate.

It is interesting that we started the debate with a reference to grandparents. I have the misfortune not to have known any of my grandparents. All my grandparents were born before the first secret ballot in a parliamentary election, which took place on 15 August 1872. When my paternal grandfather was born, Abraham Lincoln was president.

Many of my generation had less connection with grandparents than others, because we were born immediately after the war to parents who were a

bit older, as our dads had been away in the war. We probably experienced less grandparental nurturing than many have.

Pensions have been around for a long time. When Lloyd George introduced them, they were worth half a crown a week—I beg his pardon; they were half a crown a month. That was thought to be such a revolutionary and huge financial bonus that, in the book “Para Handy Tales”, Para Handy contemplated starting pensioner farms to exploit that money. He would keep a few healthy pensioners on a Scottish island somewhere and make huge profits.

As I said, pensions have been around for a long time. My great-great-grandfather Andrew Barlow, who was a soldier in the Napoleonic wars, ended up as a Chelsea pensioner, because he went deaf. When my great-great-great-grandfather left the Navy in 1782, he got a pension.

Only in modern times—almost within our memory or that of people whom we know—has the universal pension come along. That is why Gordon Brown’s intervention to take away some of the tax benefits for pension funds was catastrophic—that is partly why the private pensions of some people whom I know were wiped out to zero. That happened on the Labour Party’s watch.

The Labour Party has done many good things. For example, the anti-smoking legislation in the Parliament took great courage and I absolutely commend it for that. Labour introduced the bus pass scheme, which benefits old people and sustains the bus network in rural areas—each £1 that is spent on that has two benefits. The Labour Party was behind the introduction of comprehensive education, which I strongly support. In West Lothian, the Labour Party has done many good things, although I remember that it was Jimmy McGinley—in 1980, I think—who introduced the Christmas bonus for pensioners, rather than the Labour Party.

We have been around and we have had quite a lot of good things from the Labour Party, so it is disappointing that there is a perception—because the prospect has been put into the debate about ideas for change, reduction and containing costs—of a threat to the benefits that the Labour Party contributed to bringing to Scotland through the operation of the Scottish Parliament. That party has every opportunity to put to one side that perception now or later and say that there is no threat. It could say that those benefits are protected and will be left.

Are we challenged by the economics of older people? Yes, of course—there is no country in Europe where that is not the case. However, the reality is that the costs in Scotland are rather less.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research said:

“Our analysis has shown that the costs of the state pension would be lower in Scotland”,

for the bad reason that Scotland has lower life expectancy. We want to drive up life expectancy—nobody in the Parliament from any political party wants to do anything different. We disagree only about means and timing; we do not disagree about objectives. That is good—let us try to build on that consensus.

Social protection costs are lower in Scotland. In 2012-13, those costs were 15.5 per cent of gross domestic product in Scotland, whereas they were half a percentage point higher in the UK, which is 5 or 6 per cent higher. In Scotland, we spent 2 per cent less of our tax revenues than the UK on social protection. Those are all opportunities to provide better care for people who require it.

Of course, old people do not necessarily require care. There are very many fit older people. If a person starts fit, they can stay fit. I remember watching breakfast television in Australia in the 1980s—that is very sad, but that is what I did. I saw the guy who had just won the Australian over-40s marathon for the 40th consecutive time. He was in his 90s and was beating people in their 40s. He was fit, he stood proud and upright and his voice was strong, because he had never let himself get unfit at any point in his life.

Christine Grahame: That is where I have gone wrong.

Stewart Stevenson: That is the great trick that Christine Grahame and others have got completely wrong.

I will draw my speech to a conclusion.

Neil Findlay described very well the challenge that we face. I thought that he did a fine job. He quoted Peter Johnston, who reinforced that. I agree with Peter Johnston, but the economic challenges that local government, the Scottish Government and communities in Scotland face do not, of course, stem from the Scottish Parliament, which has no control over the macroeconomics of our economy or the substantial majority of the taxation or expenditure that affect our citizens, but from a system that we on the Government benches wish to replace.

A solution is available. The causes have been identified by Mr Findlay, but he rejects the resolutions. As always, he came from a position of supporting people who need. I respect him for that, but he will earn my greater respect if he understands that there is an opportunity to do things differently in an independent Scotland and that we should take that opportunity and do what he so earnestly desires.

15:51

Ken Macintosh (Eastwood) (Lab): I join all those who have welcomed the publication of the active and healthy ageing action plan, and I add my thanks to Dr Whoriskey and her team for their work in putting the report together.

I echo the comments that have been made about the important role that older people play in our communities—including comments by a number of allegedly, or self-styled, senior citizens in the Parliament. As I will go on to argue, it is only right that our representation reflects wider society.

The action plan makes a number of very helpful recommendations, which I am pleased that the Government has endorsed. I like the way that the process is framed; it is not framed as a passive process, but as a process of active ageing, which we can shape together, as a society. Dr Whoriskey used the phrase “age healthily” in her foreword. That neatly sums up the purpose of the plan and, I had rather naively hoped, the debate, too.

In many ways, “old” is a relative term, of course. In his retirement, my father used to tell us regularly about his visits to so-called older people. We would point out that they were a lot younger than he was. Marie Galbraith was a friend and constituent, who sadly died last year. When she was well into her 70s and 80s, she did much to shape the Parliament’s Title Conditions (Scotland) Act 2003, more than a decade back. She once told me that “Old is 10 years older than you are.” The refined version is, “Ten years is older”—I am sorry. The refined version is, “Old is 10 years older than you think you are.” [*Interruption.*] I say to Christine Grahame that we have had examples of failing memory already.

As I have just demonstrated, vulnerabilities go with age, and they simply cannot be ignored. There is not just infirmity or declining physical strength: there are problems such as increasing loneliness and social isolation, which my colleague Margaret McDougall brought to Parliament for debate just last month.

Technology moves on, and that can be liberating for some older people, but it can become a barrier for others. That is where we have to act; we have to respond to the new challenges. The Government and the Scottish Parliament have to intervene to ensure that we put in place the right protections. A bump in the car for an older person can become a source of anxiety rather than something to be forgotten about; it can turn into a reason not to drive any more. For us, as parliamentarians, that should mean more reason to support the free bus pass, so that people who choose not to drive do not lose their mobility.

The confidence that comes from maturity and experience—from a life of work or bringing up a family—can begin to wane, and that is an opening through which fraudsters and scam artists can thrive. For us as elected representatives, that is a growing threat. We need to respond to it and we need to help to protect vulnerable people from unwanted cold calling and doorstep selling. As MSPs, we are rightly proud of having introduced free personal care for older people, but we should be ashamed to be in office while older people in Scotland suffer the indignity of the 15-minute care visit.

It is right that we question and debate the costs of our policy choices, but at least as important are the support mechanisms that we put in place, the social and cultural attitudes that we help to shape and the political voice that we hear from older people.

I will give one more example. There are many retirement complexes in my constituency and, I am sure, in many other constituencies. The properties are owned by the residents and run by property managers, but the relationship between owners and manager is often reversed. I do not know how many times I have met residents who feel intimidated or, which is worse, who feel powerless and bullied. Patricia Ferguson's Property Factors (Scotland) Act 2011 has, for the first time, created an avenue for complaint, but from my experience, the jury is still out on whether we need to go beyond a voluntary code of conduct.

As the motion highlights, there is also much that we can celebrate. Last week, I was delighted to host an awards ceremony for local volunteers in East Renfrewshire, along with my Westminster colleague Jim Murphy MP. The event was attended by almost 150 people from all walks of life and of all ages. It was an uplifting, life-affirming and unsullied demonstration of our common humanity—quite an antidote to the jaundiced cynicism that too often accompanies politics. I heard first hand of many daily demonstrations of kindness and solidarity—from dementia carers, to bereavement counsellors to environmental campaigners and everything in between.

Last year, the Royal Voluntary Service found that one older person in five in the UK—some 2.25 million people—volunteers for two charities or more. In Scotland, almost one person in five over the age of 75 still volunteers.

We should not, however, have to justify older people in terms of the economic contribution that they make through hours of caring or volunteering, substantial though that is. A particularly interesting study from University College London last year found that any suggestion that older people are a hindrance to society or a drag on our economy is

unfounded. It found that the fact that people are living longer, which is often categorised as a problem—even by SNP members of the Parliament—is actually a net benefit to the economy, even taking into account the increasing health service and social care costs. Part of that net benefit includes the increasingly important role that older people play as kinship carers and foster carers.

The Fostering Network recently analysed a sample of its foster carer members and found that 23 per cent of all carers in Scotland are aged between 60 and 69 and 4 per cent are over 70. The same study discovered that only 6 per cent of carers are aged under 40. Other studies have found similar figures in other caring roles. The University of Bristol recently found that 54 per cent of children in kinship care are cared for by their grandparents; 23 per cent of kinship carers in Scotland are aged over 65.

I am surprised that that important kinship care role, which has remained hugely underappreciated and undervalued for too long, is not mentioned in the action plan, and that there is no mention of older people being supported to be carers.

I welcome the debate and the opportunity that it gives Parliament to say with one voice that it enormously appreciates not only the contribution that older people have made to Scotland, but the contribution that they continue to make. Whether working, caring for others or volunteering in every community, older people play an integral part in holding the country together, and we owe them not only a debt of gratitude but all the support that we can provide to allow each of them, and each of us, to age healthily.

15:58

Aileen McLeod (South Scotland) (SNP): As my colleague Ken Macintosh did, I welcome the new action plan on active and healthy ageing in Scotland, "Somewhere to go and something to do", which outlines Scotland's vision for its older people to

"to enjoy full and positive lives—happy and healthy at home or in a homely setting."

That vision values older people and their contribution to society and seeks to empower them to be active partners in how support and services are planned and delivered. It also sets out a number of key actions that are to be achieved by 2016, which are built around four key themes that older people have identified as being important to them:

"I want to have fun and enjoy myself";

"I wish to remain connected to my friends";

"I wish to be able to contribute to society for as long as I want";

"Don't talk about me without me, and respect my beliefs and values".

Ensuring that older people have somewhere to go, something to do and someone to do it with is fundamental to achievement of better health and wellbeing outcomes. That is important if we are to confront the demographic changes that are happening in our society, as people live longer. That more people are living longer should be welcomed unreservedly as a positive development across society, as other speakers have already said. However, we must also recognise that that brings new challenges, including the challenge to ensure that people have a good quality of life in their later years, and the challenge to ensure that we are able to support those of our citizens who will find themselves in need of key public services as they grow older. We must ensure that we can meet those challenges and deliver those services in ways that best suit individuals' often complex needs, and that, whenever possible, we do so in the most appropriate setting.

Our legislating for the integration of health and social care services, which this Parliament did in February, and as was recommended by the Christie commission, will go some way towards ensuring that Scotland's older population can attain an acceptable quality of life at home and in their communities through joined-up delivery of services that are firmly integrated around the needs of individuals, their carers and their families.

A key issue that I would like to mention is the important role that housing has to play in empowering older people to live independently. In that regard, I want to thank the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations for the briefing that it provided us with ahead of today's debate.

Providing services for the elderly is a key activity for Scotland's housing associations and co-operatives, and their involvement in delivery of older people's services is growing, especially in care and repair. They also provide local personal preventative services such as befriending—which combats social isolation—exercise and physical fitness, arts projects, and day-to-day handyman services.

I, therefore, welcome the Government's recognition of the key role that housing has to play in improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of our citizens—not least with regard to its policy commitment to enabling people to be cared for at home for as long as possible. I am also glad that housing stakeholders were added to the list of persons whom Scottish ministers must consult before prescribing national outcomes for health and wellbeing.

I represent Dumfries and Galloway, which benefits from a large and active population of older people who are often the driving force behind community activities of all shapes and sizes, and who enrich our communities. The breadth and strength of the voluntary sector in Dumfries and Galloway is directly related to the proportion of the population that has the benefit of years of experience in their trades or professions, and an interest in giving something back to their communities—for example, the people who support Crossroads (Newton Stewart & Machars) Care Attendant Scheme in Wigtown, which provides a range of services including respite care, personal care, palliative care and assistance with transport and shopping, or the people who work with Food Train and ensure that people in their communities have enough good-quality food to eat, in addition to some social interaction, which is a way to help to deal with feelings of isolation.

Furthermore, the community buyout of the Mull of Galloway, which I was delighted to be involved with, was led by two redoubtable retired couples. They have given so much back to their community that it would be difficult to imagine what it would look like without their involvement.

Older people make a massive contribution to Scottish society and our economy, as we heard from Nanette Milne and Ken Macintosh. The Scottish Government not only values that contribution, but is determined to support it to the fullest extent possible, within the powers that we currently have.

This Parliament's record on protecting the income of older people, whether it be by continuing the council tax freeze for the seventh year in a row, providing free personal and nursing care for our elderly citizens, providing concessionary bus travel for our over-60s or introducing energy-efficiency measures to help us to tackle the scandal of fuel poverty, demonstrates that decisions about Scotland are best made in Scotland.

Neil Findlay: Will Aileen McLeod give way?

Aileen McLeod: I am on my last sentence.

The only way to protect those gains for our older people is by voting yes on 18 September. I support the motion in the name of the cabinet secretary.

16:04

Fiona McLeod (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I rise to speak as the constituency MSP for Strathkelvin and Bearsden, which has one of the fastest-rising populations of older people in Scotland. A friend of mine who is a consultant in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde told me that a

few streets in Bearsden have the fastest-rising population of older people in the whole of western Europe. That is a testament to how well we have lived our lives in our early years and continue to live them in our later years.

Indeed, in Milngavie, in the constituency next door to mine, there are more centenarians than anywhere else in Scotland. Two years ago, my late father-in-law missed being a centenarian by only six weeks. He is an example of an older person who continued to contribute to society and his community until he was 99 and a half and was slayed by a heart attack. My father-in-law was the oldest man in Scotland at the time—he was 89—to receive a certificate for learning in computer technology. He ran his local residents association and sheltered housing association until he was in his 90s. He was quite an amazing man.

Stewart Stevenson: I think that it was about 15 years ago when someone in England completed their pilot's licence at the age of 82. There are no limits to the heights to which we can aspire.

Fiona McLeod: I was content that my father-in-law was a silver surfer. I am not sure that I would have been happy with him being a silver flyer. Towards the end, we were not sure that he should have been silver driver, but there we are.

The demographics in Ken Macintosh's constituency are very similar to the demographics in mine, so I was interested in the degree to which the structure of my speech was reflected in Ken's contribution.

Although it cannot be denied that a growing elderly population can present challenges for services, I want to use the rest of my speech to talk about all the expertise that is provided by a growing older population.

For Strathkelvin and Bearsden, those older people represent an enormous number of volunteers. They represent carers, activists in the community and spenders. That is an important point, which Nanette Milne made in her speech. Research by the Scottish Government in 2009—and research by the RVS in 2011, which was referred to by Nanette Milne and is worth repeating—shows that older people make a net financial contribution to UK society of £40 billion per annum. We should remember that, whenever we talk about “demographic challenges” or the older people “time bomb”. They are a group who spend a lot; they spend more than they cost society.

On carers, 21 per cent of over 65s support their parents—their parents!—their partners and their children, and 65 per cent of older people help their elderly neighbours to remain safe in their homes and communities. Those are things that we need to acknowledge and celebrate. As has been

mentioned by the cabinet secretary and others, older people are also the carers of the next generations. They brought up their own children, and 51 per cent of families in Scotland say that they have asked the grandparents to be child carers, which represents a saving of £660 million per annum throughout Scotland.

When I was looking at that statistic, which I think was from Age Scotland, it reminded me of when my son was young, 23 years ago. It was because my mum could look after my son that I was able to continue volunteering at the Marie Curie Cancer Care hospice where I had set up a library. I could not have done that if my mum had not been able to look after my son. There were many times, pushing my pram around Bearsden Cross and Milngavie town centre, when I felt like the only person pushing a pram who did not have grey hair because so many grandparents in my area supported their children to go out to work by looking after their grandchildren.

Older people are very much involved in volunteering. The figures show that 42 per cent of volunteers are aged over 50, which is a significant number that we should bear in mind when we discuss older people.

Ken Macintosh spoke about hosting an awards ceremony for volunteers. I was delighted to attend the East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action “You're our hero!” awards last Friday. I was invited along to give the award to the young volunteer of the year, which I was delighted to do, but our volunteer of the year was a man called Martin Brickley. He calls himself a retired teacher, but he has certainly not retired from life and from active commitment to his community. I will read out a wee list of what he has been up to in the past year. He is a board member of the local public partnership forum, a member of the change fund transformational group and the secretary of Kirkintilloch and district seniors forum.

It is important that I quote Martin Brickley's own words after he had won the award. He said:

“The benefits I derive from volunteering are the enjoyment from actively participating in my local community, meeting new people and exposure to new experiences. Older people should volunteer because it makes a massive difference as to how they feel and to what they provide for the wider population. It also means they require less healthcare and general support by being active and feeling useful.”

Those are wise words from Martin.

Pat Brown volunteers as a telephone befriender, a member of the knitting group and as a volunteer officer for East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action. Her quotation in the group's brochure was lovely. She said:

“it's not just a one way street, you get your own glow back.”

Perhaps the best quotation of all was from Winnie Findlay, who is 94 years old. She is part of the “Wool You Be Our Volunteer?” knitting project, and she has been knitting for the Samaritan’s Purse UK shoe-box appeal for many years. She went into a care home a few months ago, but vowed that she would keep on knitting and volunteering.

My community has an enormous number of older people who are actively volunteering. I will mention just two more: Nan Middleton, who runs Creative Care and last year won the Queen’s award for voluntary services, and the people in the Anand Bhavan cultural centre in Kirkintilloch.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (John Scott): The member may wish to start winding up at any moment.

Fiona McLeod: I certainly will.

I want to make it clear that we recognise the many achievements of older people and that we celebrate and support them in all that they do.

Scotland’s older people deserve better than the carping that we have heard from the Opposition during the debate. Opposition members need to get real. The UK is eroding through welfare cuts, changes to pension ages and the widening inequality gap, and we need to fight to ensure that Scotland’s older people continue to get the services that they deserve.

16:13

Hugh Henry (Renfrewshire South) (Lab): There is no doubt that the generation that inhabits the Parliament owes a debt of gratitude to our older people—not just to those who make up the current generation, but to those who went before.

Stewart Stevenson generously acknowledged the Labour Party’s contribution on many issues, but that contribution has come not just from the party. Over many generations, it was the members of the organised labour and trade union movement who decided that they were not going to stand for the kind of conditions that pertained in Britain in the early part of the 20th century. Having fought the second world war, they decided that, through their struggles, endeavours, agitation and action, they would change the country for the better. They wanted to ensure that their children and grandchildren had the opportunities that they never had.

It is because of those struggles—because of those people’s determination—that I, like many in others in this Parliament, was the first in my family who could go to university. It was because of their contributions and struggles that I and many others could take free healthcare for granted. It was through their struggles that, unlike my granny, who

had to live in a room and kitchen with an outside toilet, her children and grandchildren could aspire to decent houses.

Stewart Stevenson mentioned comprehensive education, and there is a whole list of things that the labour and trade union movement delivered for this country. The movement helped to define Britain in the 20th century and into the 21st century. Because of that, we owe those people something. We should thank them, with not just words but our actions, for everything that they did to give us the best possible start in life.

Fiona McLeod said that all she has heard from the Opposition today is carping. Far from it. Labour members and the Lib Dems, when we were in coalition with them for a period, delivered a number of things in the Parliament when the money was flowing, such as free personal care and free transport, as others have said. It was right that we did that.

The challenge is not older people, because, as Nanette Milne and others have said, older people are not a burden but an asset to our society. The challenge is for our generation to find the means and the money to ensure that older people are able to live their retirement with dignity and pride. That will mean that we have to make choices as a society; there is no doubt about that, because everything cannot be delivered to everybody irrespective of the consequences.

As other members have said, the ageing population—the population’s changing demographic profile—means that more and more older people are relying on fewer and fewer younger people to pay for their retirement. How will we meet that challenge? If our aspiration is to repay the debt that we owe to that older generation, we should look at providing decent pensions—there is no doubt about that—and ensuring that the money is there to pay for those pensions. Therefore, it is right to debate how we pay for them and what we can afford. The last thing that we want to do is make irresponsible promises that, as older people are wise enough to know, can never be delivered.

We heard about housing and care, but it is not enough to say that people in later life who need care deserve it. We have to show that quality care is there for them in their time of need. Something that is apparent not just in Renfrewshire Council, in my constituency, but right across the country is that we are not building enough specialist homes and very sheltered and sheltered housing. We are not building enough houses that are appropriate to the needs of the older generation, if many of them, like Fiona McLeod’s father-in-law, are living to near enough 100.

That is a challenge for us. Up until now, we in this Parliament have made a choice: we have decided that money will not be available for all the homes that are necessary. That is the wrong choice, because older people need homes now. In the same way, they need care—flexible care. Ken Macintosh and others have mentioned what is happening in care, with people going in and out quickly, and the proper levels of care not being sustained.

The problem is most obvious for those with dementia. Although there are one or two initiatives in this country that deliver fantastic care, we are closing our eyes to the problem that is confronting our society with the growing numbers with dementia. They are not a burden and they are not a challenge; they are simply members of our families who need a particular type of care. Dementia services need to be reshaped, rejigged and retooled.

To Sandra White and others who talk about the Labour Party threatening to take things away, I say that nothing could be further from the truth. What we are attempting to do is face up to how we pay for everything that we want to deliver for our older people, because what they demand and what they deserve are honesty and sensible policies.

Sandra White: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Hugh Henry: They will not take kindly to glib promises being made for the purposes of a referendum or an election. They want to see action and they deserve nothing less.

16:21

Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP): This has been an interesting debate. There has been little consensus, other than that we all genuinely and sincerely believe that an ageing population should be celebrated and should not be seen as a burden and that we all have to work together in partnership to make sure not only that older people live longer but that their quality of life is as positive as possible. There has been consensus about that, even if there has not been consensus about how to achieve it.

I will say a little bit about the affordability of pensions. It is worth noting that 42 per cent of Scottish revenues go towards social protections—I am talking about all the moneys that Scotland spends on not just pensioners but those who are unemployed and those with disability and everything else. However, on a UK basis, the figure is 43 per cent. I give that figure because, although some have suggested that pensions will

be less affordable in an independent Scotland, the figure suggests that they would be more affordable in an independent Scotland. Given that that has been part of the debate, it is important to put the figure on the record.

I also put on the record the fact that in 2012-13, 15.5 per cent of Scotland's gross domestic product was spent on that form of social protection, but in the UK such spending was at a higher level, at 16 per cent. On affordability, we can quite clearly say that pensions are more affordable in Scotland than across the rest of the UK. That is just a fact that we should all learn to accept, just as we can also accept the DWP's confirmation that the state pension has a cast-iron guarantee in an independent Scotland. The only thing that we are arguing about now is whether there will be a higher increase for new pensioners in Scotland than for other people in the UK. In any debate, that is not a bad position to be in. We also know that, because of the contractual arrangements, occupational and private pensions are safe for pensioners in an independent Scotland. That is important for our older population.

We are really talking about the increase in the UK retirement age, and it is not a glib promise to Scottish pensioners if an independent Scotland does not increase the retirement age. We are saying that we promise not to make things worse for Scottish pensioners, and the fact is that the UK intends to make things worse for Scottish pensioners.

Hugh Henry: Will the member give way?

Jim Hume: Will the member give way?

Bob Doris: I will take an intervention from Mr Hume.

Jim Hume: I thank Bob Doris for taking the intervention. He has just said that Westminster is focused on making things worse for Scottish pensioners, but we have seen the biggest rise in pensions, with a triple lock. It is worth some £800 per pensioner for around 890,000 pensioners in Scotland. That is not making things worse for Scottish pensioners; it is making things a lot better.

Bob Doris: Increasing the retirement age for Scottish pensioners is not making things better for them; it is making things worse for them. Every independent observer of UK strategy on supporting pensioners says that things have got worse under the Con-Dem coalition. I think that it is reasonable to put that on the record.

What does the increase in the UK retirement age mean for my constituents? We have heard that women reaching 65 will, under current pension plans, be likely to receive £11,000 less

over the course of their retirement because of poorer life expectancy in Scotland.

As a Glasgow MSP, it is reasonable for me to put on the record the fact that males in Glasgow—on average; as we have heard, some males in Glasgow live to a ripe old age and are hale and hearty for a long time—will receive £29,000 less in their old age compared with people elsewhere in the UK. If we could have the power to stop that inequality, why would we not take that power and deliver for Scotland's pensioners? We can have that power with a yes vote in the independence referendum. For goodness' sake, can we just deliver for my constituents, those males in Glasgow who get £29,000 less during their retirement because of their life expectancy?

I would like to have the nice problem of having to review all this in a few years because life expectancy in Scotland dramatically improves. That is the agenda that we all share. I am not celebrating the fact that life expectancy is poorer here than it is in the rest of UK; I want to improve it. I would like to be in the difficult situation that the UK Government is in because of the increase in life expectancy, but that is not the case in Scotland. I say to the Labour Party that we can fix it for the working-class males of Scotland, particularly those in Glasgow, who work hard all their lives and pay into a pension that they will never receive because of poor life expectancy, and we should fix it.

I want to say a couple of positive things about the NHS in Scotland, which our older people use more than any other group. Mr Findlay's call for a fundamental root-and-branch review of the NHS misses the point completely because of the way in which the NHS operates. I do not often compliment the Conservatives, but they have a rather well-balanced idea that the NHS is under constant review. That is the consistent approach across Scotland's national health service.

Neil Findlay: Does the member accept that I have heard consistently from nurses, doctors, patients and all stakeholders in the NHS that the NHS in Scotland is under more pressure than it has ever been in its history?

Bob Doris: That is like saying that if I put my hand in the fire, it will get burnt. The Scottish NHS is doing more operations than ever before, and demand in the Scottish NHS is increasing like never before. That is why the Scottish NHS is evolving.

In the time that I have left, I will talk about one positive thing that Mr Findlay does not wish to recognise, which is Scotland's patient safety programme. Since 2008, we have seen patient mortality fall by 12.4 per cent in Scotland's NHS. That is a good thing: 8,500 people—I point out to

Mr Findlay that they are predominantly older people—are alive today because of Scotland's world-leading patient safety programme.

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

Bob Doris: I apologise, Presiding Officer. I seem to have got sidelined into a tangential situation—not for the first time, I have to say.

From personal experience of friends and family who are in their late 60s and 70s, I see what local authorities and Scotland's NHS are trying to do for them, and, by and large, the quality of care is exceptional and second to none. Yes, there are problems and they have to be fixed. Health and social care integration and the change fund for older people are two major levers in that regard. Frankly, however, the lever that we need is the power of independence. That is a good point on which to end.

16:28

Jim Hume: We can hardly say that the debate has been consensual, but it has been welcome. Stewart Stevenson enriched it with his personal family experiences, which is a new tactic for him, I am sure. Christine Grahame enriched it with visions of her attire in the 60s. Fiona McLeod enriched it by going on about carping Opposition MSPs and then carping on about other Governments.

The Government and Parliament are quite right to celebrate older people's contribution to our society. It is absolutely correct that we should highlight concessionary bus travel and free personal care as ways of recognising the contribution that older people have made throughout their lives and will make into the future. As mentioned, both those policies were introduced by the Lib Dem coalition that was in place before the current Government. However, now concessionary fares are funded more by the bus operators than by the Government.

I am glad that Nanette Milne took the opportunity to highlight in her amendment the disparity in Scotland that community buses are not included in the concessionary fares scheme. That was the subject of one of my members' business debates not so long ago. Many rural parts of Scotland do not have the privilege of standard bus routes. How can it be fair that older people in those areas have to pay the full amount for their travel? Working across the chamber, we need to find a solution to that unfairness.

Labour has again raised its wish for a review of the NHS in Scotland. I recognise that our NHS staff are hard working and are appreciated for what they do, day in and day out. I do not agree

that we need to put improvements on hold while there is a full review. Instead, we should focus on improving the health service where we know that there are problems. We need to focus on A and E waiting times and getting the balance right between the number of beds that are available for geriatric patients and the level of emergency geriatric admissions. Importantly, we need to address health inequalities in Scotland. We need to address the fact that 90 per cent of those who experience delayed discharge are over 65, and we need to address the Mental Welfare Commission's concerns about the treatment of dementia patients. That is hardly a record of celebrating our older people.

Bob Doris: I agree with the member that there is no need for the so-called root-and-branch review as outlined by the Labour Party, which I think is tokenistic.

On accident and emergency units, does the member accept, as I do, that the Scottish Government's £50 million unscheduled care action plan is a concrete example of an NHS that is under constant review and which is developing to meet the demands that are placed on it?

Jim Hume: I welcome that investment. Unfortunately, as we all know, it was from an underspend of money and was not new money. We all know that it will take a lot more than just a few extra consultants. As Alex Neil knows, I am happy to work with him on that.

It is hardly celebrating our older people to use the lower life expectancy in Scotland compared with that in the rest of the UK as a campaign weapon to promote independence. The Government would do better to focus its efforts not only on reducing the health inequalities in Scotland in comparison with those in the rest of the UK but on reducing health inequalities between areas within Scotland. According to the Office for National Statistics, not one area in Scotland featured in the top fifth of areas with the highest life expectancy at birth. Only three quarters of Glaswegian boys born today are expected to reach their 65th birthday and, in some areas of Dundee, life expectancy for a male is 10 years worse than that in that city's west end. That is an echo from Dickensian times that has no place in a modern Scotland.

Sandra White: Will the member take an intervention?

Jim Hume: I apologise—I must make progress.

My amendment highlights many of the areas in which the Government can do better, but it also highlights what Lib Dems have done in coalition. For example, 890,000 pensioners in Scotland have benefited from the recently introduced triple-lock guarantee. For the first time ever, pensions

shall increase with earnings or inflation or by 2.5 per cent, whichever is the highest. That means that 890,000 pensioners will be around £800 each better off per year—in the past year in Scotland alone, £712 million has been put back into the pockets of our pensioners. That is what I call celebrating our older people.

We have also tackled age discrimination in the workplace, which will allow those who want to do so to work past their 65th birthday. That is valuing people with a life's experience, and that is the way to celebrate our older people. Although we have had one of our mildest winters for some time, the coalition has almost tripled the cold weather payments from £8.50 to £25 per week, which is a significant rise when money is short. Last year, that resulted in £146 million going to older people to tackle winter cold.

The Government motion mentions its expert group on welfare and the recommendation to increase the carers allowance by £575 per annum. That is welcome and can be done with or without independence, but the Scottish people are still in the dark regarding set-up costs, including in relation to the welfare recommendations. Therefore, I repeat the calls for the Government to be as open and transparent as possible and to publish its independence costs, including the set-up and transition costs and the costs of its welfare recommendations.

The debate has not been consensual, but it is welcome. We should and do celebrate our older people, and why not? We are all going that way anyway, so we have a vested interest.

Other members have mentioned that we have a growing ageing population. That is true, but, as I said, we are not ageing well in all areas of Scotland. Health inequalities need to belong to our past, not our future. The Scottish Government would do well to concentrate its efforts on addressing that issue. The number of geriatric beds is at a 10-year low and there is a damning report from the Mental Welfare Commission. We can contrast that with the extra £712 million that, despite what Bob Doris asserts, has been delivered into the pockets of pensioners in Scotland already. None of the Administration's MSPs has recognised the biggest-ever increase in our state pension, which means that 890,000 pensioners are already better off in Scotland. That was delivered in a Scotland that is within the United Kingdom and is a positive case for voting no and staying in the UK in 99 days' time.

16:35

Jackson Carlaw (West Scotland) (Con): I have to say that I came to Parliament today with a heavy heart, anticipating that this debate would be

one of the most ghastly that I had ever participated in. I have to say that my fears were largely well founded. I would not apply these adjectives to the cabinet secretary but to her motion, which is tawdry, sour, full of rancid SNP polemic and thoroughly depressing, as has been much of the debate, notwithstanding contributions that I much appreciated from Nanette Milne, Ken Macintosh, Aileen McLeod—until the polemic at the end—Fiona McLeod and Hugh Henry.

We have commented first on the fact that we celebrate old people, which is referred to at the beginning of the motion and is something on which we can all agree. We have had various pensioner contributions during the debate. As I pointed out in a previous debate, when the Parliament first assembled in 1999 only eight members were aged 60 or over but at the present time over 45 members are aged 60 or over. The Parliament is a reflection of the wider society in its ageing.

I listened to Shona Robison's rebuttal of Neil Findlay, but as I understood it the logic of her point seemed to be that if Scotland had been independent there would have been, uniquely in the western world, no deindustrialisation in Scotland—it would not have happened. Nor, when I hear Bob Doris and others go on about the new pension commitment, do I ever remember the SNP talking about reducing the pensionable age in Scotland because we had a different life expectancy. No, the great idea that we are going to have a variable pension age has popped into the public lexicon only because we have a referendum in prospect and the SNP sees it as something that it can dangle before the electorate in an illusive, bribery way.

When I was born, people expected to live about 11 years in retirement, but today it is about half as much again. I think that most people understand that, if we are going to have a much larger and wider base of people surviving into old age, we need to place that on a sustainable financial footing and, however much we might wish it to be otherwise, that requires the pension age to be reviewed.

Shona Robison: Does the member accept that the modelling that led to the increase in the pension age being accelerated was based on life expectancy in the south of England and not on life expectancy in Scotland? Surely what we need is a model that suits Scottish circumstances.

Jackson Carlaw: As I said to the cabinet secretary, she could have been arguing that for the past 30 years as a reason for reducing the pension age in Scotland, but she has not done so.

Surely the point in all of this is whether people are going to live well and be healthy in old age and live in appropriate housing. Those two points have

been touched on in the debate, and I will touch on them in my own way.

First, in relation to living well, that means that we must ensure that the healthcare that is going to keep people fit and independent into old age is readily available. In that regard, let us talk about atrial fibrillation, which I think Margaret McCulloch has asked the Government questions on. Atrial fibrillation is an arrhythmia that is present in around 1 per cent of the population and characterised by an irregular heartbeat and associated with symptoms such as palpitations, chest pain, breathlessness and dizziness. Its prevalence is strongly associated with age, with more than 8 per cent of people aged 65 or over having it and 85 per cent of people who have it being aged 65 or over.

The condition is becoming more common, it is associated with an elderly population, and, if not properly treated, it compromises the standard of living and ability to act independently of those old people, and yet the drug that is now available—despite having been approved by the Scottish Medicines Consortium—is only being prescribed on a variable ratio across Scotland. As Margaret McCulloch established, on average, only 0.05 per cent of the Scottish population is being prescribed that drug.

That all suggests that if we are going to have a health service that is appropriate and competent for elderly people, one thing that we have to look at is providing something that is more streamlined, appropriate, rapid and free-thinking. We currently have too many health boards and too many health medical prescribing committees.

The second point is on housing, which Hugh Henry touched on. Mr Macintosh contributed to the debate. He represents the constituency of Eastwood, which is sometimes known as Eastwood twinned with McCarthy and Stone, because it has such a high concentration of McCarthy and Stone facilities. Indeed, when I first stood for election there, I established that there were 63 residential homes for old people in the constituency. I went round them all and I have to say that there were some that I did not want to find myself in and others that I very much hoped I might find myself in. I did notice that very few of the homes had men, full stop. It does seem that men do not live as long as women—indeed, Carlaw men are not long lived at all, so I am completely altruistic about all this because I do not expect to be the beneficiary of anything about which I speak.

We need to think about the accommodation that we are going to provide for older people in this next great age of life. I have touched on that point in previous debates and Hugh Henry talked about it earlier. Of course, not everybody will be able to

go into a McCarthy and Stone facility—they seem to be inordinately expensive to me. We will have to ensure that people are able to live within their communities.

In East Renfrewshire at the moment, there is a proposal to build a huge retirement village on the outskirts of Newton Mearns. I am not altogether sure whether it is for the benefit of those who will live there or for the benefit of those who will manage, run and profit from it, but that is a separate issue. The question is: do we want to create communities into which old people are put, or do we want to ensure that older people are able to stay within the communities in which they have lived?

If we accept that people are going to live longer and will want to stay within their community and have an independent lifestyle, we must ensure not only that we have a health service that is capable of allowing them to stay independent and healthy but that we start planning now so that the residential accommodation that we build in the future will provide both the sheltered housing that Mr Henry talked about and appropriate accommodation within the community that will enable elderly people to live independently.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please. Your time is running out.

Jackson Carlaw: Unfortunately, this ended up as yet another debate that referenced everything to the referendum. Frankly, I am bored with that. After 18 September, we will still have all this ahead of us, whether we are independent or not. We really have to start discussing these matters with a bit more imagination than we have managed this afternoon.

16:43

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary to her new role. I also welcome Nanette Milne back to the chamber, and I join others in paying tribute to her husband for caring for her so well while she was off.

We should also pay tribute to the many older people who take on caring roles all the time—the people whom Fiona McLeod talked about, who are looking after parents, children and grandchildren. They contribute the equivalent of around £34 billion to our country. This is carers week, and it is really important that we take the opportunity to celebrate their contribution and thank them for it.

The debate should have been about the contribution of older people. At the weekend, we commemorated the D day landings, which reminded us all of the sacrifices that that generation made for the rest of us. Post-war, they faced a period of huge austerity, but what did they

do in the face of that? They set up the welfare state and the NHS, selflessly determined to make the collective lot better. Hugh Henry talked about that and said that we owe them a debt of gratitude, which indeed we do. The labour and trade union movements have worked together to improve people's lot and we benefit from that today. The debate should have been about their contribution, but many speeches have not touched on that at all, which is disappointing.

Labour has delivered and will continue to deliver for older people. Only a few of the things that we have achieved are mentioned in the Government motion. All that the SNP does is accuse us of having set up a cuts commission—that is a figment of its imagination—while it implements cuts here and now. It makes unfunded promises to older people while cutting services here and now. It is the elderly and the disabled who face a postcode lottery when it comes to the services that they receive and those that they must pay for. They are the new council tax payers, as a result of the stealth cuts that the Government has imposed. It does not have a commission; it is implementing those cuts right here and right now.

Shona Robison: Did we imagine the statement about a something-for-nothing culture that Johann Lamont made when she was elected leader of the Labour Party in Scotland? Is the cuts commission not under way? It was certainly the subject of one of Johann Lamont's big announcements at the time. I think that we should know where that is at and when it is to report.

Rhoda Grant: The cuts commission is a figment of the minister's and, indeed, her party's imagination. The SNP is the only party that seems to believe that it is possible to deliver Nordic-style services with American-style tax rates. We need to take on the challenge of how we pay for those services and not make the least well-off in our society pay for them, as the SNP is doing here and now. People are waiting on trolleys, getting seven-minute care visits and not being looked after as they should be, and that should be a source of shame to this Government.

I turn to the issue of free bus passes, which was mentioned by Nanette Milne, Ken Macintosh and Jim Hume, to name but a few. The point was made that people are less able to use them in rural areas, where there is no public transport, but that is not the case. A form of public transport is available in rural areas through the community transport schemes. Those schemes are not free, but they provide access to public transport and they are valued by older people.

The schemes are under threat right here and right now because of the Government's stealth cuts, which are having an impact on our older people. Older people are being kept at home and

prevented from socialising and getting out to do very basic things such as going to the doctor and doing their shopping. It is extremely important that the Government tackles the issue and funds those things, instead of implementing stealth cuts.

Other members talked about the health service and A and E. Jim Hume and Neil Findlay mentioned people lying on trolleys for hours on end without knowing when they will be seen, which is a disgrace, and issues such as bedblocking, which means that people are being boarded in wards and the like. Surely that is unacceptable in this day and age.

That is why we need a Beveridge-style review. NHS workers are telling me that they have never seen the NHS in such a bad state as the one that it is in now. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing has admitted that there are huge problems with the NHS, but all that he has said is that a review is not necessary, because he knows what the issues are. Let us see him start to address them, because people are confronting them now.

People accuse us of seeking to put the NHS on hold—that is not what we intend—but it is not on hold; it is actually in decline. The Labour Party appears to be the only party in the Parliament that can see that and which wants to address it. Tinkering at the edges is not enough; we need a Beveridge-style review to deal with the situation.

The debate should have been about the action plan, but not many members mentioned it. Those who did welcomed it. I think that we would all agree that it is a welcome document to have, but Ken Macintosh identified that something was missing from it—any mention of the role of kinship carers. We have a duty to ensure that older people who act as kinship carers are supported emotionally and financially in providing care for children and young people.

Neil Findlay pointed out that the Labour Party attempted to address the postcode lottery of financial support for kinship carers during consideration of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, but the Government voted down our proposal. In this country, some kinship carers are paid £40 a week, some are paid £200 a week, and some are paid nothing at all, which is an absolute disgrace. We need to support older people who perform that role. Because they are living off their pension and have no ability to increase their means, they are bringing up children in poverty, which has an impact on both children and carers.

Margaret McCulloch mentioned the need for young people to have access to older people. Because of generational change and families moving away, such access can be difficult to

provide. She talked about initiatives in Germany that are helping younger people to have access to and learn from older people. It is important that that happens.

We need to plan to deal with the challenges of demographic change, but I do not see the Government doing that. We celebrate people living longer, but we must also plan for that, to ensure that people are able to lead worthwhile lives and are not left feeling afraid and excluded from society in old age, as happens to many, many people.

On the pension age and people living longer, I find it quite disgraceful that the Government seems to be saying that our early mortality rates are a cost-saving exercise about which we should be pleased, instead of apologising for its failure. That is not to do with independence; mortality rates in other parts of the UK are much better than ours. Why are we not doing more with the devolved powers that we have, instead of bleating from the sidelines and accepting mortality rates that are a disgrace in this day and age?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must close, please.

Rhoda Grant: I understand that I need to close.

I am disappointed that in the debate we did not talk more about the contribution that older people make as they live longer and enjoy good health into old age, which is a good thing. Our aspiration should be for all people to live longer and enjoy good health. We owe them that.

16:51

Shona Robison: I thank everyone for their contributions to the debate. I pay tribute to the Scottish older people's assembly, which I meet regularly and which has its pensioners meeting here in October. The event is large and very worth while.

On "Somewhere to go and something to do—Active and Healthy Ageing: An Action Plan for Scotland 2014-2016", Sandra White asked whether there will be an opportunity to engage with the cross-party group on older people, age and ageing, so that it can feed into the action plan. I am very happy to say yes to that, and I am sure that we can arrange for that to happen in short order.

I will try to cover as many as possible of the points that were made in the debate. I will pick up on a couple of things that Neil Findlay said. The social care budgets for older people have increased, not decreased. They increased by 2.6 per cent between 2013-14 and 2014-15—that is an increase of £34 million.

Neil Findlay mentioned fuel poverty. As I said in my opening speech, we have invested more money in tackling fuel poverty. What we have done is in marked contrast with Ed Miliband's promise to review the winter fuel allowance and question its universality. I hope that Neil Findlay does not support such an approach.

Throughout the debate we heard about the challenges that the NHS faces. The NHS does indeed face challenges, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing has brought forward plans to deal with some of them. However, we constantly hear from the Labour Party that the answer to every challenge in the NHS is a review, which strikes me as demonstrating the party's absence of anything else to say about the NHS. We do not want to put the NHS on pause; we want to get on and solve some of the challenging issues that it faces. I should say that the health service provides a fantastic service to hundreds and thousands of people every day of every week.

On Nanette Milne's speech, I join members in paying tribute to Mr Milne and I hope that Nanette will share with him the *Official Report* of the debate. She talked about the importance of volunteering in the area that she represents, as did many other members.

Jim Hume mentioned the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland's report. We have accepted in full its recommendations for the Government and the NHS, and next month the Minister for Public Health will present in response to the report an integrated action plan that outlines how we will implement its recommendations.

Jim Hume also said that we could get on and increase carers allowance now, but it is reserved to Westminster, being a Department for Work and Pensions allowance and not one that we have here.

Neil Findlay: The minister mentioned the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland and said that she has accepted its recommendations. Has she checked with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing? He might reject them once she has accepted them—he has form.

Shona Robison: Anyway, as I was saying—*[Laughter.]* I will move on to some important points that were made during the debate, unlike that last, rather silly one.

Sandra White made a number of important points and talked about older people absolutely being an asset and not a burden. That view was common to many people's speeches. Margaret McCulloch said the same. I thought that she made a very interesting speech, during which she talked about an innovative project in Germany. We have a number of examples here in Scotland of services being brought together under one roof, but without

a doubt the project that she mentioned in Germany seems to have gone one step further, and I am sure that we would always want to look at such things in more detail.

Christine Grahame reminded everyone of Gordon Brown's record, with the 75p pension rise and his raid on pension funds, which people are still paying for today.

Stewart Stevenson reminded us that social protection is more affordable in Scotland, which is an important point.

Ken Macintosh made a very thoughtful speech in which he mentioned the issue of 15-minute visits. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing has charged Health Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate to develop a new inspections methodology to ensure that people get the level of support that they have been assessed as needing and that the quality is no less than people should expect. New inspections will include the commissioning processes by councils that determine the volume and length of visits that are needed to deliver safe, compassionate care services for Scotland's older people. I hope that that reassures Ken Macintosh.

Hugh Henry made a very interesting speech and I could agree with much of it, but not his conclusions. He said that the challenge for our generation is to ensure that there are adequate resources and social protections for those who require them, but his conclusion seemed to be that we have to make choices to take away from one protection in order to give to another within the confines of the fixed budget. How much better would it be to have control over all the powers—to be able to grow our working-age population, for example, and increase the tax take to enable us to fund those social protections? Would that not be more sensible than robbing Peter to pay Paul? I say to Hugh Henry that I think that we can agree with the narrative, but we absolutely disagree with the conclusions.

I thank Jackson Carlaw for his kind words. I am not sure that I have ever been described as tawdry and depressing, but I will always aim to try better not to be those things. The rest of his speech was, as ever, quite entertaining and humorous, and it was quite self-deprecating—unnecessarily so, I have to say. He made some good points about housing, and of course that is why the integration of health and social care is so important. We have to look at things in the round and bring together the key pillars of service delivery, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Rhoda Grant asked why we are not doing things to tackle life expectancy now, but of course we are. A number of the social and public health policies that the Government has introduced are

intended to do just that, not least by tackling Scotland's relationship with alcohol, which is one of the key causes of life expectancy reductions in too many of our communities. However, we have to ask why the Labour Party opposes that policy. When we try to bring in policies to improve life expectancy, Labour opposes them. That is disappointing, but maybe not unexpected.

Rhoda Grant: Will the minister take an intervention?

Shona Robison: I am just concluding.

The debate was robust, but overall it was interesting, with many interesting suggestions and issues to follow up. We can all agree that we want the best for Scotland's older people, but we have very different routes to achieve that.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Tricia Marwick): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, in relation to this afternoon's debate, if the amendment in Neil Findlay's name is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Nanette Milne and Jim Hume will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S4M-10257.3, in the name of Neil Findlay, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10257, in the name of Shona Robison, on celebrating the contribution of older people, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Abstentions

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 30, Against 80, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in Nanette Milne's name is agreed to, the amendment in Jim Hume's name will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S4M-10257.2, in the name of Nanette Milne, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10257, in the name of Shona Robison, on celebrating the contribution of older people, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)

Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 18, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S4M-10257.1, in the name of Jim Hume, which seeks to amend motion S4M-10257, in the name of Shona Robison, on celebrating the contribution of older people, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMahon, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahon, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 17, Against 95, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S4M-10257, in the name of Shona

Robison, on celebrating the contribution of older people, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Allard, Christian (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Biagi, Marco (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Brodie, Chic (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Burgess, Margaret (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Campbell, Roderick (North East Fife) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Eadie, Jim (Edinburgh Southern) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Keir, Colin (Edinburgh Western) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Derek (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 MacKenzie, Mike (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLeod, Aileen (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McLeod, Fiona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Robertson, Dennis (Aberdeenshire West) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Urquhart, Jean (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Baxter, Jayne (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothian) (Con)
 Buchanan, Cameron (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab)
 Davidson, Ruth (Glasgow) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Fergusson, Alex (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Goldie, Annabel (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Renfrewshire South) (Lab)
 Hilton, Cara (Dunfermline) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South Scotland) (LD)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, John (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Provan) (Lab)
 McCulloch, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McDougall, Margaret (West Scotland) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McMahan, Michael (Uddingston and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McMahan, Siobhan (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McTaggart, Anne (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfriesshire) (Lab)
 Pearson, Graeme (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Pentland, John (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Cowdenbeath) (Lab)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Drew (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

the decision of the UK Government to increase the state pension age to 67 from 2026, and supports the proposal that, in an independent Scotland, a commission should be established to examine the state pension age, taking account of Scottish circumstances.

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament celebrates the valuable contribution that older people make to life in Scotland today; welcomes the publication of *Somewhere to go and something to do - Active and Healthy Ageing: An Action Plan for Scotland 2014-2016*; recognises the contribution that older people have made to society and believes that entitlements such as concessionary bus travel, free personal care and the winter fuel allowance should be not dismissed as "something for nothing"; welcomes the report of the Expert Group on Welfare and the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the carer's allowance by £575 per annum; further welcomes the fact that life expectancy in Scotland has improved in recent decades, but questions

Operation Blue Star

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Elaine Smith):

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S4M-10022, in the name of Sandra White, on operation blue star. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with sadness the 30th anniversary of Operation Blue Star in 1984, which, it considers, led to the massacre of countless Sikhs from across India's Punjab; notes recently released documents that acknowledge British foreknowledge of and involvement in the planning of the operation; echoes the UK Government's statement that "These events led to a tragic loss of life and we understand the very legitimate concerns that these papers will raise", and notes calls from the Sikh community at Glasgow's Gurdwara and across the UK for transparency and closure for those affected by the operation through a public inquiry.

17:07

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I welcome to the Parliament the Indian ambassador and all the members of the Sikh community who are in the public gallery for the debate. [*Applause.*]

Thirty years ago, operation blue star began with the massing of Indian army troops to be sent to the northern Indian state of Punjab, along with helicopter gunships and tanks. What happened next has had lasting repercussions. The recent release of documents that illustrate United Kingdom Government involvement in the planning of the operation served only to raise more questions than the documents answered.

From an outside perspective, it is hard to know for sure what happened next, because the authorities imposed a complete curfew on the entire state, denied entry to foreign observers, and rounded up journalists to take them out of it. We know that the army attacked with a ferocity that had not been seen before and that, tragically, many lives were lost. The temporal seat of the Sikhs—the Akal Takht—was severely damaged and the Sikh reference library, which contained many precious documents, was lost to fire. Unconfirmed reports from those who were caught up in the battles spoke of hundreds being taken with their hands tied behind their backs and shot. Many newspapers reported that atrocities had taken place across the Punjab and that the army had acted with impunity.

We also know, of course, that the Golden temple holy site was attacked. Many inside it were killed and its holy treasures were looted.

The whole story—and stories—of that bloody episode are perhaps yet to be told. The truth is still to be fully brought to light before those involved will be able to close that chapter in India's history.

I for one do not profess to hold the right to judge those who were involved: that is for those who were affected, on all sides. It is for them to come to terms with what happened and to heal wounds in whatever way they can. However, when documents that were released under the 30-year rule revealed that the UK Government had provided, at the very least, advice on removing Sikhs from the Golden temple, I and others wanted answers.

In Scotland, we pride ourselves on having vibrant and diverse communities. I believe that the different peoples who make up those communities are as integral as one another and that they all deserve exactly the same respect and compassion. I am sure that we would all stand up for anyone in our community who we thought had been the victim of an injustice. That is no different for me. So what exactly did the UK Government know? What advice did it give? What information is it still keeping from us?

I do not believe that the inquiry that the Prime Minister set up understood the depth of feeling in the Sikh community on the issue and I do not think that it gave the community the proper respect. The inquiry stated that more than 200 files with more than 23,000 documents were examined, but it failed to release them. It is time that we knew why it did not do so.

I also note that the report to the Prime Minister states that many military files that related to the period from December 1983 until June 1984 were destroyed and that the UK High Commission reported that a revised plan had been approved, although it seemed to be unsure whether that plan was based on UK advice.

Those uncertainties only add to doubts felt by the Sikh community, rather than allaying them. They give strength to calls for an independent judge-led inquiry to be established to look into the extent of UK Government involvement in operation blue star.

As the Government said when the papers were released:

"These events led to a tragic loss of life and we understand the very legitimate concerns that these papers will raise."

I applaud the UK Government for acknowledging that the release of the papers raises legitimate concerns. I hope that it understands that those concerns have not gone away but have grown and that, to give the Sikh community the answers that it deserves, a full public inquiry should be undertaken.

If we had lost family members, relatives or friends but had not been able to have closure as to the circumstances that led to our loss, the least that we would seek would be the opportunity to

uncover all the facts surrounding what involvement our Government had in the events. That right should be fundamental to all.

17:12

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): At the weekend, BBC radio ran an item on the “Sunday” programme that examined the facts of operation blue star and the events in Hyde park to mark the anniversary. It included comment from the highly respected former India correspondent, Mark Tully, who reported on the 1984 military operation, from highly respected senior members of the Sikh community in Britain and in India and from some young Sikhs. It was an interesting piece and it urged public caution and careful understanding of the deep-seated concerns that have marked the legacy of operation blue star.

It is clear that, apart from capturing headlines around the world, the events of 3 to 8 June 1984 were seen by many as a defining moment in Sikh political history. The potent mix of a military attack on the Golden temple—the holiest shrine of the Sikh faith—the demand for Khalistan to be a separate state, and the mix of militants, pilgrims and other faiths all becoming involved in the dispute was toxic and, of course, the aftermath was the assassination of Indira Gandhi in October 1984.

Feelings naturally still run high, and there is debate among those who have been asked to comment about the weekend’s anniversary event as to whether it should be seen more as a commemoration or as a rally to promote future political support. Opinion on the BBC programme and in the newspaper coverage—probably in the Parliament, too—is strongly divided. That makes it even more important, as Sandra White said, that we are sensitive about the way forward.

I note that Sandra White’s motion states that there was British foreknowledge of, and involvement in, the planning of the operation, as indicated by the release of papers under the 30-year rule. Those papers rightly prompted an investigation, ordered by the Prime Minister, who was clear in recognising that the events of 1984 had

“led to a tragic loss of life”

and said that he understood

“the very legitimate concerns that these papers will raise.”

The Sikh community has welcomed that, notwithstanding the fact that demands for a full public enquiry remain. Again, opinions differ markedly between those who allege the full involvement of the UK Government and those who led operation blue star, who deny that that was the case. The facts are clearly a matter of dispute and,

as Sandra White rightly said, members’ business is not the appropriate forum to debate the politics of the dispute.

What is appropriate is to move forwards towards reconciliation and to try whatever method is possible to heal the deep-seated wounds that have existed and which continue to exist in the Sikh community. I note that, over the weekend, hundreds of British Sikhs marched from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square to protest against operation blue star. They were peaceful and were correctly exercising a democratic right. However, what concerns the vast majority of people, regardless of their political views, are the more militant acts that have persisted since 1984.

At the Golden temple on Friday morning, there were violent clashes involving all kinds of attempts to take opposition to an extreme. Six people were badly injured and media personnel were assaulted and their cameras were broken. As recently as August 2013, there were issues about military leaders being under attack.

It is important that, with regard to world events that are divisive and are reflective of difficult situations that have arisen, we should not allow extreme elements to start to incite hatred of other religious communities. I know that the Sikh community in Scotland is working hard to ensure that that does not happen. Rather, in India and the UK, religious people are working tirelessly to find ways in which people on all sides can live together and interact peacefully.

We have seen many issues of tension and violence but it is clear that, if the events of 1984 are to be remembered properly, the way forward must be one of reconciliation, not retribution. I hope that that is the guiding principle that we can all abide by as we work forward.

17:16

Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): I am pleased that Sandra White has brought this debate to Parliament, although I wish that it had not been necessary.

Until recently, I, like many people in Scotland, did not know a lot about Sikhism. At the previous election, a Sikh chap in East Kilbride got in touch with me to say, “You don’t know enough about our religion, our culture, our heritage and our history and it’s about time you did.” He was quite right. It is terrible thing to generalise about people, but it seems to me that the Sikhs are a pretty straightforward kind of folk, who tell things like they are. I started to learn about Sikhism and visited the gurdwara in Glasgow, where I was fascinated to learn about the history of Sikhism in the Indian subcontinent, and about the related history of Sikhs in the UK, which goes back a

couple of centuries; I read in the briefing from the gurdwara that the first Sikh who came to Scotland did so in 1849.

We are talking about British citizens. We are talking about English Sikhs, Welsh Sikhs, Irish Sikhs and Scottish Sikhs who deserve justice. As Sandra White's motion points out, it does not look as though they are getting much justice at the moment from the Government of the country in which they live.

From what we have heard, I can understand why members of the Sikh community were absolutely reeling when they learned that the UK Government had been involved in planning the 1984 Indian army attack on the Golden temple in Amritsar, and had advised the army on the plan to remove Sikh extremists from the temple. I can understand why people feel that it is time that the truth was uncovered, and why they feel strongly that a public inquiry should be held to bring everything out into the open.

I was aware that when the Prime Minister, David Cameron, visited the Golden temple just over a year ago, he declined to apologise for the 1919 massacre there, but said that we must "learn lessons". That is fair enough. Let us learn lessons. Surely, one of the lessons that must be learned is that we have to be open and transparent about the truth when people in our own country—our own citizens—call for that and feel that they are being extremely unfairly treated.

There are issues with the report; there are events and documents relating to the events that were pivotal to the inquiry but which were not specified. There is a view that they have to be specified so that we can get full transparency. The report said that the reason why such documentation was not permitted is the practices of the Indian Government. That is a bit of a woolly statement. Practices are not law. If those are the practices of the Indian Government, the British Government does not have to agree with them. There is surely room for much discussion on that.

What really got to me was that no question was raised about the practical UK support for military operations. It was described as "an internal matter". We have heard that over and over again, but it is a bit of a cop-out. Some time ago, the UK Government was sending arms to Indonesia under a so-called ethical foreign policy that said that those weapons should never be used for external aggression or internal oppression. However, the Government was still selling arms, even though people were being slaughtered in East Timor and West Papua. That lesson does not seem to have been learned.

I agree with everything in Sandra White's motion and with the call from the Sikh community in

Scotland—the Scots Sikhs—for an inquiry, because it deserves the truth. I would like the UK Government to agree that it will look for the truth and declare that lessons have been learned.

17:21

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I had no intention of speaking in the debate and have nothing particularly illuminating to add; I stayed to hear about the subject only out of nosiness. I vaguely remember hearing about the events at the temple in the Punjab 30 years ago, which was when I was in fourth year at school.

The events strike me as having many similarities to a number of domestic issues in the UK—issues in which I have an interest. There are similarities in terms of the role of the state, the security services and, probably, the police and the general establishment. There is a shared interest. Cases such as the Shrewsbury pickets, the blacklisted Cammell Laird ship workers, the Hillsborough victims and victimised miners all show glaring similarities with the case that we are discussing and the state's role in it. The release of the papers and the exposure of the role of the state and, in particular, the security services, is much needed. We need to shine a light on what those people do. Many campaigners have been pursuing that for some time.

I have been working alongside the GMB trade union, and we will host a justice conference in Liverpool in the autumn, which will bring together all those campaigns. I invite members of the Sikh community to attend that conference, where there will be discussion of all the common issues that have been campaigned on, such as release of papers, evidence from the time, and bringing about justice. The aim of the conference is for all those campaigners to speak to and learn from one another. We will have legal representation at the highest level. It is an open invitation to attend, because there are many common issues that are being campaigned about here in this country.

17:24

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Sandra White for bringing this important subject to Parliament. Although it is not an issue about which I have any great knowledge, I have a great deal of respect for the Sikh community. Many Sikhs have lived in Leith over the years and have contributed a great deal to Scottish society, and I would always listen carefully to the views and concerns of the Sikh community. If it is demanding that more be told about this these terrible events, I am prepared to back its call.

The theme of reconciliation, which Liz Smith talked about, is central. Whatever happened, we do not want the issue to fester and to promote tension between communities and religions. Reconciliation has to be at the heart of the debate.

The other side of the coin of reconciliation is truth, and we can never have proper reconciliation until the truth of a situation has emerged. I certainly support Sikhs in my constituency and elsewhere Scotland who want to get to the truth of the matter. That seems to be a completely reasonable demand, which we should support.

Clearly, it is not this Parliament that can act directly on the issue, so some of us will no doubt have discussions with our colleagues in the UK Parliament, as it is in that Parliament that decisions about the matter will be made. I certainly undertake to discuss it with the MP colleague who represents my constituency in the UK Parliament, and I am sure that he, too, will be mindful of the demands of Sikhs in his community, and further afield.

Let us have reconciliation, but let us have truth as well. Let us always remember the enormous contribution that Sikhs have made, and still make, to the life of Scotland.

17:26

The Minister for External Affairs and International Development (Humza Yousaf): I offer my thanks to Sandra White for bringing this very important motion to the Parliament. I extend a warm welcome to the Indian consul general, and I say Sat Sri Akal to all the members of the Sikh community who have joined us from across the country.

I offer the Scottish Government's deepest condolences, once again, to those who were affected by the tragic events that took place in 1984—those who were killed, injured and maimed and also those family members who, to this very day, still suffer without having had proper closure. It is right and fitting that, in the 30th anniversary year of operation blue star, the Scottish Parliament remembers all those who lost their lives, and those who continue to be affected.

Operation blue star was ordered by the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, to remove Sikh separatist insurgents from the Golden temple in Amritsar. They were accused of amassing weapons in the temple. As Liz Smith and other members have said, we are not here to debate the politics or the rights and wrongs of that operation, or indeed the politics that continue to this day. We know about the human tragedy that resulted from that operation and from what followed thereafter. Official figures put the death toll at 575, but other reports suggested that many more hundreds, even

thousands, were killed, including pilgrims who were caught up in the crossfire.

I understand, and many MSPs have expressed, the deep pain that continues to be felt by the Sikh community as a result of that operation. That feeling was most recently echoed by the First Minister, when he met representatives of the Glasgow gurdwara on a visit there.

As members have commented, on 13 January 2014, following the release of two letters in the National Archives, concerns were quite rightly raised about the UK Government's involvement in operation blue star, and that Special Air Service officials had been dispatched to help India in the planning of the raid on the Golden temple. No such suggestion had ever been made before or had been known about.

On 15 January 2014, the UK Prime Minister stated that an urgent inquiry into the matter—led by the Cabinet secretary, Sir Jeremy Heywood—was under way. The inquiry was completed on 4 February and was followed by a statement to the UK Parliament by the Foreign Secretary that same day. We welcome the speed with which the UK Government acted.

I will read some of the summary conclusion of that report from Sir Jeremy Heywood:

“that the nature of the UK's assistance was purely advisory, limited and provided to the Indian government at an early stage; that it had limited impact on the tragic events that unfolded at the temple three months later; that there was no link between the provision of this advice and defence sales and there is no record of the government receiving advance notice of the operation.”

As regards the Scottish Government's response to that report and conclusion, I wrote a letter to the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, on 10 March this year. I raised the real concerns of the Sikh community here in Scotland about the very narrow scope of the review. I got a letter from the president of the Glasgow gurdwara, who believed that the report's remit was too narrow. It was an internal inquiry, whereas he was asking for an independent public inquiry. I wrote to the Foreign Secretary very much on that premise.

We welcome the fact that the UK Government conducted a swift review, but we believe fundamentally that the Sikh community has the right to an independent inquiry that is transparent and fair. It deserves assurance that the UK Government was in no way linked to the tragic events that happened at the Golden temple in Amritsar in 1984. We believe that that is fair and right. Such an inquiry has not happened yet, so we will continue to listen to those calls and pursue the UK Government for full transparency.

I grew up in and among the Sikh community from a very young age, and my father and mother

are from the Punjab region in Pakistan and have a very close affinity and relationship with the Sikh community there. Many members spoke eloquently about the importance of the Sikh community in their constituencies here in Scotland.

Some of the values of Sikhism are worth exploration, as Linda Fabiani said. When we explore the religion, we notice that its values include devotion to God, honest living and equality of all. One of my favourites is the idea of community service and active caring for others. If any members have a gurdwara in their constituency—the Deputy First Minister has the largest in the country in her constituency—they will see that every Sunday it is open to anybody to come and get free food, which is a fantastic service for those who live locally. Gurdwaras reach out specifically to the homeless—those who do not get a meal—to try to get them in. Given that we have had many a debate about food banks and people having to choose between heating and eating, that service is particularly relevant in this day and age. I commend the Sikh community very much for that. The community is part of the rich tapestry that we have here in Scotland.

On a lighter note, I was looking at the diaspora tapestry in Prestonpans recently. It had a tapestry from the Punjab of the Laird of Lesmahagow, Sirdar Iqbal Singh, who is a colourful and flamboyant character indeed.

Whether it is through small business, through religion, through devotion to God or through politics, the Sikh community has made a great contribution.

The relationship with the state is a two-way thing that has to be built on trust. We and the UK Government owe the Sikh community, which we talk so highly about, the sense of closure that has been denied to it thus far. One way in which we can achieve a truly just and fair society is by fully understanding how the tragedies of the past happened. My discussions with the Sikh community have made it clear to me that it does not have a sense of closure about what happened at Amritsar 30 years ago, and it will not have that without a full understanding of the facts, which includes the role of the UK Government then.

I continue to express the Scottish Government's deepest condolences to the relatives of those who died and to those who were affected by the tragic events in 1984. I give an absolute commitment to the Sikh community that we will continue—and I, personally, will continue—to repeat its calls for the UK Government to conduct an independent, fair and transparent inquiry.

Meeting closed at 17:33.

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