



The Coalition of Carers in Scotland Fairer for Carers – Hustings Meeting 30th March 2016

Full Transcript of the Debate

Opening Remarks

Carole Ford, Scottish Liberal Democrats

Well, good morning ladies and gentlemen. I think I will just say a word or two about myself because I think that looking at the panel here this morning, I am pretty much of an unknown quantity to most of you.

I am actually a former head teacher and I was a head teacher of a secondary school for 14 years and so my experience of carers was dealing with and trying to support young carers and that was a real issue in schools and a real issue for the young people concerned and so that is my background and knowledge of dealing with the whole issue of caring. In a personal front also, I was a carer myself briefly for very elderly parents and have had the same personal experience that probably many of you have had and many of the carers across Scotland.

In relation to the Carers Bill, as Donald said, the Scottish Liberal Democrats were very supportive of that Bill and gave it all the time, care and attention that it deserved and we are delighted that the Bill has now become an Act.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats have identified two key priorities in this election and the first of these is obviously education. We consider that the Scottish education system has been seriously undermined under the current Government and we wish to put a penny onto income tax to rectify the situation

Our second major priority is in fact mental health. It is not just the mental health in relation to carers and people being cared for, one in four of the Scottish population will at some point in their lives experience mental health issues and it is an absolute priority for us.

We have two specific things that I will mention in relation to mental health - one is that it should become a statutory provision in exactly the same way that physical health issues are, because it is not in that position at the moment. It has been a Cinderella service for many years.

Secondly, specifically in relation to CAMHS, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, we are committed to doubling the budget for CAMHS and certainly my own experience as a secondary head, the mental health issues associated with young carers were really quite evident to us. The fact that if we made representation, if we made referrals and so on through the normal channels, the waiting times for young people to receive any form of support were inordinate and quite

frankly, in a young person's life, being asked to wait six months, nine months or even longer before they are being seen about issues is simply the equivalent of almost no service at all.

So those are the main issues in relation to carers from the Scottish Liberal Democrats. The one thing I would say is in relation to the Bill, that is of concern to me, is the fact that the responsibility for enacting what is in the Bill, falls to local authorities and local authorities are incredibly short of money.

I have worked in the past for many years with support plans in relation to learning difficulties and it is actually relatively easy to create a plan. The thing you have to be careful about is how do you implement the plan and that is certainly something that the Scottish Liberal Democrats would want to keep a very firm eye on.

Have local authorities actually got the resources, both in terms of financial resources and manpower to deliver on what I think everybody agrees is a very good Act? I think we are in agreement that this is a major step forward for carers across Scotland but it is the implementation that we have to be careful about to make sure that the actual differences that people are looking forward to can be made.

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour Party

Thank you very much and good morning. We will obviously go on into details about specific policy proposals from the different parties in the debate. I just want to make a couple of basic points to start with.

First of all, I think that the Scottish Labour Party position is that in relation to carers, carers themselves need to be at the centre of developing plans, developing policy, understanding properly the consequences of particular decisions and certainly in the past I was very proud of the fact that we set up carer centres and supported organisations that support carers.

I am proud of the fact that we were able to work across parties in relation to the Carers Bill and at the time I did say I think that the most important thing is not just to give people rights, but that these rights are enforceable. I think the challenge for Government is not simply to say you have a right but actually to then talk about the hard decisions you need to make in spending terms to make sure that these rights are enforceable.

I think it is particularly important in terms of the quality of care that you are given to support you in supporting your loved ones. Because I know from experience that if you have not got confidence in the carer and you do not have confidence in the respite, you will not use it and the impact on you and your family is then immense. So it is not enough to tick a box to say respite is available if people are refusing then to access that respite because they have no confidence.

So we believe we must invest in paid carers and in the workforce, but also recognise that as budgets are being stretched in local Government and elsewhere, it will be unpaid carers who are stepping in and managing that gap. We need to have a very honest conversation about properly funding local Government.

I think it is simply wrong for the Scottish Government to have targeted the local Government for cuts. It is not theoretical when it comes to families and the supports that they need. That is why we have spoken about investments through income tax in addressing the question of cuts, but I also think the conversation we have to have with carers needs to be ongoing.

I know that there are people who would have come here today who cannot come because the needs of the cared for has stopped them, so we have to have a different mindset from the one that we too often have, we just presume that everyone is able to operate in the same way.

We know that there are consequences for unpaid carers, of their own ability to learn, I think its fundamentally wrong that further education cuts have meant that it's part-time places that have been targeted. Somebody with care responsibilities, means their access to education is more than likely to happen if they are able to take a part-time place.

We need to think about the impact on employment and I think we need to be having a proper discussion when we talk about fair work. How flexible are employers to people with care responsibilities that allow people to go to work and to operate on that basis?

I suppose my final point is this – in the time that I have been an elected member, of all of the groups that I have come across, I think the people who have had the most impact have been the carer campaigners.

Now I think there is a long way to go, the fact that we implement a Bill and COSLA says it is not funded properly, then there is a question there. But actually in terms of people understanding the nature of the impact of unpaid care on families, this has been driven by carers themselves and so my final point is that wherever we go in terms of developing policy for carers, it must be carer-led

That must be real rather than tokenistic, because there has been a social revolution in my lifetime when we emptied long-stay hospitals and supported people to live in their communities, that was driven by carers who understood the potential of their loved ones was not being reached.

I expect across the parties there will be an agreement in that and, therefore, in terms of policy making we should then follow that commitment to carers by making sure that it is not a tokenistic engagement, but it is genuine and real, because that is the way in which we actually are able to support you in what you do and support the ones that you care for.

Jamie Hepburn, Scottish National Party

Thank you very much. Let me start at the outset, we have been told 5 minutes and not take up all of that time, but I can see that it may be a pledge that I break for the first time to be told to shut up because I was taking too long, but I will try and not to because obviously it is important people get the chance to pose the questions they want to of us.

I was, as Donald has just mentioned, fortunate enough of course to be asked by the First Minister to serve in her Government in November 2014 as the Minister with responsibility for the carers' policy. In that time I have had the very great privilege, and I do consider it a privilege, to have been able to meet the many carers from across the country who are doing an outstanding job in caring for their loved ones, as has been alluded to often in very difficult circumstances.

I think Johann makes a very pertinent point, that there will be many people who would dearly have loved to have been here today with us and because of their circumstances they have not been able to. I think that is a salient reminder for each and every one of us, the responsibilities, and the demands that are placed on those with a caring responsibility.

Collectively Scotland's unpaid carers do outstanding work for us as a society and I have to concede at the outset, it is always going to be very difficult for any administration, for our society as a whole, to adequately recompense and respond to that level of commitment.

That of course doesn't mean that we should not try to do so and I think the point that was made about the hashtag for today's event, #fairerforcarers, I think it will be a shared agenda from everyone across this top table.

I think the point has been made about the Carers Act, which I now need to remember to call it an Act, Donald has reminded me I can't call it the Carers Bill anymore. It is now an Act of the Scottish Parliament, it is now the law of the land. It was a very good reminder for the way that we collaboratively worked together, not just within the confines of Parliament itself but also working with the National Carer Organisations, for the manner in which they engage with the process in creating that legislation.

I thought it was interesting to hear Donald saying that the carers organisation didn't achieve everything that they wanted out of the Act and I'm sure that's probably true, but they certainly achieved a lot.

I thought we had a good Bill at the start of the process and after it was amended at stage 2 it was finessed and better still and certainly by the end of the process at the final stage, through that process of engagements, coming to Parliament, working collectively and listening to the carers voices out there, we have an even better piece of legislation.

I want to remind us of some of the rights that are now endowed as a result of that Act which I was very proud to be able to take through Parliament. We have expanded the definition of carers. We have now put on a statutory footing a responsibility for each local authority area to provide a carers information and advice service. We have now set out that carers have a right to be involved in the discharge process for their loved ones, when they are in the hospital environment. We have been undertaking work for some time on a charter that is going to be set out on a statutory footing of the Act and of course we will have a carers strategy in each and every local authority area.

But I would recognize and concede if we were just relying on that Act alone we wouldn't be doing enough. I want to set out some of our other commitments at going forward. There are the commitments we have funded in the past and we have committed to funding, again this coming financial year. Going forward, there will be continued funding for carers information services across the carers information strategy.

I have been privileged to go out and see first-hand some of the tremendous local initiatives that take place directly as a result of that funding. That funding will continue, we will continue to fund the short breaks, we are continuing to fund the young carers festival. I was very fortunate to go for the first time to the young carers festival last year and it was very clear to me that there is great value placed in that event by those young carers who attend, not only as a form of social

interaction and respite but also as a critical means by which they can come together and support each other in a peer support basis and crucially to tell people like me the type of services they need in going forward.

We've got the carers positive scheme working with some 45 organisations to create a more positive environment for carers in the workplace, with 43 other organisations interested in engaging that scheme.

We will have another Carers Parliament this year. I was just speaking to Donald earlier, I think it is now critical we evolve that type of process, I think it has been a very good type of engagement for carers coming together on a national basis, but I would recognize Donald was reminding me he had to travel quite far today to get here, we also need to think we reach out and engage with carers on a more local basis, but still bring people together on a national basis and I will be very clear that that the next Carers Parliament should be part of this focus.

We now see new powers coming to the Scottish Parliament as a result of the Scotland Bill. Already the Scottish Government has been able to commit to increasing Carers Allowance to the same level as Jobseekers Allowance and we have said we will end the ludicrous 4 week rule, whereby people lose their entitlement to Disability Living Allowance and Carers Allowance if the person they cared for has been in hospital for that period of time.

So these are, I would recognise, individual small changes, but I hope that are felt to be positive changes. They will not be the sum total of what we seek to do to deliver to carers but we hope to show a track record which demonstrates our commitment to doing what we can to support Scotland's unpaid carers.

But also crucially, and I think I would agree very much with Johann's point in this regard, that to hear that carers' voice as well and that is what I will be ensuring that the SNP always does if we continue with the administration after the election.

Zara Kitson, Scottish Green Party

Hello I am Zara Kitson, I am delighted to be here with you this morning representing the Scottish Green Party. Like many of you here, I also have experience of care, and it is more or less explicitly linked to growing up in poverty in Scotland. The two are explicitly linked.

All too often it is a reality that we need to face up to in Scotland, either because people who are living in poverty are more susceptible to having to be unpaid carers, because of the reality of the higher risk of illnesses, ill health and disability and mental health in those families. But also the reality for many unpaid carers is that if you had to be forced into a situation of caring, then you are going to be more financially burdened throughout your care experience, because care is undervalued and unpaid, all too often in our economy.

So a lot of this is very personal to me, so I am delighted to be here representing the Greens, because we believe that not only do we need Scotland to be fairer for carers, but we also need Scotland to be fairer for everyone, for us all and that is the platform that we are standing on for this election

We want to push our Holyrood to be bolder, we need a bolder Holyrood so Scotland can be fairer and it can look after all of our people and care for all. So there are some specific things related to carers that Scottish Greens are pushing for and will push the next Parliament to bring in for carers that will make a real difference.

The first thing that is very important is that we do have devolved powers coming to Scotland that means that Carers Allowance will be controlled by the Scottish Parliament. So Scottish Greens are pushing to have a 50% increase in Scottish carers allowance to push that benefit up to £93.15.

Now we recognize that that still probably won't be enough for people, but it is something that will be within our powers to do and will make a real and meaningful difference to peoples' lives. In relation to this as well, we will reduce the threshold to 28 hours of work rather than the higher hours that are in place at the moment.

We will also bring in a minimum entitlement to short breaks, because this should not be seen as an add-on or a luxury. The health and wellbeing of the carers needs to be absolutely at the centre of any policy, because otherwise we are failing everyone because you can't care for other people if you are not able to look after yourself. That has to be front and centre of any policies that people put forward.

We will also ensure that there is an employment programme to support carers who at any point want to go back to work. Because often there is barriers to getting back to work after a long time. So again we need to make sure that carers voices are central to this and their lives are considered in policies taken forward.

We will also extend concessionary travel to unpaid carers, recognising that it is not going to have a huge difference, but it will make a bit of a meaningful difference to enable carers to get around and to travel.

Now all of this for the Greens relates to a much longer-term plan and linking back to what Johann said about actually ensuring that we value care within our system. We know at the moment, like Donald already pointed out, there is a lot of carers, unpaid carers in Scotland. Now that number is set to grow and by 2037 we are going to be looking at over a million. So this is actually something I'm glad Scottish Parliament is taking bold action on and has got an Act there, because we need this now more than ever. The issues that we are talking about will continue to grow and will not go away, so it is great to share a platform with people who similarly take all of these issues seriously, because that is the kind of bold action we need.

Now within that we have a situation where care work and the care sector is underpaid and completely under-valued. Now it is traditionally women's work and by and large a lot of care is still done by women.

It is under-valued and there is a huge problem there because it means that then the care that people receive is often not of great quality, because the people that are providing the care are low paid workers who don't have the skills, because they are not being invested in and they also have stressful lives and they often live and work in poverty and have got other complex situations going on. So we are pushing for a living wage plus for people who work in the care sector and that will be at £9 per hour in 2016 and continue to go up each year to £10 per hour by 2018.

So this is some of the real and meaningful differences that we want to push for and it is looking at carers as a whole in Scotland and how we can actually change the picture. It is part of a longer-term plan to push for a more caring economy that looks after all of our people, because first and foremost actually, like we said, there is a value that this all brings to our economy, because without looking after our human beings, what is our economy? Our economy is made up of human beings so it has to start from that basis and it has to focus on how do we ensure that we are able to look after each other from cradle to grave.

So this is all part of a longer-term plan and our longer-term plan in terms of welfare in caring for people, for a citizen's income which would mean that everyone would be paid a basic income which would allow them to do the things that they need to do, whether that is to train themselves, invest in education, invest their time in education or if they are needing to care for people at different times.

So that is part of our wider picture but there is some specific proposals in there that I hope are going to make a meaningful difference and I hope that we will be able to implement by being part of a bolder Government in a bolder Parliament in May 2016 to actually push our Scottish Government to use the powers that we do have to bring about meaningful differences to people's lives. So I look forward to your questions and I am absolutely delighted to be here with you this morning. Thank you.

Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative Party

Good morning. Can I begin with an apology first time, I am a chronic migraine sufferer and I have got one this morning. I have taken my medication, it is not working and some of you are going to become a bit of a blur, so if I look as if I am disengaged or yawning at any point, it has nothing to do with you or the process, it is just the way I react.

Can I say that the Coalition of Carers has also achieved a coalition of political will within the Scottish Parliament which has led to the Carers Act. And that is really a remarkable thing.

We are at the beginning of a Scottish Parliamentary election which is going to be very feisty. If you have watched any of the debates already you will have seen that the exchanges can be quite fiery and quite sharp. But it is also wrong to imagine that on every subject and on every area of policy that division is as sharp and as testy, it is not.

On the issue of carers, there is a tremendous unanimity with the Scottish Parliament, both in the support of the Act that we have now just achieved and on that not being the end of the story. Because just as with health and social integration, it is how you see that the legislation that has been passed, actually then is implemented in an effective way. How it achieves the objectives that it was set to achieve and delivers.

In this respect, you know, Johann Lamont might not thank me for saying anything nice about her in these political sort-of environments. Since she ceased to be the leader of the Labour Party I have heard her speak on this issue and in the Parliament, more than any other and I believe that many of the comments that she made, although some of them I think become more sharply political, and some of them justifiably so, are correct in that as we go forward carers themselves

have to feel that they are at the centre of the decision making process and that they have got an element of control and involvement.

Where we have sought with socially improved legislation, whether it was the community healthcare partnerships or whatever else previously, where we have not achieved what we set out to do, that has ended up with the various parties becoming disenchanted and becoming less committed and involved in the process.

I am a politician, I am a lay person, the expertise is here, so I am here as much to listen as well as to try and inform constructively on some of the issues this morning.

But I do think against the broader envelope of health can I also say this, for the next five years I think our whole healthcare system has to know that it is going to be properly funded on a planned and predictable basis, which is why we have advocated a funding formula for health over the next five years which would see expenditure go from £13bn to £14.25bn.

But beyond that the overwhelming impression I have gained, whether at events like this, whether with Allied healthcare officials, whether with nurses, whether with doctors, whether with patients, information groups or whatever, is that all are unanimously heartily sick and fed-up of partisan political politics intruding into this whole area of public area service debate.

What they want above all else, is for the political parties, as we have done in this Act, to work in a more constructive fashion to achieve an overall strategy for healthcare in Scotland which is sustainable, which is in public hands and which remains free at the point of need and delivery.

That is, as well as the funding envelope, the position I am very much committed to. So I am not going to be spending this morning trying to knock spots off of everyone else. I will not even say of the Green Party, who you might think I would be the most likely to say “my goodness is that some sort of utopian vision that is all going to happen”

I might not believe that some of the things identified there are deliverable immediately, in the next Parliament, but do I think as objectives that we should be seeking to work forward to in terms of moving the Carers Allowance from the Jobseekers Allowance to a level higher and to moving the hours that you need to work before you are eligible. As a structural way forward fine, as a series of commitments I am not going to stand here and promise things I don't think are immediately deliverable for the immediate period ahead what we have got to do is make the legislation that we have passed work.

QUESTIONS

Question One from Joan McEwan from Perth (asked by Claire Cairns as Joan was not present)

“Could the panel help explain to ordinary citizens, such as myself, why Government always announces increased and new monies are being fed into local authorities’ health and care budgets, but our 32 local authorities say their budgets in these services are continually being cut and they are struggling to meet even their statutory obligations. It is a very confusing message and would be helpful to have an explanation. Is there increased new real monies or just old monies being redistributed under new names?”

Carole Ford, Scottish Liberal Democrats

Well as someone who spent most of her working life working in a local authority in the Education department, I can say that I would say from Joan's question it is the latter. The money does not come into the public services in the way that politicians appear to announce that it does.

I know for a fact that in education the money has been seriously cut in schools and in terms of carers, it has had really quite a devastating effect.

As I said before, my expertise is largely with young carers and dealing with them in an educational setting and certainly several years ago we would have had a community link worker stationed in our school whose job it was to support those children in school and to co-operate and work with their families in trying to alleviate the stress and the strain on those young people. These community link workers now don't exist in our schools. We don't have the classroom assistants that we used to have, so I would argue quite strongly, also as someone who is not involved with the Government, that the money that gets announced doesn't appear to materialise.

As I said at the start, my major concern about this new Act is that the responsibility for implementing it falls onto local authorities and local authorities are seriously cash-strapped.

When they have, as this year, attempted to try and raise more money, they have been met with the prospect of penalties which have forced them to retract and retreat and so local authorities are not in a position to increase the level of support at the moment, unless the funding is altered.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats do see that as a major issue. Most people, carers included, rely on their local authorities for their public services that they receive and the local authorities have been squeezed out to the point where they are very unlikely to be able to offer the services that you or any other group would require.

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour Party

I think there is an argument going on just now about how local authorities are funded. This city alone (Glasgow) has to find £130m of cuts in the next 2 years. Nobody goes into local council to be a councillor to deliver those kinds of cuts. I mean the idea that somehow local authorities are making this up is simply dishonest.

I think there are 2 things happening. First of all local government has been targeted for cuts and I think the Scottish Government is not being honest about that. Then when local authorities make those cuts, very often the same party that has made that decision, denounces the local authority for making those cuts.

What we need is a far more grown-up conversation about how we fund local government and it is about taxation and I make this point. I was a teacher for 20 years, when I started teaching in 1979 I was paying something like 27p to 28p in the pound income tax. At the height of Thatcherism I was paying 25p to 26p. We are now balking at the idea of increasing taxation from 20p to 21p.

Well if we don't have a conversation about funding, then there will be consequences and some people will suffer more and the more cuts that are made to the local government, the more carers suffer.

Now I would make this point, however, and it is that even if local authorities had all the money in the world, they need to do more to work with carers to make sure that money is spent properly. I am not saying if only the local government had proper money everything would be fine, because there is a mind-set here as well about how you actually deliver services and how you work with people.

But the related issue to that in terms of funding, and we probably did it when we were in government too, is that we announce little bits of money and you get credit for having a fund for this and a fund for that and a fund for something else because you can tick lots of boxes.

And the example might be something like young carers. So we have very good initiatives to support young carers, but I know as somebody who worked as a school teacher, that there are young people who in order to achieve educationally, just needed a wee bit more help, somebody to talk to about what was troubling them, somebody to go and speak to their family about what the pressures were. That is all stripped out of our schools now and is a fundamental problem for the rights of some young people to achieve their potential.

So I think we need a grown-up conversation about funding and I think we also have to stop this mind-set where you chase ideas by finding wee pots of money. We need to find a better way of resourcing and funding the supports that people who are caring have. And if we don't get local Government right in terms of funding those rights that have been established, the Carers Act in particular, will not exist in the real world and that surely has to be the test that we all carry forward in terms of what our commitments are.

Jamie Hepburn, Scottish National Party

Thanks very much Donald. I think it is a useful starting question. I think we have to place of course the entire budgeting process in some context.

So each year the Scottish Government has to present a budget to Parliament for approval. For that budget this coming financial year we are presented with a particular challenge. The sum that is available for disbursement by the Scottish Government has been cut in real terms. That is just a fact of the matter that brings a certain press to bear in funding allocation. So certain decisions have to be made.

I won't shy away from the fact that we have had to ask local authorities to make some difficult decisions, but I think again to place in some context the budget view of my local authority area, North Lanarkshire. Once you factor in some of the monies that have been invested in the process of health and social care integration, their budget came down in the region of something like 1.5%.

Now, I am not suggesting for a moment that it does not beget some difficult questions for them, but I think again you have to place it in some context. Some 1.5% and that is before we get to the fact that authorities hold significant cash reserves which they presumably hold for difficult financial times. Well I think we are in difficult financial times and I would have thought they might be looking, not in terms of the decision they make, but how they may seek to utilise some cash reserves.

But I think on a wider basis the question we should be asking ourselves is "are we getting the finances to the right places" and I think in terms of the budget that we have presented this year

and it has now been approved by Parliament, we have taken the decision on top of the £500m that we have already invested and assisted in the process of health and social care integration to seek some £250m being transferred directly from the record health budget of £13bn to further assist this process of health and social care integration.

Part of which will be to ensure that every paid carer is paid at least the living wage. I thought that would be a commitment that would be broadly welcomed and make a huge difference to those who work in that important sector and those they care for

Also, looking more specifically at some of the commitments that we have made going forward in terms of public finances for unpaid carers. We have already talked about the Carers Act, you know with any Act of Parliament it is incumbent on the government to present a financial memorandum alongside that Carers Bill which sets out that from year 2022 it will be accompanied with some £88m worth of funding to fully fund the commitments that have been set out in that Act.

Now I will concede I have heard directly from, and it has been alluded to by Johann, that COSLA have expressed some concerns about the nature of that financial package. It might not surprise you as the minister with the responsibility for taking that Act through Parliament, I have spoken directly with COSLA about this matter, I have said to them very clearly “provide me the contrary evidence”, the information that will make me question the assumptions we made, which incidentally have been underpinned by information provided directly by COSLA and local Government already. They have not provided me that information. Now if it is presented to me and I still have responsibility for this Act and I think it is credible and it causes us to question the assumptions we’ve hitherto to make then of course we will look at that, but the information has not come thus far.

Again I go back to the point of getting the money to where it will make the biggest difference. We have already made the commitment under the terms of the new powers that have come to the Scottish Parliament to increase the level of the Carers Allowance, to get rid of the 84 day rule. The ludicrous rule that families lose their right to DLA or carers allowance if the person they care for is in hospital for 84 days or more.

These are real decisions, these are practical decisions that will make a practical difference to the people on the ground. I think that is what I mean when I am talking about getting money to the right place and where it will make the biggest difference.

Zara Kitson, Scottish Green Party

So, I think with this is a canny game of politics going on as you might imagine. Essentially it is announcing some money in terms ‘we are investing in health’ but at the same time the Scottish Government is squeezing budgets at local authority level and that has to be recognised.

You know Scottish Greens, we campaigned alongside the SNP to bring more powers to Scotland, because we also believe that we can manage our affairs better. But we also extend that to devolving more powers to local councils and to local government

I think that is something that we should all be calling on Scottish Government and SNP to do, because those at local level are where we are delivering the bulk of services. It is local councils that deliver our education, that deliver our health and social care. They are the people in the

services that know best about how to deliver those so they should also be able to control budgets and raise income.

At the moment we are not seeing that part of the picture being met and I think that that is causing confusion. But more to the point it is actually meaning that we are having to eradicate services and we have seen services being run into the ground and potentially that is going to continue to happen.

Now there are certain services that are more protected within that mix, in terms of statutory duties, but in terms of local government delivery, where some of the cuts are being made, too often to third sector provision and services that actually are of most value, and are very important in lifesaving to people like carers. You know that is your carers centres, that is your services that you rely on day-in-day-out.

I think that is why we absolutely need to be answering this question fairly and not just be hiding behind politics of 'he said she said' or 'he's to blame or she's to blame.' Okay, what is the picture? The picture is we need to raise more money locally and we need to do that fast or we are going to see people's lives further destroyed and people moving into poverty.

We are serious about making things fairer for carers, we need to be serious about answering this tax issue.

But how do we raise more money to actually defend and protect our public services? I think it is interesting that at the moment the question and the key topic of this election has turned to taxes and it seems that there has been a change in public appetite in Scotland because people are so anti-cuts.

People don't want to see cuts in Scotland, we want to protect our services and by and large people are happy to pay more if that means that they can protect the services that are of value to them. I think that's where we need the conversation to be.

Now for the Scottish Greens, as well as a progressive income tax and pushing for a top rate band tax of 60p for earners over £150,000, we are also pushing for at local level, a residential property tax that is progressive.

So we are scrapping the council tax and we would push to scrap the council tax because it is out of date. So the whole time that I have been alive, more or less, it's not been re-evaluated.

I think the proposals that we have seen coming forward aren't bold enough and we need something bolder. So our proposals would be. They are progressive and it is actually looking at taxing that the local tax would be on the value of property. It would be in favour for the majority of people, would actually reduce their bills and save on their local council tax .

But those that have wealth and that is in properties and land wealth, would pay more. That's fair, that's progressive and it means that it benefits all of us, because it means that we can all benefit from the local services that we all value.

I think that's the kind of question and the kind of answers more to the point that we need to be seeing moving forward. So Scottish Greens are going to be pushing those proposals forward and hopefully pushing other parties to come along with us, because we need these answers now.

We can't wait another 5 years, because that's another 5 years of peoples lives in crisis, which actually in the long-term just increases all of our tax output because we're wasting resources and we're wasting money on crisis intervention when we could be spending it on prevention. So that is where we need our focus to be.

Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative Party

I think the short answer to the question is very often there is an element of smoke and mirrors about the way that funding of whatever is announced. Sometimes it's additional and it's real money, sometimes it's not.

I think it's very difficult for people who are just hearing these statistics announcements to understand whether or not it is genuine, because very often it is announced, frankly in response to a crisis of some sort and is an expedient headline to try and overcome the difficulty of the issue in the next morning's press or in the next day's Parliament.

I am far less convinced by the idea that a radical reform of local government taxation will help.

When I was a very young politician in the early 1980's I had a conversation with Alex Douglas-Hume who was the former Prime Minister and he said "Jackson, the only piece of advice I am going to give you is some advice that Stanley Baldwin, who had been a prime minister in the 1930's gave to me" and I wondered what this great pearl of wisdom was going to be and he said "whatever you do, don't mess with the rates".

Well the Conservatives did and it was a political disaster for us when we did because it was the Poll Tax and the idea that you just did sweep away local government taxation and replace it with something else and its always going to be wonderful, I am afraid is not the reality of the experience that most people will have.

I have looked at the Labour Party's proposal and I have learned about the re-evaluation, but the problem with all of that is that it is no longer related to your ability to pay, it's not even related any longer to the size of your house. The evaluation that Zara has just announced would reflect the real value of peoples properties, irrespective of their ability to pay any tax.

If you happen to live in a perfectly small modest property, but in a local authority that was very desirable for education, so that property prices were artificially up because the local schools were popular, you could be somebody who is a pensioner or not a pensioner, someone in middle age, who has lived in this house for 30 or 40 years, perhaps on a modest income, who is suddenly hit with a massive great big increase in local authority expenditure.

What was Patrick Harvey's response to that last night – "sell your house and move to somewhere that you can afford". That is not a practical solution.

Now we have gone through an extended period of council tax freeze. I understand as part of the overall difficult time that we went through as a nation that the security of knowing that council tax was not going to go up each year was something that most households depended upon and could plan.

But we are coming to the point where that is no longer sustainable and it's no longer sustainable for 2 reasons. One is we have asked local authorities to do far more and secondly the whole demographic of the country is changing.

We are recognising that there is a far larger elderly population and, therefore, the demands on services are not even met now, what they were 5, 7 years ago when we may have begun to implement a council tax freeze.

So I think we have to be realistic, that council tax does have to go up. I largely support the policy of the Scottish Government. They used to be bolder, it is certainly true. They were all for local income tax at one point.

I support the fact that you introduce additional bands and I think you now allow the council tax to increase by inflation and by more than that, if in fact that is a way of responding to the additional demands that there is for local services.

I have got one other thought in all of this and it's not a policy, so I am not announcing anything particularly, but I do wonder if all of our local authorities are now of an equivalent size to actually manage some of the detailed responsibilities which we have increasingly asked of them. In my experience with some of the smaller ones is that they don't necessarily have the same level of resource available on the ground to deliver some of the things that we need to see changing and I think that is another issue which plays at the back of our ability to deliver on some of the legislation we are passing.

Question Two from Sean Hawkins, North Lanarkshire Carers Together.

“The Carers Act is welcome by carers if it offers them rights for the first time. However, there are concerns that it will not be applied equally across Scotland, particularly as the eligibility criteria will be developed locally. There is also concern there is not enough money to implement it. What would you do to ensure it delivers the same rights to all carers across Scotland?”

Carole Ford, Scottish Liberal Democrats

Yes, I would echo those concerns. As I said before this kind of legislation has been in place in education for a long time in relation to learning plans and so on and the concerns that you have raised there are serious concerns.

My thought about it is that since we have abandoned the idea of ring-fencing money in our public services, that this has become even more of an issue, because if an authority is very strapped for cash there is a horrible temptation to draw Peter to pay Paul and depending on the nature of the crisis around about you, that can happen.

It is also the case, as has already been referred to by Jackson, the size of some of our local authorities, some of them are extremely small and some of them are actually much better off than others.

There are local authorities who have far higher levels of deprivation and therefore, the demands on their services are infinitely greater than in other authorities where that level of deprivation is much much lower.

I think my concern, which is the eligibility criteria, is one that could be much more readily addressed than the money concern. I think there needs to be a review at some point of how these plans are being implemented to see if there a large disparity between the eligibility from one local authority to the other.

I mean a country the size of Scotland having 32 local authorities is slightly odd in its self, my own background is in mathematics and I have to say the whole idea of divvying up a country of only 5 million people into 32 local authorities is slightly odd. But it is the situation that we have to deal with, so I would say there needs to be a review at some point, quite early on in the process about disparities opening up between authorities in relation to the eligibility criteria.

Also, we have to be looking at what money is actually going into this. Is there more money available in more prosperous areas than there is in the less prosperous areas? I think that a number of the parties here today consider that local authorities are seriously underfunded and that that needs to be changed, but it isn't just more money going in. There needs to be a review, a monitoring of how that money is actually being spent if ring-fencing is not going to be re-introduced, as a way to ensure that things like the Carers Act is properly implemented.

Donald McLeod, Chair

Thank you. When Jamie was talking earlier and saying the carers organisations didn't get all that we asked for, one of the things that we asked for of course was a national eligibility criteria and we were really pushing for that with a view to being fairer for carers across Scotland. We lost that debate, at least for the moment and so this where that question is coming from. We're going to have local eligibility criteria developed. Is there going to be enough money to implement things. Is it going to be fair for carers right throughout Scotland?

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour Party

Well, no if we continue with the same policy in relation to local government.

I accept there has been a cut to Scottish budgets and I regret that but the budget to local government has been cut by more than the budget cut to the Scottish Government from the UK government.

They have cut local government by more than that and Jamie says they could use their reserves. You only get to spend your reserves once. Now if you concede that they should be using the reserves, you are accepting that local government has not got sufficient money as it stands.

I think we do have to review how we fund local government, I think we should be bolder and talk about the most progressive tax, which is income tax and we can now talk about income tax. A penny on income tax would mean that you could properly fund local government and that is not theoretical, that then means you are able to deliver on the challenge you put to local government in terms of rights for carers.

I was in favour of there being national eligibility. I absolutely agree that we should be devolving power out of Holyrood to local government and out of local government into local communities. It is why I am very much a fan, for example, of the co-operative movement and housing association movement. You take decisions down to a very local level and there is a tension if you say you believe in that, but you are going to impose national standards.

But I actually think, in terms of eligibilities, what you are doing is you are providing a basic level that people have a right to expect across the board. Then if people want to do slightly different things at local level on top of that that is accepted widely.

I think the phrase postcode lottery sounds just like a phrase, but it can mean the difference between having the rights to access the care you need and not within different local communities.

I hate to tell Jackson it was his idea to have 32 local authorities. All those years ago I worked for Strathclyde region and there were local councils and there was the region. I am not advocating change in local government because it was such a massive upheaval, but that idea that you could have some decisions at a more strategic level and direct resourcing to some place where there was more need. Certainly it worked in terms of childcare and there were quite radical things done in the 80's in Strathclyde region.

There is an issue about capacity at local level, but fundamentally there is an issue about resources. I don't believe that Jamie wants to produce a Bill and not actually make a difference in people's lives and, therefore, I think that is why we need to make sure that local government is funded properly and then take them on if they are not then delivering for carers in the way that they should. That is the benefit of having the right, you are able to work on both levels.

So I think fundamentally there isn't money there to support national eligibility criteria and I also at the same time think we need to pay more respect to local government by funding it properly and then challenging it when it doesn't deliver.

Jamie Hepburn, Scottish National Party

Thank you Donald. Sean it's good to see you again, and you know it's a useful question. I think hopefully I alluded to the point in the last question that it is part of any legislative process any time there is a Bill going through Parliament, that a financial memorandum has to be prepared by the Scottish government to set out the costs associated with it.

We did that with the Carers Bill, now the Carers Act and in that financial memorandum from the year 2022 there will be £80m available for full implementation of that Act.

Now that's our best assumption of the costs of the provisions set out in the Act that we have just passed. It's informed by information that has been provided to us by the local Scottish authorities and various individual local authorities.

I accept others suggestions that it may cost more. I have been very clear with those who have advanced that proposition. I am more than willing to see any contrary evidence, any other advice that would lead to me drawing different conclusions to those in which we presented in that financial memorandum. Which, as I say, resulted in concluding that we require £80m from the year 2022 onwards.

I have not had that information yet, so you know if it is provided to me and I still have responsibility for this policy, or whoever else has responsibility for this policy area will take that information very seriously indeed.

Indeed I take this issue so seriously that we have established a finance working group which contains COSLA and the National Carers Organisations to look at the financial assumptions we made. Again I have not had any evidence presented thus far that would lead me to draw any different conclusions to those that were presented in the financial memorandum, but I am open to hearing as such.

In terms of the issue about local eligibility criteria as opposed to national eligibility criteria, it was interesting to hear Donald say you lost that (I think you said) battle. Now, I'm putting words in your mouth. I don't view it that way at all, what I actually think was a finely balanced debate.

I think what is rather more important is that the Bill and its provisions have a positive practical impact on the ground.

Now I believe that can be achieved by the measures we put in place which sets out that, yes there will be local eligibility criteria, co-produced with carers themselves, but overlaid by matters of national direction which each local authority must have due regard.

Incidentally, I have been very clear that the implantation of the Act, that part of the Act, will need to involve the National Carers Organisation who did great work to produce a suggested national eligibility criteria and I think that work can contribute very positively to those matters that each local authority has to be pay attention to in setting out the local eligibility criteria.

I would also make the point that I would concede in passing this Act to know that it is now the law of the land, that in itself isn't going to make a difference. It is how we implement that Act on the ground that will make the greatest difference. I am absolutely committed, I can tell Johann Lamont, to ensuring this Act has a positive practical impact and that will clearly involve the National Carers Organisations, sitting round the table involved in that process from implementation, passing on the carers voices directly to the Scottish government, telling us how the specific provisions of the Act can make the biggest difference.

But let me make one last point, because you know Carol talked about the importance of reviewing the provision of the Act. I was very clear in the past that this Act will be important to monitor its effectiveness on the ground and again the National Carers Organisations need to be involved in that process of telling us how we can best monitor the practical implementation of that Act to make sure that it is making that positive difference.

If it is found at any stage that local eligibility criteria is not making that difference, I have very clearly retained in the face of opposition from the convention of Scottish local authorities the ability for the Scottish government to introduce secondary legislation to institute national eligibility criteria.

If I have anything to do with it and I have responsibility for this area, then if I think it is necessary to do, I will not hesitate to introduce such national eligibility criteria.

But let's work together, let's make sure this Act makes a difference, because I believe as it is worded and as it has passed through Parliament, it can make that difference.

Zara Kitson, Scottish Green Party

So what will I do to ensure that the same rights of eligibility are applied across all of Scotland?

I am happy to hold Jamie to the commitment that he has just made here, if we find that on implementation of the Act, from the experience of carers and scrutinising and reviewing that it isn't working across Scotland.

Because of the bleak picture, let's be honest, that we have all been painting in terms of the inequalities that Scotland faces, both around income and also geographically, there are massive challenges in Scotland and that is the backdrop to all of this.

So there is a point about us taking those challenges seriously, but I am happy to be pushing for that national eligibility criteria and to hold Jamie to account on that in Parliament and I will be pushing my Scottish green colleagues too. I'm sure they will all be happy to join me in doing the same.

In terms of the wider point about the challenges, the geographical inequality and the income inequality and the wealth inequality that are the backdrop that are plaguing all of these challenges that we are facing. I think that I want to come back on the point that Jackson challenged me on.

I think it's actually laughable that someone in the Conservative Party is challenging the Greens on daring to actually try and reform, let's face it, a failed economic system, where we have in the UK more billionaires per head of population. Yet we have in Glasgow tonight 1 in 4 of our kids who probably are unlikely to get a hot meal and we have a number of homeless people who are camping out on George Square because they do not have anywhere to live.

So Jackson, I am sorry, but I actually think that your claims that our proposals are discredited and are utopian, I think that that's actually laughable. Because we are operating in a system where our system right now is failing millions of people and we need radical reform, that's the truth of it.

So in terms of that picture of what we are putting forward, actually if as Carol said we have somebody that is in the situation where their property's value is a bit higher, but they maybe don't have that disposable income, well actually let's take it as part of the bigger picture that we are proposing. If you are on £26,500 or less, actually you would pay less income tax and it is people who are on more money, so people like the MSPs on the panel, who can afford to pay more tax, would be paying more tax.

Now we think that is fairer. It's progressive, so if you can afford to pay more, you pay more and if you've got wealth in income at your disposal, then you should also be able to afford to pay more. Because the reality of the picture is that most people in Scotland are on average incomes which are less than £26,500. That's the majority of our population, actually it's those people that our party is working for to make the difference.

If anyone on this panel can stand here and say that they are happy to take seriously the issues of having a more progressive and a caring Scotland, without being willing to push people to actually let go of some of their income and wealth for the benefit of all.

Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative Party

I think those were actually the issues I tried to address right back in my opening remarks when I said that it's all very well to pass legislation, the question is then do you properly monitor that you are implementing it effectively.

I know this is probably a dry point that I am going to make but I think it's an important one. One of the failings of the Scottish Parliament is that we do virtually no post legislative scrutiny at all. In fact, if you look at all Parliaments across the world, only in Switzerland is it written onto the face of the terms of reference of the Parliament that post legislative scrutiny is a mandatory requirement.

We have within the Scottish Parliament a committee system that is able to initiate legislation, is able to review legislation the government is progressing into and interrogate it and to undertake post legislative scrutiny. But it does virtually no post legislative scrutiny of any kind whatsoever on any legislation that we pass. That is a very considerable weakness I think of the Parliament, that many politicians in all parties recognise and which I hope when the new Parliament meets there will be a sufficient will within the new presiding officer to actually seek to tackle.

Because if we are not just going to pay lip service to what I said in my opening remarks about ensuring the legislation is implemented effectively and works, actually we need the committee that initiated it to continue to review the implementation of that legislation, to understand the consequences of it. To see whether in fact the very problems of a potential postcode lottery or national eligibility criteria, or whether the funding is adequate, that would then become apparent and I think would then inform the process in a much stronger way.

There is one other point I just want to come back, I mean I've got to say billionaires do not tend to live in vans or council properties and they are one of the ones that are going to be paying considerably more under the Greens plans. But in general terms how do we raise more money?

Now I know there are those that say we put up income tax, well actually historically the reality is that when income tax rates have been cut, we have actually raised more from them being cut than when we did when they were higher.

I don't want to put peoples taxes up, I want to create more tax payers, I want to get more people in jobs paying tax and more people who are in jobs paying tax having better paid jobs and they will pay more taxes as a result of that.

We know that there are nursing vacancies in Scotland, we know that there are a whole lot of GPs about to retire, we know that there are unfulfilled positions in consultancies in our secondary care hospitals all over Scotland.

We are not going to attract people into those jobs from around the country or from elsewhere if we say come here and pay significantly more tax than you will anywhere else doing those jobs. I know it sounds a lovely idea, I don't believe it will work.

I am not necessarily advocating we don't need to raise more revenue to pay for our services, but we do that by creating the most entrepreneurial vibrant skilled economy that we can by restoring those college place cuts which Johann referred to earlier, 152,000 courses no longer available, which many part-time carers and others were able to take advantage of.

You get people into work paying tax, that's how you increase the tax. Just clobbering people with a penny now and then next year a penny more and then a penny more the year after that and then another penny the year after that, it won't work.

Donald MacLeod, Chair

Employment is an issue for carers. There is a gender imbalance in terms of carers. 60% of carers are women, 40% are men.

The peak ages of caring are 50 to 64 when women could be expected to be at the top end of their professions, but that is when caring is hitting most and it is hitting women most at these ages. The next age group is the 25 to 49 years of age.

There is a question about gender that Christine Farquhar has got on employment.

Question Three from Christine Farquhar, a carer from Edinburgh.

I have a got a script, I usually go off script but I am determined to try and keep on it. Caring for family members is more likely to be undertaken by women than men and women are also more likely to give up work to care. A 64 year old who gave up work at 59 is in front of you here.

Why is the same priority not given to keeping carers in employment as it is to supporting parents in the workplace through investment in childcare?

Carole Ford, Scottish Liberal Democrats

It's great to have the living example, asking the question that is very good.

Well, as I said at the start I am actually another living example and between those ages I was caring for two very elderly parents and I have to say there were times when I actually reversed my car out of my driveway and could not think where I was going. I could not, I was under so much time pressure I couldn't work out was I going to work, was I going to the hospital to visit one parent, was I going to the house to prop up the other parent. So I know exactly where people are coming from

I do agree that employers and employment law should recognise this and certainly as a manager of an institution, I never questioned anybody who came to me and said I have to take my elderly mother here, I have to take my father there. I didn't obey the rules of the local authority I have to say and I'm prepared to admit it now since I am no longer employed by them.

But I do think that the employment situation has to recognise the realities of the demographic and the demographic is that people are getting older and older and are going to require care, so that group in the 50 to 64 age group is going to grow because more and more of their parents are going to require support.

Now it applies equally to people who are caring for children, who need support, or for spouses and partners who need support. I would recognise absolutely that employment law needs to be changed to reflect this.

I do agree that the loss of training places in our colleges has hit employment for this group also. Most of the training places, the part-time ones that have gone from the colleges, were also for women.

I have to say as a life-long feminist I find it really sticks in my throat that women in society in general bear the brunt of a lot of this and I would certainly be supporting employment legislation that supported carers. Breaks away from work at critical times, being able to have the right to reduce working hours in the way that women returning from maternity leave can, all of that should be extended to carers who are in exactly the same position in many ways as parents of young children.

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour Party

I think that you make a really important point in drawing a parallel between the attitude towards childcare, to support for carers who are supporting older people.

I think it's the women question; paid carers are disproportionately women and these jobs are poorly paid. You ask the question 'Are they poorly paid because women are doing them, or are women doing them because they are poorly paid?' and it's a vicious circle.

We need to value care workers because that then supports people who are unpaid carers.

The reality is we have spoken already about cuts to local government, care workers will get the living wage, but they are more likely to be doing more for that and there will be fewer of them doing it.

The amount of pressure they are under becomes immense as well and I think we should be aware of that. I do think there is a long-term thing about how we value women's' work and how we learn to share and care. You know the younger generation of fathers are far better at looking after their children than my father's generation was, so there has been progress.

There needs to be more done than that in terms of the jobs that women take up, it may be partly about employment laws, but it is also where it is within the gift of a local authority to be flexible, the way Carol has described, in terms of supporting people, so that they can take time off.

But there is a bigger question in terms of employment, because, Jackson talked about people, you want to get people into work, but there is an awful lot of people who are in work who are living in poverty, who have got job insecurity, get very few guaranteed hours and are under phenomenal pressure.

I think we need to be talking about that as well, how you respect your workforce and some of it must be about understanding the pressures they bring with them to the workplace in terms of care.

I have wrestled with this, I don't think you can put this down as a manifesto commitment. We will all say how much we value unpaid carers, we will all recognise the figure that the chair quoted in what it saves the government in terms of spending, but do we ever then think, if we know that how do we then talk about investing in supporting carers as a means of having a better economy, rather than us being nice to carers.

It actually makes economic sense as well as being socially just and I think we need to have a much more radical view of what that means, because we are all good at saying 'yes we recognise the job you do.' If you really believed it, you would then translate that into policy which means you could be economically active in a job that supports you. Rather than what we hear, that people who end up with caring responsibilities all end up with a cut to their income.

I think that this is a much bigger issue which I know this group will be at the centre of developing.

Jamie Hepburn, Scottish National Party

I would recognise this as a very important area. I thought it was interesting to hear Carol say at the outset she would support employment legislation that supported carers. So would I, but I would certainly remind everyone that even with its enhanced powers, the Scottish Parliament do not have responsibility for employment law, so we are going to have great difficulty in achieving that legislative change through the prism of the Scottish Parliament.

Now that's not a council of despair, because that doesn't mean we can't do anything to try and improve the situation of carers on the ground and indeed hopefully we are responding to that challenge.

To pick up on Johann Lamont's first point, I think is incumbent on us to do more to support those who work in the paid care sector. I think for too long it has been an under-valued form of employment.

I should declare my interest, my brother-in-law works in that sector in the borders and I think it is very important that we respond to the challenge of ensuring that that is a more valued career path.

I think a hugely important part of that is ensuring that it's more adequately recompensed. That's why the Scottish government is taking the decision to invest directly through the process of health and social care integration to ensuring that those paid carers are paid as a minimum, the living wage going forward.

In terms of those unpaid carers who want to retain their employment, I think it's also important that we do everything we can to make sure that happens. I am going to refer again to the Act that we have just passed, the Carers Act. I think this emphasises why it was so important to pass that form of legislation to take it to its first principles, the first principles of that legislation is designed to support carers to have a life alongside caring.

Incidentally, the starting assumption can never be that that the carer should have to retain that care and responsibility, that has to be part of the conversation. But in trying to support a person having a life alongside caring, sustaining employment could be important to that individual carer.

The process of the adult carers support plan and the young carers statement is a very person focused process and when the individual carer says 'Retaining my employment is important to me', then that has to be part of the equation going through that process.

And of course we seek to do more, I referred earlier to the carer positive scheme. I have to call it the carer positive scheme incidentally as we used to call it the kite mark and we quickly learnt that kite mark is a trademarked term, so we are not allowed to call it that anymore.

That is the scheme that I think we've achieved something with so far, but we can achieve a lot more. I referred earlier to the fact that 45 organisations have signed up to it, some 43 more are interested in participating. Right now there is about 152,000 employees working for organisations signed up to it. I reckon that's a drop in the ocean, we need to go further to ensure that more private sector employers in particular are signed up to this important initiative. We need to get out there and explain why it's in their own interest to be signed up to this scheme.

I was very pleased to go and visit Scottish Gas, one of Scotland's largest employers who are signed up to this scheme and indeed have gone further and have initiated their own scheme to support carers, speaking to carers who have benefited directly by that approach but also hearing very directly from the management of that company how they have benefited by that approach.

Because investing that time and care and attention to those who work for them and who might also have unpaid care responsibilities, they are able to retain that skilled workforce rather than losing them to either unemployment or to other employers and having to go through the process of training up new employers.

So it's important that we invest more time and effort in promoting that particular scheme so that more organisations are signed up to it, because it is in their own interest as well as the interest of carers.

We can ensure that we retain that commitment to that important scheme, but also the Carers (Scotland) Act has a critical role to play in supporting each individual carer to retain their employment if that is important to them.

Zara Kitson, Scottish Green Party

I think it's a really good question. I said at the beginning I connected to the general belief that exists in this kind of work, whether paid or unpaid, that it is traditionally women's work. And you know it's a kind of chicken and egg, is it unpaid or under-paid because it's women's work, or is it kind of why it is women's work?

But regardless of that, I think the question you asked is really interesting, because actually whether it's care of young or care of any other age of people, there is a difference here in terms of where we prioritise as a society. The focus is on enabling people who have got childcare responsibilities, largely women, to stay in work, or continue to get back to work, but then we don't seem to have the same political response, or policy response to ensuring that there is that kind of investment to carers.

So I think that's a really good question to be opening up. And one that I'm actually keen to explore more. I think it would be good to focus on what are the barriers there? Is there an element of age discrimination there? Is there an element of we're investing more in our children? Or that's more politically topical, because that's going to earn you more brownie points if you are talking about that? I think these are interesting questions in themselves.

The Greens have said before that we will be pushing forward a £9 per hour minimum living wage plus for people in the care sector and that's only a beginning. It is part of a longer-term strategy and citizens income that ensures that regardless of where you are caring, whether that's for young or the elderly or disabled or people, in any other circumstance, that your financial needs are met. This then enables you to free up space to meet carers demands, but also enables you to re-skill or to re-train or to invest in the things that you would need to get back to work.

We are also specific about investing in an employability programme for unpaid carers to enable them to explore what it is that they need to do to get back to work, if they want to get back to work.

But I think the wider point about gender is really important because that actually goes right across the board. Specifically in our proposals we have named unpaid carers in relation to Equalities, because they are a specific group that is affected. There is a general inequality that extends to other groups as well, it extends to black and minority ethnic communities, it extends to disabled communities, these kind of gender issues are intersectional. But there are things that I think we can push, so within that Bill we want to explore all this and actually remove the barriers where they exist.

But there are things that Scottish Government can do. So we don't have control over our employment legislation, but we do have control over where we spend our money. Now when we are giving away public money to companies, whether that's private sector companies, to deliver on contracts or public sector companies, we can say 'we will give you this money, but in return we want you to do some things to meet some minimum commitments'. Now that can be about, we want you to pay a decent living wage, we want you to ensure that the workforce are protected and that workers have got rights, so if they have to care for an elderly person or somebody else you will ensure that their role is protected and that they have the flexibility that is needed to ensure that they can actually stay in work.

These are things that we can push our Government to do and I think these are quite meaningful.

Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative Party

You know what, I actually thought when that point was being made that it was both an important point and one in which I have not reflected on sufficiently myself. I am not going to make up anything as I go along here, I am actually going to say that I thought the point that was made was really very valid and one that needs to be explored further in the next Parliament. I undertake to do that with colleagues.

Donald MacLeod, Chairperson

Now I am going to exercise chairs prerogative, I am going to give the panel just a minute or two to reflect on things and to give a final comment. I would like to do that with two further questions in mind.

Question Four from Maureen Summers, a carer from Perth

I am the chair of the unpaid carers forum in Perth and Kinross. I would like to ask something that is not going to cost money. What do the panel think about carers being allowed to sit on the Integrated Joint Board but not having voting rights? You are not allowed to vote, now who decided that and why? We are supposed to be equal partners.

Question Five from Christine Bell, Crossroads, Dunoon

I am the Centre Manager for the Crossroads Cowal and Bute. My question is about short breaks. Short breaks are the Cinderella service when it comes to supporting carers. Carers have to fight to get a break, even when they are told they can have one, there isn't always a suitable service in the area, which means you go without. Carers' health needs to be protected and that can't happen without regular breaks from caring. When will carers have a minimum entitlement to a short break?

Carole Ford, Scottish Liberal Democrats

Well on the carer involvement on committees, my experience has been that it's politicians who decide who is going to have a vote and who is not.

Speaking as someone who was once a board member of learning and teaching Scotland, which was the organisation which had responsibility for implementing national education policy, there were 22 people on the board and I was the only one from an educational background. So I absolutely know where you are coming from here.

It is politicians who are concerned that the people on the ground will make demands that they can't meet. Partly because of resourcing, but also because they are coming at it from a different angle. So I would agree with you that that is not acceptable and given that this Act is all about taking carers and putting carers at the centre of decision making, that just seems completely illogical to me.

On the short break issue, my understanding of the new Act is that carers will have an adult support plan, that there will be a plan put in place, not just to support the person who is being cared-for, but also to support the carer and the needs of the carer are part of that and having a short break must be an integral element of any such plan.

Again, from my own experience with young carers being taken off on short breaks, one of our concerns was that because the availability of short breaks is so limited, that they would be offered a short break sometimes at a time of the year which was really critical to their education, so a week before the SQA exams, somebody got the opportunity to go on a short break.

Obviously we didn't stop them, but we were concerned that actually it was having a double whammy effect on their education, the caring responsibility and then their only chance of a break and it comes at the wrong time. So I would agree that there needs to be a better availability. But I also hope that this Act is going to include that if the carer is to be kept sane and working and fulfilled and happy, then a short break at a decent interval is absolutely necessary.

Johann Lamont, Scottish Labour Party

My life's work, what I really believe in is that we bring the real world and politics together. They should be one and the same thing that people are talking about is how people are experiencing it in their lives and I think the 2 examples that are raised there are good examples of where what we claim is happening in the reality and on the ground is entirely different.

I am not sure about the technicalities about the carers voting rights. I am sure the minister will be able to go over the detail of that more than me, but I do know that in other areas when we used to have social inclusion partnerships that was an equal relationship between the people in the community and those who were delivering services in the community.

I absolutely believe that when you value people, you make sure that they have a voice. I am not quite sure about the technicalities of why that's not happening, but I agree if you are going to put carers in a place where they are going to influence, it must feel like they are valued and is not just a box that's getting ticked.

Equally in the question of short breaks, I met with people from my own local carer centre and a woman told me a story; I think it was her granddaughter was getting married, she knew for a year when her granddaughter was getting married and she ended up negotiating with Glasgow City Council for 9 months to get support for her husband to allow her to go to the wedding. It caused a massive amount of stress, she didn't even relax and enjoy the wedding because the care centre for her husband was inappropriate.

It isn't rocket science. If we are saying that we value unpaid carers because of what they bring in terms of saving the public purse, surely we can find a system where somebody says they want a break at this particular time, this suits my needs and I can have confidence in what is happening to my loved one when I'm there.

I am assured this is a cross party issue, probably Labour councils make as many mistakes as others. This is not a party point I am making. I think we just need to be far more radical about these

things. One carer said to me it would be reasonable to be told 'I'm entitled to something and then I get what I want' rather than being told 'you're entitled but you can't have that and you can't have that'

As I said at the beginning, my aspiration is that the politics of this actually come right up against the real world and that's where the difference should be made.

Jamie Hepburn, Scottish National Party

Let me try and address both questions as quickly as I can before the contents of this egg timer run out.

Maureen, I think first of all I'm glad to hear that you are represented on the integration board. I think it's very important that carers voices should be heard through that forum. For the sector it's also very important for sector voice should be heard through that forum, that has been legislated for.

In terms of voting rights, I have to concede this is the first time this has actually been raised with me at any stage, so I guess I'm going to have to need to reflect further, but I think I know the cabinet secretary whose prime responsibility for the whole process of health and social care integration is very clear, the carers voices must be heard as part of that process. If that isn't happening as a result of voting rights then that is something we will need to have a look at. This of course is a new process and we will be looking very close to see how it goes.

Christine your question on short breaks, again I refer back to the Act we have just passed, that is now statutory provision. I would reflect in the first instance of course having widened the scope of who can be defined as a carer, we are now talking about some individuals who provide one hour of care a week, it being encompassed in the provisions of that legislation.

I think we have taken the right approach, that as part of the adult carers support plan and the young carers statement that provision of short breaks must be considered. Looking at the individual needs of the individual carer.

Your issues are regarding availability in localities is a point well made. Under the Act there are requirements for the promotion of the availability of short breaks. I would concede we need to do more work in that regard and we are already working on that issue.

I would make the point that we have committed again to £3m for the short breaks fund. I know that there has been some really creative work done, I was just visiting Lanarkshire carers centre in my own constituency last week and they were telling me about some of the initiatives they have been able to undertake regarding that funding and ensuring that it can still be available to carers on the ground.

Zara Kitson, Scottish Green Party

Okay, so I think at all levels we need to bring people closer to decision making and absolutely that should connect with integrated joint boards.

I think it's ridiculous if people have been invited on the board to have a voice, you don't really have a voice without a vote, so I think that we should be asking why that is. I would be happy to have a chat with you more and find out what's going on and pass that onto my colleagues in the Green Party

Short breaks is something that is in the Green Party's manifesto. I don't think it's in any of the other parties manifestos so it is something that we are taking seriously and that we will push for.

I think there is a wider point that we have already spoken about and explored in relation to funding. I am not going to take up the full 2 minutes, because I think that people are hungry and they are ready for their lunch and we have heard enough of us. I want to hear more from you.

I just want to take this opportunity to thank you all for coming along and for actually posing these questions to us, you have certainly made me think about a few things I hadn't considered before and I want to take those away and reflect on them and feed them back into my party and actually report back and hopefully have more meaningful dialogue with you over lunch and ongoing as well. So I look forward to hanging around and having some conversations with you.

Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative Party

Can I just briefly say, like Johann, I am not actually sure of the technicalities of the voting rights on the integrated boards, so I think you make an important point.

We are obviously seeking to put carers at the heart of the decision making process and really to be at the centre of the evolution of what we do next, so it does sound anomalous. But I don't know the technical answers, I need to find that out for myself.

My colleague Nanette Milne, I am proud of the fact that she moved amendments in the Carers Bill which actually secured short breaks and has been one of the provisions the government accepted. So I am proud of that fact and as I said right at the start, we now have a Bill that has become an Act, we have a duty I think now to ensure that it is properly implemented and that we reflect and monitor the progress of that implementation so that it is effectively implemented.