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Thursday 27 February 2020

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 27 February 2020

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

Crofting Commission (Employment)

1. **Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many people are employed by the Crofting Commission. (S5O-04179)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): The Crofting Commission currently has a staff of 55. None of them is employed directly by the commission. Two are temporary staff provided by an agency and all the others are Scottish Government staff on secondment.

Dr Allan: Despite my constituency having more than a third of all crofts in Scotland, the Crofting Commission can often seem a long way away. What consideration can the Scottish Government give to relocating any jobs or moving any vacant posts at the Crofting Commission to the Western Isles, where they could, perhaps, be closer to the crofting communities that they serve?

Fergus Ewing: Dr Allan has been raising this matter with me for some time on behalf of his constituents. As a result, I agree that it should be considered and I have already had preliminary discussions with officials. I have asked officials to explore the matter further with the Crofting Commission and its board and I will discuss it with the board when I meet it later in the year. I am always looking for ways to strengthen the links between the Crofting Commission and the communities that it serves.

Carrier Bag Charging Scheme (Exemptions)

2. **Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to review exemptions under the plastic bag charging scheme. (S5O-04180)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): We have no plans to review the exemptions under the Single Use Carrier Bags Charge (Scotland) Regulations 2014. Our approach to exemptions was carefully considered and was based on experience in other countries. As far as I am aware, our recent consultation on proposals for legislation on the circular economy, which included a question on increasing the carrier

bag charge, raised no issues on the question of exemptions and a change to the policy.

Annabelle Ewing: On the important issue of the scope of the exemptions regime, the cabinet secretary will be aware that the 2014 plastic bag exemptions include bags for prescription medicines. Some groups, such as the plastic-free Dalgety Bay group, have questioned why that should still be the case. Given that the Welsh Government is reportedly looking again at its exemptions, will the cabinet secretary consider reviewing that exemption to the plastic bag charging scheme in Scotland?

Roseanna Cunningham: The single-use carrier bag charge applies to both plastic and paper bags. The exemption in the regulations for bags for prescription medicines was asked for by pharmacists in order to protect people's privacy when collecting medicines, and that confidentiality remains important. We will, however, monitor any developments in the policy in Wales. I am glad that many pharmacies are already using paper bags when dispensing medicines and appliances, and I encourage other pharmacies to follow their lead.

Police Scotland (Drug Overdose Nasal Spray)

3. **Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the announcement that Police Scotland is developing proposals to trial the use of a lifesaving nasal spray that allows officers to treat victims of a drugs overdose. (S5O-04181)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): I very much welcome the news that Police Scotland is conducting that test of change. We know that naloxone can help to save lives and, as such, improving its provision, particularly among emergency responders, has been a key focus of the early work of the drug deaths task force. We are now seeing the results of that from other sectors, and news of the development follows the recent announcement that the Scottish Ambulance Service made about a pilot of the use of naloxone.

When the test of change that Police Scotland is running concludes, it will be for the force executive to assess the test and decide on the next key steps. As the member would expect, feedback from officers on the ground will undoubtedly be a key part of that assessment.

Shona Robison: Yesterday I attended the drug deaths summit in Glasgow and I was encouraged by the determination that is being shown to tackle the issue on many fronts, including through the role that is played by Police Scotland. Will the cabinet secretary expand on how he sees Police

Scotland's role developing in respect of the crucial work to reduce drug deaths in Scotland?

Humza Yousaf: That is an exceptionally important question. We will continue to look at how the test of change for officers to carry naloxone develops; we will be keeping a close eye on that potentially important development.

The enforcement aspect of Police Scotland's work is incredibly important in disrupting serious and organised crime gangs, which are supplying drugs into our communities; the reducing harm aspect of its work is hugely important, too.

There are examples up and down the country—I suspect that there are examples in the member's constituency—of the police working with multi-agency partners to reduce the harm caused by illicit drugs in our communities.

Enforcement is one aspect of the police's work, but, equally, the police work with partners to reduce harm. It is exceptionally important that they continue to do that work.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Voluntary Sector and Third Sector (Support)

5. Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support the voluntary and third sectors. (S5O-04183)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish Government's draft budget includes investment of £24.6 million for the third sector in 2020-21. That will enable us to continue to work in partnership to deliver on Scotland's national performance framework.

The third sector budget represents just one aspect of overall spend on the third sector from across Scottish Government portfolios. For example, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations has estimated that, in 2018, the income to the third sector from the Government was £472 million, which represents 7.9 per cent of its total income.

The third sector is not only a crucial part of our social and economic infrastructure; it has a key role to play in the reform of our public services—without them, we would not be able to innovate, adapt and maintain our drive to tackle deep-rooted social challenges in the way that we are doing.

Margaret Mitchell: Given the involvement of, and reliance on, the voluntary and third sectors, especially in criminal justice work, does the cabinet secretary agree with Apex Scotland that the annual budget process for justice-related third sector organisations is “extremely wasteful and

inefficient” and that, as a priority, it should be replaced with—at the very least—a more sustainable and effective minimum of three-year funding, which would encourage preventative spend?

Aileen Campbell: I think that everyone agrees that the ideal situation would be to provide three-year budgets and to indicate that length of commitment to organisations that continue to do great work, for which the sector is rightly credited.

However, it does not help that we have a yearly budget, particularly when that budget has been delayed. Indeed, the third sector has made a big plea in that regard, given the uncertainty over the delay to the United Kingdom budget. In addition to that, we have no clarity from the UK Government about the shared prosperity fund. We have continued austerity, and we are continually having to mop up the pieces left by the UK Government.

Again, on a point of principle, we are always willing to work with other parties. The fundamental challenge is that, when we get a budget of only one year, that has a knock-on impact on the programmes and the operations that we try to fund.

We will continue to engage with Margaret Mitchell. However, one of the big points of concern that the third sector has raised with me is the delay to the UK budget.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): This morning, I received an email from Kingdom Off Road Motorcycle Club. I understand that the transition from the community jobs Scotland programme to the no-one left behind model, which is due to start in April 2021, appears to be creating a funding gap. I understand that offers of grants have been withdrawn. Will the cabinet secretary investigate that?

Aileen Campbell: I will happily meet Claire Baker.

In my answer to Margaret Mitchell, I noted that the third sector budget that sits in my portfolio is only a small part of the overall funding that comes from Government. Indeed, on income, the SCVO noted that the third sector has benefited from £472 million-worth of funding, from across different portfolios.

I will endeavour to meet Claire Baker to talk about that issue—because the funding to which she referred may sit in another part of Government—so that she can get clarity and the organisation that she mentioned can get the support that it may require.

City Region and Regional Growth Deals (Outcomes)

6. Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it measures the outcomes of city and regional growth deals. (S5O-04184)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): The deals are three-way partnerships between the Scottish Government, the United Kingdom Government and regional partners. It is incumbent on all partners to demonstrate impact through appropriate monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

The deals are long-term investments delivered over 10 years or more, and outcomes will take some time to develop, but we can already see returns for our economy and our communities. For example, our investment in the Glasgow city region deal is transforming Sighthill, one of our most deprived areas, for the benefit of future generations.

Alison Harris: A recent report by Audit Scotland stated that

“The Scottish Government needs to be clearer”

about what it wants from city region deals, particularly in relation to how success is measured and the sustainability of economic growth. I appreciate that the majority of city and regional growth deals are under way, but will the cabinet secretary commit that, for future long-term infrastructure projects, those measures will be in place from the outset?

Michael Matheson: We welcome Audit Scotland’s report, which made a number of recommendations for regional partners and the Scottish Government. Disappointingly, it did not look at the United Kingdom Government element of those deals, because that is not within its remit. However, the recommendations broadly apply to the UK Government as well. The Scottish Government’s inclusive growth outcome framework, which was refreshed in December 2019, will assist the Scottish Government element of the deals to be better assessed, and to demonstrate the impact that the deals are having and support regional partners. As yet, it is not clear what the UK Government will do to make sure that we have greater sight of the impact that its investment is making through city and regional growth deals.

The Presiding Officer: Question 7 was not lodged.

Antisocial Behaviour (Off-road Vehicles)

8. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is

taking to address antisocial behaviour on quad bikes and similar off-road vehicles. (S5O-04186)

The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham): I am strongly committed to tackling all forms of antisocial behaviour and was pleased to hear from Police Scotland about the success that the improving Levenmouth together project has had in tackling the antisocial use of motorcycles. A range of legislative powers is available to tackle antisocial behaviour, but successful reductions in antisocial behaviour will be best achieved through that type of effective partnership working. Although the Scottish Government remains committed to ensuring that the police and local authorities have powers available to them that are effective and fit for purpose, I have asked my officials to consider whether the Levenmouth initiative could be highlighted as an example of best practice that could be adopted in other areas experiencing similar problems.

Claire Baker: I have been raising the issue for a number of years, but a constituent still contacted me last week to describe a near miss between his family and a quad bike user in a public park. Further to the letter that I received from the minister in October, can she say more about what progress, if any, has been made in scoping a national strategy that makes clear to retailers and users of off-road vehicles that it is against the law to use them in public spaces, and that doing so creates a danger to the safety of members of the public and is antisocial behaviour that will not be tolerated?

Ash Denham: I am sorry to hear that there has been a problem in parks in Fife, especially as those are places where young children should be able to play in what should be safe surroundings without any fear of traffic. I have not received any information on that issue, but I suggest that the lessons learned from the good practice collected through the improving Levenmouth together project should be shared with the areas of Fife that are experiencing problems.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Antisocial behaviour involving reckless and illegal driving over farmland is part of a wider rural crime issue. The rural crime rate is rising and antisocial motocross, bike theft, machinery damage and rural fuel theft are damaging rural communities. The National Rural Crime Network 2018 survey stated that 27 per cent of those living in rural areas felt that crimes reported were not being dealt with sufficiently. Will the minister act on calls from rural organisations such as the Countryside Alliance to level up funding in areas where tackling rural crime is difficult, and will she work with Police Scotland to further develop its Scottish partnership against rural crime, or SPARC, programme?

Ash Denham: I would be happy to meet the member to discuss some elements of her question, although parts of it may have strayed into a colleague's portfolio. The Scottish Government fully supports the police, our local authorities and court services to take appropriate and proportionate action to tackle antisocial behaviour. We believe that the range of powers already available to authorities allows them to deal effectively with antisocial behaviour, regardless of the circumstances. However, we are always open to listening to authorities and, indeed, to members if they have suggestions on how we can improve our approach to tackling antisocial behaviour for the benefit of all our communities.

Transport Links (West Scotland)

9. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve transport links in West Scotland. (S5O-04187)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government is investing in a range of transport improvements in the west of Scotland, including the opening of the £30 million A737 Dalry bypass, the £5 million Den realignment and continuing design work for the schemes at Beith and on the A82. That is alongside the £350,000 that is being spent on new active travel measures in Inverclyde and North Ayrshire and the £2.5 million that is being invested in extending the life of the Gourrock ferry terminal linkspan to improve the resilience of the Bute and Arran ferries for users of those services. We are also refurbishing the region's rail fleet as part of a £475 million national programme.

Looking forward, the strategic transport projects review is considering future investment priorities for the strategic transport network.

Neil Bibby: My constituents have consistently raised concerns about ScotRail services. This week's transport statistics confirm that, since the so-called "world-leading" deal with Abellio, passenger satisfaction with ScotRail has fallen across the board.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that listening to passengers as well as the workers is key to driving improvements in my region and elsewhere? Will he therefore consider the issue of passenger and trade union representation in a future publicly owned ScotRail? Will he also consider how automatic compensation could be introduced to improve service standards for passengers?

Michael Matheson: The member raises a number of important points, but he will be aware that the recently published statistics on passenger

satisfaction with ScotRail showed a marked improvement over the course of the past year, and further work is to be undertaken on that. In some cases, the increase was the largest for any rail operator in the UK providing regional passenger services. However, it is clear that there is more to be done.

In relation to Mr Bibby's wider point about public ownership of our railways, I very much hope that it is now the Labour Party's position to support the full devolution of all rail powers to this Parliament to allow us to be able to take that option. To date, the Labour Party has refused to back that, and I hope that it will now commit to supporting this Parliament being given the power to make the changes that are necessary to deliver on that priority.

River Esk (Pollution)

10. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what is being done to find a long-term solution to the pollution issue in the River Esk in the Midlothian North and Musselburgh constituency. (S5O-04188)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): I am, of course, aware of the recent pollution incident in the River Esk. Scottish Water is committed to cleaning up any sewage-related debris arising from any discharges in storm conditions. In addition, Scottish Water is making regular checks along the River Esk for any signs of sewer debris and is actively working to encourage people to stop flushing the wrong items.

In order to minimise the risk from rural diffuse pollution to water quality on the north and south Esk, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency has committed to visiting farms in the catchment during 2020 and working with land managers to help to reduce pollution.

Colin Beattie: Does the cabinet secretary think that it is acceptable to allow sewage to flow into local bodies of water, given that there are 17 sewage outflows along the River Esk in my constituency? Will she take action to encourage SEPA to reduce the sewage that goes into rivers and streams through outfall pipes?

Roseanna Cunningham: Operation of the sewer network is a matter for Scottish Water. As the member will be aware, discharges from outfalls generally occur during extreme storm conditions, not during regular operation. Scottish Water has committed to investigate any recurring network issues.

As I indicated in my earlier answer, SEPA intends to visit farms in the catchment and work

with land managers in respect of the diffuse pollution that might emanate from land use.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general questions. We are a minute early, but I hope that members are happy to proceed to First Minister's question time.

First Minister's Question Time

11:59

Exam Results (Higher Pass Rate)

1. **Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** Last summer, exam results showed that the higher pass rate had dropped for the fourth year in a row. At the time, John Swinney said:

"These are a strong set of results".

Is that still the Government's official position?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, it is. Three quarters of young people passed higher exams, and I think that that is a good performance.

As I have said previously, although exam result performance will fluctuate from year to year, it is important that the Scottish Government assesses the underlying reasons behind that, and that is what we have done. As I have also said repeatedly, although there are year-on-year fluctuations, the long-term trend in Scottish education, particularly in exam passes, is improving. Whether we are looking at passes at level 5 or performance at level 6, which is higher, we see more young people leaving school with these qualifications than was the case when this Government took office. We will continue to press ahead with those improvements.

Jackson Carlaw: After 13 tricky years of the Scottish National Party being in power, that answer is certainly brave, especially when we consider the contents of the report that the Deputy First Minister commissioned into Scotland's education crisis, which was slipped out under cover of darkness at the end of last week. In public, he praises supposedly strong results but, in private, he is interested in a detailed analysis of the reported reduction in the A to C rate at higher level. In other words, the Deputy First Minister was alarmed, as we all were, at the plummeting standards in Scotland's schools.

It gets worse. The most recent drop in higher pass rates was mostly due to falls in crucial subjects such as English, maths and history. Just a few weeks ago, the First Minister asserted to me that results in those subjects were improving. I ask the First Minister again: is it still her position that the falling exam pass rates represent a strong set of results?

The First Minister: If Jackson Carlaw thinks that 8 pm on a Thursday evening is late, that says more about his work rate than it does about anything to do with the Scottish Government.

On John Swinney's candour, I refer Jackson Carlaw to the press release that the Deputy First Minister issued on 6 August last year, which was the day on which the exam results were published. He said:

"there has been a fall in the overall pass rate."

That is not hiding things; that is being open and transparent.

Let us get back to the core issue of the trend of improvement. Jackson Carlaw said that my answer was "brave", but I believe that it was accurate. Let us look at the figures step by step.

In 2006-07, when this Government took office, 71.1 per cent of young people left school with a level 5 qualification. In the figures for 2018-19, which were published this week, the figure was 85.1 per cent. Let us look at higher performance. In 2006-07, the percentage of young people leaving school with a higher was 41.6 per cent. In the most recent statistics, for 2018-19, the figure was 60.5 per cent. As I have also said many times in the past, more young people are now leaving school with at least five passes at higher level.

This Government will never shy away from the improvements that need to be made. If Jackson Carlaw does not want to take my word for the improvements in and strength of Scottish education, perhaps he should pay attention to what the president of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland said about "significant progress" having been made in recent years or the international experts who advise the Scottish Government saying how impressed they are by the efforts of the Government to target inequity and inequality. In the words of one of them last week, the Scottish education system is

"doing everything that we would expect a high-performing system to do."

That is the reality, and we will continue to press forward with those improvements.

Jackson Carlaw: Well, it has taken a long time, but the First Minister has finally taken up the habit of her predecessor in regularly patting herself on the back for a performance that everybody else understands is far from the success she paints it to be. I note that she did not quote Professor Lindsay Paterson; she always chooses the selective quotes of people who will cheerlead for her argument.

Members: So do you.

Jackson Carlaw: I have not quoted anybody.

It gets worse. Just this month, Mr Swinney told Parliament that the Scottish Government had embarked on reforms that are closing the attainment gap and raising standards. However,

his report states exactly the opposite. It says very clearly:

"candidates who are lower attaining are not improving at the same rate as higher attaining young people."

Again, in public he is saying that everything is fine and the gap is closing, as the First Minister did—there is nothing to see here—when, in private, months before, his civil servants told him something categorically different. Does the First Minister really think that her Government has been open and transparent with pupils, parents and the public?

The First Minister: I do. I am not patting myself or the Deputy First Minister on the back; I am patting on the back the young people of Scotland, who are delivering improvements. I know that Jackson Carlaw wants to talk down the Scottish education system, but he should not be allowed to do so.

Jackson Carlaw talks about the attainment gap, so let us look at figures that were published on Tuesday. The gap between those from the most and least deprived communities who are in a positive destination is now at a record low—it is less than half what it used to be. The hard fact of the matter is that there are now more young people leaving school with qualifications than was the case when this Government took office. Despite the best efforts of Jackson Carlaw to berate the achievements of Scottish young people, we will continue to support them, their parents and their teachers and continue to drive forward the improvements in our classrooms.

Jackson Carlaw: Pupils, parents and teachers are not patting the First Minister on the back for her performance. The cumulative denial will no longer wash, because not only did the cabinet secretary commission a report into a problem that he said did not exist and then contradict what it said, but he refused to publish it. Finally, it was brought out on a Thursday night, when the Government knew that it could not be held to account in the chamber for yet further evidence of its failure in government. The cabinet secretary obviously hoped that no one would notice. When he finally faced the music, he had the audacity to say—with a straight face—to the media that it takes time to improve an education system.

I say to the First Minister that time is up. Her Government has had 13 long years in power—13 years of failure. How much longer does she and this dreadful Government need?

The First Minister: Annie Wells comes to mind when I look across at Jackson Carlaw—he is clearly angry that people keep voting for the SNP in elections.

It is interesting that Jackson Carlaw has not been able to argue with any of the statistics that I have given him today, because those statistics showing improvement in our education system are true. We come back to nonsense about publishing something—note that we did not refuse to publish it—at 8 o'clock in the evening. John Swinney was on the radio the first thing in the morning the day after, so perhaps Jackson Carlaw was not only in his bed at 8 o'clock on Thursday night but was not up to hear John Swinney on the radio early the next morning either.

John Swinney answered a topical question in the chamber on Tuesday afternoon, and we are in the chamber now, discussing the issue. The fact that Jackson Carlaw has to talk about the process issues shows that, on the substance, he knows that he is in the wrong. Scottish education is improving, and we will continue to push forward with the improvements. Jackson Carlaw does not like it, but it is in the interests of pupils the length and breadth of this country.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Out-of-hours General Practitioner Services)

2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):

Last week, I raised with the First Minister the crisis in Scotland's general practitioner and primary care services. This week, Scotland's largest health board, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, suspended all out-of-hours GP services at five centres due to a shortage of doctors. Does the First Minister accept that she bears any responsibility or accountability for that?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The fact that I am standing here answering questions shows that I believe, as is right and proper, that I am accountable on these issues.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has announced temporary changes while it has a significant and sustained recruitment campaign. It has been made clear to the health board, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will continue to make it clear, that it has a responsibility to ensure that there are improvements and that its out-of-hours services meet the varied needs of its local population.

It is important to note that a full home visiting service is maintained across all of Greater Glasgow and Clyde and that transport is made available to those who require it. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will continue to work with the board to ensure that improvements are made to allow all the services to operate in the way in which patients expect them to.

Richard Leonard: They are neither changes or improvements; they are closures.

Only last month, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport told a national newspaper:

“There is a wee plan in place now with Greater Glasgow and Clyde to make that”

out-of-hours

“service more robust.”

This week, five out-of-hours services have closed. If that is what happens when the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has “a wee plan”, let us hope that she does not have any more.

Last week, I warned the First Minister that cuts to GP services will hit accident and emergency waiting times. Already this year, at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital in Glasgow, one in three people have waited more than four hours in the accident and emergency department. GP services are under threat, out-of-hours GP services are closing and A and E waiting times are going up. The Government talks of a whole-system approach. Is that how the First Minister defines a whole-system approach, or is it a whole-system failure?

The First Minister: A and E waiting times are improving; they remain the best in the whole of the United Kingdom and significantly better than in Wales, where Labour is in government. I come back to—[*Interruption.*] As I said last week, at the centre of that proposition from Richard Leonard is that the health service in Scotland would be better if Labour were in government. We have proof that that is not the case, because where Labour is in government—in Wales—the health service is performing significantly worse than it is in Scotland.

I come back to the plan, which Richard Leonard thinks is not important, that is in place for Greater Glasgow and Clyde. It includes a significant and sustained recruitment campaign for GPs and advanced nurse practitioners, service remodelling to create multidisciplinary teams, a review of GP pay rates to ensure that they are comparable with those in other boards and the introduction of an appropriate appointment system. Temporary changes have been made to allow those improvements to be implemented. In the meantime, GPs undertake home visits and a patient transport system is in place across Glasgow to take patients to out-of-hours services. Professor Sir Lewis Ritchie, who led on the national review of out-of-hours services, has agreed to provide support to the board as it improves those services. That is the kind of action that we need to see, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will hold the board firmly to account on that.

Richard Leonard: Those services are not improving; they are closing. I accept that, last week, the First Minister might have mistakenly

thought that Tarbolton was in Wales, but she knows that Glasgow, Inverclyde royal hospital, Easterhouse, Gartnavel, Greenock and the Queen Elizabeth university hospital are in Scotland.

The First Minister talks a lot about financial inputs, but people are concerned about patient outcomes. It is not only in accident and emergency where the Government is not meeting its commitments or keeping its promises. This week, it was confirmed that treatment time guarantees are still being missed as well. Last year, they were missed 82,000 times; as many as one in four people were not treated in time. It is not enough for the First Minister to apologise to patients who wait too long, to families who are anxious and in distress or to NHS staff who are underresourced, undervalued and overstretched. It is time that the First Minister recognised her accountability, took responsibility and finally started meeting her NHS targets.

The First Minister: I will try to take on all the issues that Richard Leonard raised in that series of questions.

The statistics that were published this week show an improvement in treatment time guarantee performance, compared to the previous quarter. Our accident and emergency performance also improved in the past week and remains the best in the whole of the UK.

With regard to GPs, Labour is sensitive about its performance in Wales—and so it should be. However, with regard to Tarbolton, Richard Leonard should reflect on what he said last week, when he was inaccurate about the health secretary. In Tarbolton, the issue is not about closure; it is about a change of location, and the same number of GPs will serve the same number of patients. A number of initiatives are under way to make sure that we recruit more GPs and continue to deliver excellent health services across the country.

Interestingly, neither Richard Leonard nor Jackson Carlaw has mentioned today's budget, because they are still trying to work out how they will justify voting against it when it delivers everything that they asked for. There is a record £15 billion of funding for our national health service to support the record numbers of people who work in it. Per head of population, spending in our national health service is higher than in other parts of the UK. That is the record of this Scottish National Party Government and we will continue to deliver the best national health service of any country in the UK.

Professor Sam Eljamel

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The First Minister will be well aware of the news earlier

in the week that revealed that the former NHS Tayside surgeon Professor Sam Eljamel is now practising in Libya. She will also be aware of the very considerable on-going distress that that is causing to his former patients in Scotland, who have already been waiting two years to find out whether there will be a criminal prosecution following his alleged malpractice in Scotland. I know that the First Minister cannot comment on on-going police inquiries, but what can the Scottish Government do to offer some support to Professor Eljamel's patients in Scotland, who have been so badly traumatised?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I share Liz Smith's concern about the report that we read earlier in the week. If there is any support that the Scottish Government can give to patients of the surgeon, we are more than happy to consider it. If there are constituents of Liz Smith who want to be in touch with us, we would be happy to make that contact.

On the surgeon's ability to practise, I of course cannot comment on on-going police investigations. However, Liz Smith will also be aware that whether a surgeon remains able to practise is a matter for the General Medical Council, and not the Scottish Government; we do not have power over that. Suffice to say, however, that I understand and share the concerns that have been raised, and certainly want to be in a position to offer whatever support we can to patients who are affected.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (Shortages)

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I have been contacted by women who are suffering due to United Kingdom-wide shortages of HRT. One woman told me just this morning that

"Stopping medication abruptly can have all kinds of negative effects ... Until there is a re-established supply it feels as though you just have to wait feeling less than yourself until it becomes resolved ... All the issues you were trying to combat sweats, mood swings etc, come back there must be woman struggling day to day possibly in silence as they feel they cannot turn to their employer."

I will write to Matt Hancock, the UK Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, outlining the blight that is being caused to the lives of women in my constituency, who I represent, to ask what he can do to tackle the shortage. We surely have a common cause across the UK on the matter. How can the Scottish Government assist?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I know that many women have very real concerns about shortages of HRT. As Bob Doris rightly said, the implications of that for many women can, and will, be severe. Many women will suffer very debilitating symptoms and—as Bob Doris also

rightly said—many will suffer in silence. It is an unacceptable situation, which people are rightly concerned about.

The supply of medicines is, of course, reserved to the UK Government. We continue to press it to work very closely with the affected companies to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. Last month, the chief pharmaceutical officer for Scotland wrote to all national health service boards, general practitioners and community pharmacists to advise them about the latest supply position and to provide advice about appropriate HRT products for patients who are affected by the supply issues.

Any disruptions in the availability of drugs, including HRT, will be concerning to those who have been prescribed them, and anybody who is affected by the disruption should discuss alternative treatment options with their doctor in the first instance.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Out-of-hours Services)

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde announced the complete suspension of out-of-hours services in Inverclyde, and their effective closure at sites across Glasgow and in my constituency at the Vale of Leven hospital. That most basic of emergency services will no longer operate between 5 pm and midnight, or at weekends, forcing my constituents to travel more than 20 miles to get to an accident and emergency service. That will simply add to the waiting times at A and E, instead of treating people locally.

I say to the First Minister that temporary is 18 months to two years. The report from Sir Lewis Ritchie was five years ago. The health board has had years to sort out the problem; however, it has instead stuck its head in the sand and done nothing.

Will the First Minister instruct the health board to reverse the decision; agree that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will meet me and local campaigners, who are devastated by the action; and—while she is at it—sack the chair and chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde for gross incompetence?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Jackie Baillie will be aware that it was partly concern about out-of-hours performance that led the health secretary to elevate the board to level 4 of the monitoring regime. I am advised by the health secretary that she has asked Calum Campbell, who has been appointed by the Scottish Government as the board's turnaround director, to meet with and speak to Jackie Baillie about the

local issues in her constituency. If that contact has not yet been made, it will be made shortly.

The changes are temporary. We want the health board to prioritise improvements to the services at the Vale of Leven and Inverclyde. We see that as a priority, and we will work closely with the board as it takes forward the other improvements that it is required to make.

Dyce Clydesdale Bank Branch (Proposed Closure)

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind): In November 2014, Clydesdale Bank trumpeted investment in and refurbishment of its branch in Dyce in my constituency, but yesterday the bank announced plans to close the branch in September of this year. That follows the closure of the village's RBS and the significant reduction in the opening hours of the village's TSB. Does the First Minister share my concern with the approach that is being taken, which will be detrimental to my constituents and local businesses? Although the decision is ultimately a commercial one, will the Scottish Government do what it can to raise the matter and seek to convince Virgin Money, which owns Clydesdale, to think again?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I understand those concerns. Closures of bank branches cause understandable concerns, particularly in more rural communities. We discuss the issue regularly with different banks, and we will continue to do so. I am sure that Fiona Hyslop, who is the new economy secretary, would be happy to discuss the issue further with Mark McDonald and raise it again with banks generally and with the Clydesdale Bank in particular.

Fife Integration Joint Board (Overspend)

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Accounts Commission is seriously concerned regarding the slow progress of Fife's integration joint board and anticipates another overspend in excess of £10 million this year. Those significant financial pressures are putting health and social care at risk. What urgent action will the Scottish Government take to ensure that the clear financial sustainability issues are addressed?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Those issues are under discussion. The health secretary has had recent discussions about the issue. The part of the local government settlement in the budget that involves social care has at its heart the need to address such issues in Fife and more generally. I am sure that the health secretary would be happy to send a progress and update report to the member in due course.

Donald Trump (Financial Transactions)

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I welcome the decision to reject the Coul links development. It seems that some lessons may have been learned since Donald Trump was allowed to trash the Menie estate. However, big questions remain over Trump's business dealings in Scotland. The purchase of the Menie estate and the Turnberry golf resort were part of Trump's huge cash spending spree in the midst of a global financial crisis, while his son was bragging about

"money pouring in from Russia".

The US House Of Representatives has heard testimony that states:

"we saw patterns of buying and selling that we thought were suggestive of money laundering".

The testimony went on to express particular concern about

"the golf courses in Scotland and Ireland."

Is the First Minister aware that, nearly a year ago, the campaigning organisation Avaaz sent her a briefing setting out those concerns in great detail and proposing action that is within the power of the Scottish Government? That group has heard nothing back since the summer. Can the First Minister tell us what action has been taken since that report was received?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): No, I cannot do that today, but I am happy to look at the correspondence and get back to Patrick Harvie in detail. I think that most members would recognise that I am no defender of Donald Trump or of his politics or any of his other dealings. Where there are concerns about alleged criminality in Scotland—I think that I heard Patrick Harvie mention that—those would be matters for the police and the Crown Office to investigate; they would not be matters for me to investigate. I hope that members across the chamber will understand and respect the very good reasons for that.

On the specific correspondence, I will certainly check back, through my office, to see what happened after it was received and what action, if any, was taken, and I will get back to Patrick Harvie on that as quickly as possible.

Patrick Harvie: The First Minister is right that criminality in Scotland would be a matter for the law officers and prosecutors, but there are also questions for the Scottish ministers leading the Scottish Government. Under the Criminal Finances Act 2017, the Government has powers that are designed for just such a situation. Trump's known sources of income do not explain where the money came from for those huge cash transactions. There are reasonable grounds for suspecting that his lawfully obtained income is insufficient.

Trump is a "politically exposed person" under that act, and there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that he or people who he is connected with have been involved in serious crime—indeed, some of them have pleaded guilty.

Scottish ministers can apply via the Court of Session for an unexplained wealth order—a tool designed for precisely such situations. We need to have confidence that the Government will show leadership and use the powers available to it. Will the First Minister seek an unexplained wealth order and make it clear that Scotland is not a country where anyone with enough money can buy whatever land and property they want, with no questions asked?

The First Minister: Scotland is certainly not, and should never be, that kind of country. Patrick Harvie is raising serious issues to which I do not want to give answers without having the full information in front of me. I undertake to come back to him after I have had a chance to look into the matter in more detail.

As I said, and Patrick Harvie accepted, issues of alleged criminality are not for me to investigate. Beyond that—I am not talking about the specifics because it would be wrong for me to do so without having properly looked at the matter—in general terms, when the Scottish Government is taking legal action of any nature, it may also be inappropriate, or certainly ill advised, for me to talk about it in the chamber in detail. If any action in any subject is a matter for legal proceedings, a lot of sensitivity and respect for due process must be attached to that.

I take the question seriously. I will look into the correspondence that Patrick Harvie referred to and come back to him as soon as possible with as full an answer as it is possible for me to give, with all the caveats that I have injected into my answer so far, which I hope he understands.

Heathrow Expansion

4. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Two hours ago, the Court of Appeal ruled against the third runway at Heathrow. I asked the First Minister about her support for Heathrow last May, but she stood firm. I asked her again in January and she refused to budge. Is the First Minister glad that a court has stopped Heathrow expansion?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Willie Rennie mischaracterises my answers to him. The decision on whether there will be a third runway at Heathrow is not one for me or my Government. I pointed out to him that the last time the issue came to a vote in the House of Commons, Scottish National Party MPs did not vote in favour of it. I understand that the court has ruled this

morning in the way that Willie Rennie said. I have not had the opportunity to look at the reasons behind that ruling, but I want to see all policies from both the Scottish and Westminster Governments aligning with our climate change ambitions. In Scotland's case, that is the need to get to a net zero position by 2045. Increasingly, questions have been raised, understandably and rightly, about whether expanding Heathrow in that way would align with that climate change responsibility. I hope that that is clear to Willie Rennie. I am not sure how I can make my position any clearer. As far as the court is concerned, such matters are always for the courts.

Willie Rennie: All that waffle will not tackle climate change. The court found that the United Kingdom Government had failed to carry out an environmental assessment of its Paris climate change commitments. The Scottish Government made exactly the same mistake when it signed the memorandum of understanding on Heathrow. Our parliamentary questions found that no climate change assessment had been made by Scottish ministers. They missed 600,000 tonnes of emissions, but the First Minister told us not to worry because the Tories were taking care of the environmental side of things. That looks pretty stupid today. Will the First Minister confirm that she is finally ripping up her agreement in support of Heathrow expansion?

The First Minister: I do not know how to make it clearer to Willie Rennie that the decision on Heathrow expansion is not for the Scottish Government. It is not within our power or areas of responsibility. We said that, if it was going ahead, any economic benefit should not miss out Scotland. I hope that Willie Rennie understands that. In terms of our climate change ambitions, unlike the UK Government we include emissions from aviation in the calculation of our overall emissions. Again, Willie Rennie should be aware—I am sure that I have pointed it out in the chamber previously—that we are in the latter stages of the process of updating our climate change action plan, which will be published in April. We are looking right across Government at all our policies—

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Actions, not words!

The First Minister: I am being heckled by Mike Rumbles about action, but the climate change plan is all about actions to meet our world-leading targets. That is what the Parliament demanded that the Government do. I suggest that, instead of getting up and calling for things that are outwith the powers of the Scottish Government, Willie Rennie should put his shoulder to the wheel and look at the actions that the Government, the

country and the Parliament have to take—that is exactly what my Government is doing.

The Presiding Officer: There are a lot of constituency questions to get through.

Drug Summit

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Annemarie Ward of drug death action group, Faces & Voices of Recovery UK, said that yesterday's drug summit

"was nothing more than a party political broadcast for the SNP".

She went on to say:

"No one in the Scottish Government is willing to take responsibility for what's actually under their control".

As well as being in recovery for decades, Annemarie is also a member of the SNP. On Monday, she's going to another funeral of a friend who died from drugs. She is asking why the Scottish Government keeps blaming Westminster when it has the powers to fund rehab beds now.

Will the First Minister put politics aside and back the cross-party calls for £15.4 million for residential rehab?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will listen carefully to all those with lived experience, including Annemarie Ward. I think her views deserve to be treated absolutely seriously, just like the views of anyone else.

However, for Annie Wells to say that about yesterday's summit does a real disservice to all the people who contributed to the summit. That summit discussed issues that are important to people with lived experience, and there was discussion on changes in the law that are required. The task force reported on its recommendations and a range of initiatives and suggestions were raised yesterday that we hope will feed into the United Kingdom Government's summit that is being held today.

I have two other points to make. On funding, the draft budget that was published a few weeks ago included an increase in funding of £12.7 million to reduce harm related to drugs. I can say today that the finance secretary will confirm this afternoon that we intend to go further than that: instead of an addition of £12.7 million, there will be an additional £20 million of funding from health dedicated to reducing harm from drugs. That will support the recommendations that the task force makes. We are serious about this issue and we are serious about working with anybody and everybody to tackle what is a public health emergency.

On the issue of UK Government action, we absolutely recognise our responsibility, and the range of actions that we are taking and the funding that we are dedicating to the issue shows that, but

it is the case that there was a lot of consensus yesterday that law changes are also needed, including around having a safe consumption room, which is a responsibility that lies with the UK Government. I absolutely take my responsibility—I wish that we had a similar approach from the UK Government so that we could genuinely put party politics aside and work together in the interests of those who need us to do exactly that.

Islamophobia

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Presiding Officer,

“He started screaming in my face, that I should go home, that I was a terrorist. Again, he used the ‘p’ word, swearing at me, telling me I wasn’t welcome here.”

Those are the words of Lindsay Taylor, a Scots-born Muslim who wears a hijab. She goes on to say:

“I don’t use public transport. I don’t walk about streets I am unaware of. It has altered my behaviour.”

The initial findings of our public inquiry into Islamophobia will shock the majority of Scots, but sadly they will not surprise Scottish Muslims. The inquiry has found that a third of Muslims say that Islamophobia is an everyday issue, 80 per cent have experienced Islamophobia and 80 per cent believe that it is getting worse. That impacts education, policing, communities, transport and employability.

Will the First Minister commit to ensuring that all relevant Scottish Government departments make themselves available to support the work of the inquiry? I know that there are lots of issues that divide people in this chamber and in the country, but the fight against all forms of prejudice and hatred is a fight that must unite us all.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will give that commitment on the part of the Scottish Government that the Government and its agencies will make themselves available to co-operate with the inquiry. As Anas Sarwar said, the findings coming out of the inquiry will shock many people, but unfortunately, they do not shock Muslims and, I am sad to say, they do not entirely shock me either, because I regularly hear from Muslim friends and constituents about the completely unacceptable and heinous abuse that they are the victims of almost daily. It is unacceptable. It shames our country and, whatever else we may disagree or divide on, we must unite to stamp it out. Bigotry, racism, prejudice, antisemitism, Islamophobia and prejudice of any shape, form or nature is completely unacceptable. That is not who we are. We must never tolerate it and we must come together to make sure that it can be eradicated once and for all.

Flooding (Economic Impact)

5. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the economic impact has been this year of flooding. (S5F-04002)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): There is no doubt that the impact of flooding can be significant. When flooding occurs communities, businesses and infrastructure suffer, with the economic impact depending on the location, source, extent and duration of the flooding. There are other significant consequences that, although not economic, are very important, including stress and anxiety for people who are affected, and travel disruption.

Managing flood risk is a priority for the Government. We invest a minimum of £42 million on flood-protection measures each year, as well as supporting the Scottish Environment Protection Agency’s flood-forecasting service and the Scottish Flood Forum.

We are also aware of the threat of increased flooding that is posed by climate change, which is why we are leading the way in the transition to net zero emissions.

Stuart McMillan: Last weekend, the A8 trunk road from Langbank into Inverclyde was closed due to flooding, and there were reports of people sleeping in their vehicles overnight. That was in addition to the usual flooding that happens in my constituency. Although constituents might have been able to use a back road to get into Inverclyde, visitors to the area and drivers who were delivering goods to businesses will have struggled to reach my constituency at the weekend.

Will the First Minister support my calls for improvements to the current roads and flood-prevention infrastructure, and for a feasibility study into a bypass as a solution for improving economic opportunity and the health needs of my constituency?

The First Minister: The second strategic transport project review is now under way and is considering improvements to the transport network across Scotland, including—I can say today—the A8 in Stuart McMillan’s constituency. The review will appraise a range of potential interventions, including upgrades to the A8 through Inverclyde. That will ensure that our transport investment plans remain relevant to delivery of the outcomes of the new national transport strategy, and that they continue to be the correct decisions for the public purse.

Surface water flooding can be caused by a complex interaction of many sources of flooding. I understand that Scottish Water and Inverclyde

Council are working together to consider the best way of tackling flooding issues in Inverclyde.

Playing Music (Educational Benefits)

6. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government considers to be the educational benefits of learning to play music. (S5F-03992)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Music education provides significant benefits to children and young people. It gives them opportunities to be creative and contributes greatly to their mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. That is why expressive arts, which includes music, is one of the eight core areas of the curriculum in Scotland.

It is for local authorities to decide how to provide music education, depending on local circumstances, priorities and traditions. In taking those decisions, local authorities should consider the undoubted benefits that learning musical instruments can have on wellbeing and attainment.

Brian Whittle: I do not know how you can reconcile that answer with the fact that the Government refuses to class music tuition as being core to the curriculum. In areas where councils are now charging for music tuition—26 out of the 32 councils—uptake of music tuition has plummeted by as much as 45 per cent.

Like sport, art and drama, access to music tuition is increasingly available only to those who can afford it. First Minister, you never miss an opportunity to declare your desire to tackle inequality. Surely you must recognise that by persisting with such policies you are reducing opportunities for our children to participate and excel, and are actually driving inequality.

The Presiding Officer: I urge members not to use the term “you”. Refer to the First Minister by her title.

The First Minister: That was more polite than the Tories usually are, but I will let that go.

On a point of fact, in the broad general education pupils are entitled to music as one of the eight core areas of the curriculum. Secondly, the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and I have made it clear that we are concerned by moves by local authorities to limit access to musical instrument tuition. All local authorities should consider the Education and Skills Committee’s recommendation that music tuition be provided free of charge.

Of course, we will have the budget debate in Parliament this afternoon. We were already providing a fair deal for local authorities, and as a

result of the deal that was announced yesterday, an additional £95 million will go to local authorities for resource spending, which should make it easier for councils that are struggling to keep music tuition free.

The Conservatives asked us specifically to put an extra £95 million into the revenue budget of local government. Given that we have done that, perhaps the question for the Tories to answer is whether they will they back the budget or vote against the money that is needed for the very things, including music education, that they stand up in the chamber and demand.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Does the First Minister recognise the positive influence that two successful bands from Kilmarnock—Biffy Clyro and Fatherson—are having on young people and elsewhere? Their example is opening up for young people the prospect of successful careers in the world of music, which is well provided for in East Ayrshire.

The First Minister: As an Ayrshire girl, I am always delighted to celebrate success from Ayrshire, including Kilmarnock.

Both the bands that Willie Coffey referenced are excellent and inspirational. They also illustrate the importance of giving young people access to music, which is why it is so important that it has the place that it has in the curriculum, and why we are providing resources for local authorities to ensure that they can provide young people with music tuition free of charge, which I think they should all do.

Budget Proposals (2030 Child Poverty Target)

7. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government’s response is to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities’ statement that the draft budget proposals put the 2030 child poverty target at risk. (S5F-03998)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I would say that that response came before yesterday’s announcement that an extra £95 million was going to local government.

In addition, this year, we will introduce the Scottish child payment for eligible under-sixes. Around 140,000 families will be eligible for that. The budget also commits £843 million for affordable housing, £645 million for the expansion of early learning, £182 million for tackling the poverty-related attainment gap in schools, and £3.4 billion for social security. Local government will receive additional revenue funding of £589.4 million, alongside the ability to raise the council tax. Councils now have the potential to access an additional £724.4 million, which is a real-terms increase of 5.3 per cent.

The Scottish budget will actually help us in our efforts to tackle child poverty, and I hope that, accordingly, the member and her party will back those budget proposals this afternoon.

Sarah Boyack: If the First Minister had actually looked at the demand for fair funding for our services, she would know that there will be cuts to essential services following this year's budget.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said that the budget

"falls short of the mark"

on tackling child poverty. The Poverty Alliance has called for increased investment in the Scottish welfare fund, because crisis grants are "a vital lifeline" for families—[*Interruption.*] I know that this is difficult for Scottish National Party members. Crisis grants are "a vital lifeline" for families who are struggling to get by.

Councils need proper funding to cope with the increased demands that COSLA made representation to the Government about. Will the First Minister listen to not just us, but other organisations, in order to wipe out child poverty across Scotland and give our young people a chance for a future?

The First Minister: Quite like the Tories, Labour asked us to put additional money into local government, and we have said that we are putting additional money into local government. It is the amount that they seemed to want, but of course now Labour is trying to justify voting against it.

I do not think that anybody who cares about tackling poverty—and tackling child poverty in particular—could in good conscience vote against the budget this afternoon, because it includes the funding for the Scottish child payment, which will in its first phase deliver extra income to 140,000 families. That is something that Richard Leonard used to ask me to do but has not mentioned since we agreed to do it, strangely enough.

The budget also includes more money for affordable housing, early learning and childcare and tackling the poverty-related attainment gap in schools, and a real-terms increase in the funding available to local government.

If Labour members vote against the budget this afternoon, they put all of that at risk, including much of what we will be investing in social security. In those circumstances, it will be they who have to explain why they are prepared to put the fight against child poverty at risk. I am sure that they do not want to be in that difficult position.

The Presiding Officer: We will return to that subject later.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In an earlier

answer that was given to Richard Leonard, the First Minister stated that Tarbolton general practitioner surgery is not closing but is just moving. It is actually moving to Mossblown, which is definitely not in Tarbolton. What she said was an inaccuracy. The GP surgery in Tarbolton is closing. I want that on the record, please.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I note the point that Mr Whittle made. It is a point of clarification, rather than a point of order for me to adjudicate on. However, the point has been made.

That concludes First Minister's question time. We will move on shortly to a members' business debate in the name of Tom Arthur. There will be a short suspension to allow members, ministers and members of the public in the gallery to change seats.

12:45

Meeting suspended.

12:48

On resuming—

War Memorials

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-19754, in the name of Tom Arthur, on Scotland's war memorials. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of protecting and conserving Scotland's war memorials, and highlights the positive impact that war memorial associations have in communities across the country; understands that, until 2015, the East Renfrewshire village of Neilston was one of the few communities in Scotland that did not have a unified memorial to acknowledge those who gave their lives in the service of their country; recognises the crucial role played by Matt Drennan, Secretary of the Neilston War Memorial Association, in campaigning for a memorial and raising the £85,000 required for its construction and who now dedicates significant time to the upkeep of the site; notes that Matt was instrumental in obtaining a Book of Dedication for the fallen, which now sits in Neilston Library, and that he was part of the small team that spent hundreds of hours researching the names and historical backgrounds of men from Neilston who lost their lives in the wars; further notes that Matt also plays a significant role in the organisation and running of Neilston's annual Remembrance Service Parade; recognises the efforts of all those who support war memorials around the Renfrewshire South constituency, and all those involved in war memorial associations across Scotland, and thanks them for their selfless work.

12:49

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to lead this afternoon's members' business debate, which recognises both the importance of protecting and conserving Scotland's war memorials and the positive contribution that local war memorial associations make to communities across Scotland. I thank members from across the chamber for supporting my motion to enable the debate to take place, and I look forward to hearing contributions from members regarding the war memorial associations in their areas.

My constituency takes in a number of the towns and villages of southern, eastern and western Renfrewshire, from the large towns of Barrhead, where I was brought up, and Johnstone, where I live, to the more rural villages of Lochwinnoch and Uplawmoor. Nearly all the settlements in Renfrewshire South have a war memorial and, in my capacity as the constituency MSP, I have the honour of laying wreaths at many of them on each remembrance Sunday.

Although every community in my constituency was severely impacted by the loss of life that was

sustained in the two world wars, there is always a particular poignancy associated with commemorations in the villages. Even in today's highly connected world, with many people regularly commuting to different parts of the country for work, village life is still characterised by a familiarity and sense of place that is unique. Those traits, which are a source of strength, can make the experience of loss particularly acute, so it is understandable that so many of our villages choose to have their own dedicated war memorials.

Although there is much that I would like to say about the war memorials in Renfrewshire South, I will focus my remarks on the war memorial, and its association, of one village in particular: Neilston. Until as recently as 2015, Neilston was one of only a few villages in Scotland not to have a civic memorial to honour its war dead. Residents of Neilston had long contributed funds to support national war memorials, but only the three local soldiers who fell during the Boer war were honoured with a public memorial in the grounds of Neilston parish church.

Neilston lost 164 of its young men between 1914 and 1918, including 16 in one day during the 1915 battle of Loos. That casualty rate is significantly higher than the national average. It was amid growing discomfort at the absence of a fixed memorial, with the approaching centenary of the outbreak of the first world war, that, in 2011, members of the community established the Neilston War Memorial Association.

Many people from the village and beyond soon became involved in supporting the association in its objective of funding and delivering a fitting memorial for the more than 200 Neilston lads who made the ultimate sacrifice in the two world wars and other conflicts, including in Northern Ireland. The war memorial association was supported generously by many local businesses and benefited from many individual donations, as well as from the spectacular fundraising feat of local man Jimmy Higgins, who, along with his cousin John McGuire, walked the 600 miles or so from Neilston to Vimy ridge, in France, which is the site of the battlefield where his grandfather fought in the first world war.

One individual, in particular, who has made and continues to make a huge contribution is Matt Drennan, the secretary of the Neilston War Memorial Association. I am delighted that he has been able to join us today in the public gallery, along with his wife, Jacqueline. It was Matt's good friend, the writer and photographer Keith Fergus, who first told me about Matt's key role in the association. I had the pleasure of meeting them for coffee over the weekend, and I was blown away by Matt's passion and his encyclopaedic

knowledge of the impact that the two world wars had on Neilston and the wider area. Forensic in detail and utterly dedicated to his subject as he is, it was a privilege to chat with him.

When Neilston's unique and moving war memorial was erected, it might have seemed to some as though it was job done, but that was not the case for Matt. He continues his assiduous research to ensure that all who fell are honoured and that the list of names on the memorial is updated as new information comes to light. Matt was instrumental in obtaining a book of dedication for the fallen, which sits in Neilston library, and he was part of the small team that spent hundreds of hours researching the names and backgrounds of those who lost their lives in the wars.

Matt plays a significant role in the organisation and running of Neilston's annual remembrance service parade, as well as in ensuring that the memorial is well maintained. He has been a key part of the development of the Neilston War Memorial Association into a wider-ranging community organisation, helping to secure lottery funding for bagpipe parades, Christmas lights and, later this year, a community fun day in Kingston park to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of the second world war.

Matt is currently working on a special and worthwhile project. This Sunday will mark the 75th anniversary of the arrival in Neilston of 19 Norwegian refugees. Their journey from their native island of Sørøya to the safety of the Kingston park hostel in Neilston is a harrowing and heroic story.

In early 1945, as Hitler's 1,000-year Reich began to collapse after barely a decade, German forces began the forced deportation of able-bodied civilians from Norway to forced labour camps. The islanders of Sørøya resisted and were met with a brutal German retaliation. There was indiscriminate bombing of civilians, destruction of property and the requisition of food supplies.

An audacious rescue mission was launched by the Royal Navy, which successfully transported over 500 civilians to safety in Murmansk, Russia. The next stage of the mission involved a perilous convoy that skirted the Arctic Circle to transport the refugees to Scotland. Harried by U-boats and one of the final maritime Luftwaffe missions of the war, the convoy also had to contend with atrocious weather.

During the treacherous journey, one of the convoy ships—the American Liberty ship, the SS Henry Bacon—suffered storm damage and became separated from the main convoy. Under heavy enemy fire, the crew valiantly held out for some time, downing several German torpedo bombers. When the vessel was struck, 27

members of the crew went down with the ship, selflessly ensuring that 19 Norwegian refugees found refuge in the lifeboats before reaching safety in Scotland.

To commemorate those American sailors, who made the ultimate sacrifice, Matt Drennan is leading the Neilston War Memorial Association's efforts to establish a memorial in Kingston park that will consist of 27 native Norwegian trees—one for each life that was lost on the SS Henry Bacon. Those crew members' lives were given so that the refugees could find sanctuary. We must continuously reflect on their example and remind others of it.

The events of the second world war—indeed, of all wars—must serve as a lesson to us today, as they demonstrate our capacity for both evil and good. The work of the Neilston War Memorial Association and Matt Drennan, in particular, has perhaps never been more important in helping us to remember, understand and learn. I put on the record my sincere thanks to Matt and everyone who is involved in the association for all the work that they do. They are a credit to their community and I wish them the very best in all their future work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I remind members that we are time limited today, so everyone must stick to no more than four minutes for their speeches. We have a lot of members who wish to speak.

12:56

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I thank Tom Arthur for bringing this significant subject to the chamber for debate. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about Scotland's war memorials and the importance of their preservation.

I am sure that most, if not all, of us in the chamber have had the opportunity to stand before war memorials and view plaques that are etched with the names of hundreds or even thousands of men and women who died fighting for their country. I believe that I speak not only for myself when I say that these visual representations of the staggering losses of war are very poignant. They remind us of the extraordinary sacrifices that were made by ordinary people in our local areas and in the country as a whole. War memorials are much more than ornate stone walls and metal plaques; they are monuments to the memory of beloved husbands and wives and cherished sons and daughters.

For those who have never seen warfare, viewing monuments and memorials does not bestow understanding of the hardships and horrors that soldiers often endure in war. However,

they remind all who see them of the soldiers who bravely faced such struggles and why they deserve our respect. As a veteran, I am aware of how important it is to remember those who have fallen in war. There is a famous epitaph by John Maxwell Edmonds that says:

“When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today.”

Many men and women have given their lives for our tomorrow. It is humbling to remember the courage and sacrifice of so many who died so that Scotland could continue to progress. We must remember, and we must make it possible for future generations to remember as well. For that reason, we construct and preserve war memorials, and in doing so we ensure that

“Their name liveth for evermore.”

It does Scotland credit that we have an estimated 10,000 war memorials, the majority of which are dedicated to soldiers from the first world war to the present. They are found not only in major cities but in our rural communities. In Helensburgh, which is my home town, we are lucky enough to have the Hermitage park war memorial by which to remember those from our community who gave their lives in times of war. It has recently benefited from repairs, and the names of the soldiers, sailors and airmen, which were worn and difficult to read, are now perfectly legible.

The war memorial in the little village or hamlet of Shandon on the Gare Loch, in my region, was recently relocated from the parish church after many years spent lying in the garden there and not being erected. That reflects the loyalty and the total dedication of the local people, who wanted to put it back in place by Blairvadach.

As Tom Arthur has mentioned, Mr Drennan and his team did a lot of work in Neilston. He played a crucial role in obtaining a book of dedication for the fallen in Neilston and worked on a team who dedicated hundreds of hours to finding the names and histories of those from Neilston who fell in the wars.

The Neilston war memorial was completed in 2016 and stands in memory of 217 men from Neilston who died in war. I am proud to have that memorial in my region. Now that the memorial is finished, Mr Drennan is dedicating his life to its upkeep and the preservation of the memory of Neilston’s war heroes.

I will mention two other examples from my region. First, in Arrochar, Mary Haggarty and others in the Arrochar, Tarbet and Ardlui community council have put together wonderful historical records of the war memorial and the first world war. They are now working on second world war records and have refurbished the memorial

park on the A83, which is much more accessible for people to come and see.

In Rosneath, the war memorial is dedicated to the American convoys and the sailors who sailed the North Atlantic so bravely in defending and protecting our nation and to make sure that we were fed and supplied with materials.

We owe a debt to our fallen soldiers, sailors and airmen, which we can never repay. They made the ultimate sacrifice, for which we should be eternally grateful. We can convey that gratitude by ensuring that their legacies continue in our memory, and war memorials play a major part in that continuation. The efforts of, and stories by, people such as Mr Drennan and Mary Haggarty, as well as those of the villages of Rosneath and Shandon, have ensured that they will be remembered as much more than mere names engraved on a war memorial wall.

I thank all those individuals and organisations who are working diligently to preserve Scotland’s war memorials. They are immortalising the memory of Scotland’s fallen heroes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: This is a very important subject, and I do not want to cut people off mid-flow, but members will have less than four minutes each from now on.

13:01

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I am pleased to be called to speak in this lunch-time debate on Scotland’s war memorials. I, too, congratulate Tom Arthur on securing the debate and on his excellent tribute to the work of the Neilston War Memorial Association.

When reflecting on what I would say today, I considered the nature of the important role of war memorials in villages, towns and cities across Scotland. I concluded that war memorials are not just about paying tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, as important as that is. War memorials serve as a reminder of the importance of and pride in community; they also ensure that current and future generations are mindful of what war involves and the terrible impact that it has.

I praise all the associations across the land that look after our war memorials and, indeed, all the individuals involved, be they members of community councils, the Royal British Legion or the council, or simply local volunteers. I also praise all the local “in bloom” organisations, which contribute their time to ensure that any flowerbeds are carefully cultivated, nurtured and tended to.

In my Cowdenbeath constituency, as in every constituency in Scotland, there is no community that does not have some form of war memorial. Presiding Officer, you will be pleased to hear that I

cannot in the time available list every war memorial in my Cowdenbeath constituency, but I will mention a few.

The Cowdenbeath war memorial is dedicated to the men who gave their lives in the first and second world wars. I am privileged to lay a wreath there every year as the constituency MSP. I always take the time at that dignified ceremony to read the names of the fallen, which are inscribed on the memorial. It is a very long roll call, with many sharing the same surname. I also mention the spruced-up memorial at the town house in Cowdenbeath, where all concerned have done a very good job.

Kelty has a well-loved memorial that represents, through an iconic statue, a Highland soldier from the first world war.

It is worth noting that, in Benarty, there was no non-utilitarian war memorial to the fallen from the village until as recently as 1980; rather, given the area's strong mining heritage, Benarty had the Mary pit war memorial. Further to work by the Benarty heritage preservation group and its excellent research project, "Benarty Patriots: The Fallen of WW1", and after painstaking research, the names of 179 young men of Benarty were found, and those names are now inscribed on the war memorial, ensuring that the sacrifice of those young men is recognised.

I also recognise the many other kinds of memorial to the fallen across my constituency—for example, the bronze placard in Rosyth parish church, the Inverkeithing roll of honour, which sits in the vestibule of St John's church, and the stone of remembrance in Lochgelly bowling club, which is inscribed with the names of six members of the club who died in the first world war. All those memorials are part of the fabric of our nation and we thank very much indeed all those who look after them.

13:05

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank Tom Arthur for lodging the motion and congratulate Matt Drennan and the Neilston War Memorial Association on their hard work in building the memorial and their on-going work.

War memorials are an important reminder of the tragic impact of wars on local communities. They are sobering reminders of the sacrifices of ordinary people, especially in the two world wars, but also in numerous other conflicts. After the first world war, the scale of the losses and the large number of soldiers whose fate remained unknown and uncertain left those at home with a shared sense of grief. Few families were untouched, and people needed somewhere to focus their grief. That led to the construction of many memorials—

sadly, as we have heard, that did not happen at that time in Neilston.

We cannot overestimate the importance of war memorials, which sit at the centre of our communities, as Annabelle Ewing said, and remind us of the sacrifices made by so many young men and women. They have also come to play an important educational role for schools and local history groups. By keeping the memory of the fallen alive, they help us to learn about the history of conflicts and understand the human cost.

I have a special interest in the memorial in my home town of Coatbridge, in Fulton MacGregor's constituency. I have attended numerous remembrance services there over the years. Like many monuments around Scotland, it is a remarkable and beautiful piece of art. A less well-known fact is that the architect was a woman named Edith Mary Wardlaw Burnet Hughes. She was one of the many women who shaped Scotland but whose story is hidden beneath the stories of Scotland's men. She attended lectures at the Sorbonne and was a graduate of Gray's school of art in Aberdeen. She set up a practice in 1920, specialising in domestic architecture. She is considered Britain's first practising woman architect. Her two most important public commissions were the Coatbridge war memorial and Glasgow's mercat cross, which many members will be familiar with. It is important to recall the contribution of women in Scotland to these issues.

I turn specifically to those who are remembered on the Coatbridge monument. Two dedicated researchers have compiled information on all 863 fallen soldiers. It is only when detailed family histories are reconstructed and linked to one another that something of the full extent of the collective communal tragedy experienced in one small community can be felt. I am sure that that is the case in Neilston as well as in Coatbridge.

When my own parish of St Patrick's marked the centenary of the armistice, we remembered the 200 sons of our parish who died in the first world war. Les Jenkins, a retired teacher from Coatbridge, started what became a 35-year project, completing it in his retirement to mark the centenary. Little did he know at the time that John McCann, another Coatbridge man, was also researching the lives of Coatbridge's fallen and had accumulated hundreds of photos from visits to battlefields. Les's biographies, which are now available in the local studies room at Airdrie library, tell the human story in a heartbreaking way. One example is the story of 19-year-old George Orr of Church Street in Coatbridge, who died on the western front and is also remembered on the Thiepval memorial, where 45 Coatbridge men are remembered, together with 72,000 others

who were reported missing at the Somme. Another man was killed on the day his child was born, and another three brothers, aged from 21 to 23, were killed within nine months of one another. There are names of women on the memorial, too, many of whom were serving as nurses—one senior staff nurse, Kathrine Aitken, died at the Somme in 1915 aged 27.

There were also those whose lives were cut short due to injuries sustained, including my own great-grandfather, Jimmy McDowell, who lost a leg. They all deserve to be remembered, and I am sure that the new memorial at Neilston will become as important to its community as the one in Coatbridge is.

The debate is an important opportunity for the Parliament to place on record our appreciation for all those who give their time to research and record our history, particularly those who do so in a voluntary capacity. I again thank Tom Arthur for bringing the debate to the chamber.

13:09

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to speak in the debate, and I congratulate my colleague Tom Arthur on his absolutely excellent contribution.

The debate gives us the opportunity to note the many important sacrifices that have been made over many years, including during the first and second world wars, the recent war in Iraq and the conflict in Afghanistan.

The earliest memorials in Scotland, one of which is in Ayr, record battles that were fought against Viking and English invaders. After the 19th century, war memorials began to be a common feature of communities across Scotland,

“to acknowledge those who gave their lives in the service of their country”.

as Tom Arthur’s motion rightly states.

The south-west of Scotland is home to many historical and modern war memorials. We have the ruins of Dunoon castle, which in 1333 was besieged and taken by Edward Balliol, who surrendered it to Edward III of England. An insurrection ensued, with Balliol being driven out of Scotland. There is a memorial to the castle’s recapture in the castle grounds, which is thought to have been there since the early 15th century.

There are other notable local memorials, one of which is directly beside MacLellan’s castle in Kirkcudbright town centre in my South Scotland region. It serves to honour those who died in the great war and those who fell in world war two. The historic ruins of MacLellan’s castle act as a backdrop to the war memorial, which was unveiled in 1921. It is just one of many great war memorials

by the acclaimed Scottish sculptor and artist George Henry Paulin, who died in 1962. The bronze figures on top of the stone base show a warrior holding a sword and shield while protecting a sleeping child. Panels on the memorial’s base list the names of 88 people who died in the first world war and 36 who fell in the second.

Each year, a service is held on remembrance Sunday and, two years ago, the memorial was also used by the Holocaust Educational Trust to educate young people across the region about the Holocaust, and to promote the values of tolerance, respect and kindness towards one another, which we should continue to promote across Scotland today.

In noting Tom Arthur’s references to Neilston and the Neilston War Memorial Association, I, too, welcome Matt and Jacqueline Drennan to the gallery.

I recognise work that has been done by local people in Dumfries and Galloway. Shortly after my election, I was contacted by local constituents Craig Brydson and his father Jim, who were actively trying to establish a war memorial in Buittle churchyard to honour those from the local Buittle parish area, which is near Dalbeattie, who had died fighting for their country. They wanted a new memorial to replace the original plaque, which was located inside Buittle parish church, which had been sold and converted into a private home. For years, that made it difficult for local people to access the plaque on important remembrance occasions. Jim wanted the memorial to honour his uncles, Private George Brydson of the Scottish Rifles section, who died in world war one, and Captain William Brydson of the merchant navy, who died during the second world war.

Through crowdfunding, Jim—along with residents—successfully raised £1,700 for the new memorial. It was carved and inscribed by local business Douglas Swan & Sons in Kirkcudbright. Through engagement with Dumfries and Galloway Council and collaboration with my colleague Councillor Rob Davidson, I was able to assist in having the memorial established, and I attended the unveiling ceremony.

I again welcome the debate and note the importance of our war memorials and the people who look after them.

13:13

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I thank Tom Arthur for bringing this debate to the chamber.

Memory is an important part of who we are as individuals, as communities and, indeed, as a country. As well as helping us to shape who we

are now, importantly, it helps us to learn from the mistakes of our past and to create a better future.

The region that I represent—Lothian—has a great many war memorials, and it is right that we remember all those who lost their lives in war. Bathgate in the west of my region is home to Scotland's Korean war memorial and, just up the road from this chamber, Edinburgh castle, which is one of the most visited places in the United Kingdom, houses Scotland's national war memorial. More recently, Edinburgh saw the arrival of a statue to Wojtek the bear, who served Polish regiments by carrying ammunition in the second world war. The statue honours the memory of Polish soldiers and reminds us that millions of animals have served and died in wars.

However, Scotland has very few peace memorials, and none at all to those who opposed war as conscientious objectors. Wales has had a memorial to conscientious objectors in Cardiff's national garden of peace since 2005 and London has a commemorative stone in Tavistock Square, but Scotland has no such memorial.

I know from previous debates that we in this Parliament appreciate that objecting to war and resisting conscription takes great bravery and personal conviction, especially when there is widespread societal support for war, as has been the norm, and severe penalties for those who refuse to serve in armed roles, as was the case during the two world wars.

We have spoken in this chamber about Walter Roberts, who was a conscientious objector who died in Dyce work camp in 1916, after being forced to quarry stone in terrible conditions. Thousands of conscientious objectors were conscripted into coal mining during the second world war, again in dangerous conditions. In the words of Ernest Bevin:

"conscientious objectors, although they have refused to take up arms, have shown as much courage as anyone else in Civil Defence"—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 9 December 1943; Vol 395, c 1108.]

It is important to remember that many who refused to fight served their country in medical and other support roles, and were killed doing so.

It is also vital that we remember the role of women in the struggle for peace. For instance, Edinburgh's Chrystal Macmillan took part in a women's peace conference at The Hague during the first world war.

It is therefore well past time that, in Scotland, we formally commemorate those who have experienced hardship, imprisonment and even given their lives in the cause of peace. That is why I welcome the work of the Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre, which has been working for some years to build a memorial to conscientious

objectors and others who have opposed war. The City of Edinburgh Council has given permission for such a memorial to be erected in Princes Street gardens, and a particularly beautiful and poignant design by artist Kate Ive has won the design competition. Her design will be the first piece of art by a woman to go on permanent display in the gardens.

The memorial will be in the form of a bronze tree and the flowers are based on those of the dove tree, which are said to look like handkerchiefs, recalling a meeting of the no-conscription fellowship in 1916, where, in the face of an aggressive crowd who were trying to break in, the attendees waved their handkerchiefs instead of clapping. Granite from Aberdeen will be used in the memorial to symbolise people who have died in the service of peace.

I recognise Matt Drennan's fundraising efforts for Neilston. The Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre has done an incredible job of fundraising for the memorial that I have been talking about. The crowdfunder page is just £2,000 off its target of £59,000, and I encourage anyone who is able to to give what they can to ensure that the memorial becomes a reality.

I join Tom Arthur in recognising the efforts of all those who work hard to conserve these important memorials and help us to learn. I also ask that we recognise the efforts of the Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre, the Quakers and other organisations that work to memorialise the efforts of those who have made sacrifice for the cause of peace.

13:17

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I, too, thank Tom Arthur for bringing this important debate to the chamber. There are several war memorials in my constituency of Coatbridge and Chryston. Elaine Smith referred to the big one in Coatbridge, and there are others in Glenboig, Muirhead and Stepps.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that it is important to respect the war memorials. Unfortunately, since my election in 2016, I have had to raise the issue of vandalism at the memorial in Coatbridge twice. The protection of war memorials is something that we can all get behind.

The main reason I wanted to speak in the debate is to pay tribute to the work of three local men and their relationship to the Coatbridge cenotaph. Those three men have taken the time to understand our history and do something to make sure that it is not lost.

As Elaine Smith mentioned—perhaps we can be a tag team on this issue and get all the information across—there are two different pieces of work. First I want to speak about Mr Les Jenkins. As a declaration of interest, I should say that Mr Jenkins was my history teacher at Coatbridge high school in the 1990s. He had a long career there of 30 years, and he is well remembered and much loved by many former pupils, including myself. I take this opportunity to thank him because his passion for history and politics certainly had an effect on my development in those areas.

Mr Jenkins worked on the programme of the war memorial for more than 35 years, which will have included the time that I was at the school, and completed it in the centenary year. He has compiled the stories of all 863 first world war fallen who are on the Coatbridge cenotaph. As Elaine Smith said, the stories are now in a series of folders that are available at Airdrie library.

Mr Jenkins is a bit of a force of nature and I am aware that he still goes into the school to deliver a workshop with secondary 4 pupils on his research. It is testament to him, and another example of his inspiration, that three of Coatbridge high school's current history teachers, Karen Dunion, Laura Ballantyne and Derek Reid, were all taught by him. His research also helped the school when it was planning a careers event in 2018 to commemorate the end of the first world war.

The other two gentlemen I want to talk about are John McCann and Steven Buick. I welcome Steven Buick to the chamber today. John McCann was not able to make it as he now lives in Belfast, but he is from Coatbridge and I know that he is watching proceedings today. He and Steven Buick have created a website, which is a culmination of more than a decade of research by John, who travelled across Europe to piece together scraps of the information that was recorded about the brave fighting men from Coatbridge who lost their lives during the great war.

John McCann has always had an interest in the war, and he began reading about men who had the same name as him and who died in world war 1, as all his relatives had survived the first and second world wars. As he was doing so, he thought about the memorial. He was quite shocked to learn that no research had been done on the men who it commemorates, so he decided to do it himself. Thirteen year later, the website has come to fruition—all the men were listed on it in February last year. That is where Steven Buick came into the equation, because he has been a web developer since the mid-1990s. He also grew up in Coatbridge and has moved back to his childhood home, where he still lives. He noticed John's post asking for someone to help him to

make his research available on the internet, was inspired and duly obliged.

As of today, the website has received 54,000 views. There has been a lot of support from family and friends of the fallen, who have found out information about their loved ones. I include myself in that, as we were able to trace my gran's brother. I was quite surprised that family members did not know where he was.

The Presiding Officer is asking me to close, so I thank Tom Arthur again for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I thank the three men whom I have mentioned for the work that they have done in making sure that our war dead are remembered.

13:22

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): As I drove up to the crossroads in the village of Gordon, a lone man held up his hand to bring me to a halt. I stopped as he requested, turning off the car engine as I realised why he was there. It was a Sunday—remembrance Sunday—and I was on my way to speak at a church further on. Gathered around the war memorial on the opposite corner to me was a small crowd of people who were there to remember—the war memorial provided the focal point for doing so.

Across Scotland, dotted through countryside, villages, towns and cities, the stone war memorials stand as silent witnesses to those who fought, and died, far from home. They stand as a reminder of the importance of peace and seeking the peace in and for all time. Their numbers silently bear witness to the tragedy of the times when politicians have failed to maintain peace and the consequences for everyone of that failure, including for families and future generations.

However, war memorials also stand for something more: to remind us of the importance of having something that is worth fighting for. Do we still have that? We should always be prepared to ask ourselves that question. I remember my mother taking me to the cenotaph on remembrance day as a young lad, and I remember the very old soldiers—at least, that was how they seemed to me at the time—who were present to remember. However, the real meaning of it all only finally sank in, I think, on a beautifully sunny day years later when, as a teenager, I walked with my Aunt Betty on the Ardrossan shore. We came to stop at the war memorial, and my aunt started to read the names on it. She said, "I remember him; he had blue eyes and fair hair" and, "I also remember him; he sat behind me in maths class", and so on. As she did so, the names came alive to me as real people. That day gave me a real

understanding of what war memorials are really about: people, real people.

Whether it is the Korean war memorial in the Bathgate hills, the Scottish war poets memorial here in Edinburgh or the lists of names on wall plaques in innumerable churches and halls up and down the country, such as Charlotte chapel in Edinburgh, they all bear silent witness. Stones and bronze cannot speak; it takes people to remember and to speak, but we need the memorials to remind us that we need to remember and to act, as the man at the Gordon crossroads did.

13:25

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): I thank Tom Arthur for providing the opportunity to highlight the important role that local communities play in ensuring that our armed forces personnel, and especially the fallen, are never forgotten or overlooked. Today, we are specifically noting the hard work of Matt Drennan and the Neilston War Memorial Association in their efforts to create and care for a memorial in their community. However, through the contributions of other members, we have also noted that such work is mirrored in communities the length and breadth of Scotland.

Memorials such as that in Neilston are not there to glorify war but, instead, to recognise the sacrifices that were made to protect the freedoms that we enjoy today. They help us to remember the hardships that were endured, the courage that was displayed in the face of adversity and, sadly, the ultimate sacrifice that is made during times of conflict. They also serve as a lasting reminder that despite all the talk of a war to end all wars, many conflicts have, sadly, followed. Memorials give friends, family and the general public important and poignant focal points to pay their respects to so many of our country's young men and women who did not return home from conflict. In the case of Neilston, the memorial is for the 217 souls who have given their lives since the first world war.

In my role as veterans minister, I have been lucky enough to have seen at first hand multiple examples of the outstanding work that is being done to honour those who have fought, or continue to fight, for the liberties and relative peace that we often take for granted, and I am often humbled by those experiences. The great work that is being done in Neilston is often replicated right across our country.

In my constituency, I am particularly proud of our award-winning Carnoustie war memorial, which, in 2019, was given the accolade of the best-kept war memorial in Scotland. In nearby East Haven, we have a memorial that marks the

contribution of the Airedale terriers in world war one.

Next month, I will visit Ballingry cemetery at the invitation of Annabelle Ewing. That invitation came about following last month's debate in the Parliament on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. I look forward to having the opportunity to pay my respects and to witnessing a fine example of the work that is being done by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to ensure that our fallen servicemen and servicewomen are commemorated with the dignity that they deserve.

Alison Johnstone and Gordon Lindhurst mentioned the Korean war memorial, which is certainly in the "very special" category—I say that having visited it twice myself. However, of all the memorials that I have visited and will no doubt visit, in terms of sheer poignancy nothing will surpass the commemoration of nine soldiers of the K6 force of the British Indian Army at Kingussie. The simple graves are lovingly tended to by local Legion Scotland member Isobel Harling and are the subject of a poignant annual ceremony that is organised by Glasgow-based Colourful Heritage.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government plays its part in ensuring that war memorials throughout the country are looked after to the highest standard. Through the Scottish Government's centenary memorials restoration fund, Historic Environment Scotland provided support totalling £1 million to the War Memorials Trust. The money was used to aid repairs to war memorials throughout Scotland from April 2013 to March 2018. The programme supported the repair and conservation of about 125 projects all told, and the support has not ended. Last year, Historic Environment Scotland awarded the War Memorials Trust approximately £90,000 to cover 50 per cent of its grants programme and conservation programme for 2019 to 2023.

The Government—and I, as veterans minister—believe that war memorials have played and will continue to play a vital role in ensuring that, regardless of age or rank, those who laid down their lives for ideals that we all cherish will forever hold an honoured place in our hearts.

In closing the debate, I will return to its subject: the Neilston War Memorial Association and, specifically, its plans to build on its previous achievements by developing an additional memorial at Kingston park. As Tom Arthur highlighted, the new memorial will be to remember 22 American sailors and seven members of the United States Navy armed guard who gave their lives during an operation to rescue Norwegian refugees in the Arctic Circle, towards the end of the second world war. Many of those refugees and others subsequently spent the remainder of the

war housed in Neilston, at the Kingston park hostel. It is great to see that the Neilston War Memorial Association continues to show community spirit and I wish it all success in its aims for the new memorial.

I thank Tom Arthur for introducing the debate and for allowing us all to recognise the great work of Matt Drennan and the Neilston War Memorial Association, and that of others in other parts of our country.

13:30

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Exam Results 2019 (Analysis)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a ministerial statement by John Swinney on analysis of the 2019 exam diet. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Education is the highest priority of this Government, because we want all Scotland's children and young people to reach their full potential. We believe that we have a moral imperative to ensure that all young people in Scotland receive a first-class education in their local school. Monitoring and analysing performance are key to ensuring that we deliver that overriding aim. That is why the Government and its partners regularly consider young people's performance in exams and take action to support continued strong performance.

Previously in the chamber, I committed to publishing analysis of the 2019 exam diet, which I did last Thursday. Four papers considering diet performance—by the Association of the Directors of Education in Scotland, Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Scottish Government—were published, including summary information and proposed system-wide actions for partners.

A substantial proportion of that information was also contained in a response to a freedom of information review that I was advised required to be answered last Thursday in order to meet the statutory deadline. Because the bulk of the material formed part of the review response, I took the decision to release the report and the review concurrently. I was conscious of my commitment to Parliament to publish that material and therefore felt that it would not have been appropriate to release it to a private individual alone without making it available to Parliament through general publication. However, it was never our intention to release it as late in the day as we did.

The necessary material for issue was approved at approximately 5.30 pm. That was later than would have been ideal, but given the deadline that I had been advised of, I decided to proceed with publication. I have subsequently been advised that the statutory deadline that I was given was incorrect. Therefore, it is deeply unfortunate that a series of issues delayed publication, including the issuing of a press release, until later that evening.

We sought to be as timely and informative as possible with publication, but it must not be

forgotten that much of the material is not new, but has been available since August last year, because the SQA publishes annually a commentary on exam results and individual course reports. Members will also be keenly aware of the number of times that we have discussed that information in the chamber and at committee.

I do not suggest that such an important issue does not merit discussion—far from it. I welcome any discussion on this Government's education record and the significant improvements that it has delivered. However, I hope that we can all agree on the need to focus discussion on positive steps that we can take to support our young people in achieving their potential.

It is important to note that the papers demonstrate excellent collaboration with our partners in considering the drivers of exam performance, which identified a range of actions to underpin future positive performance in exams.

On 27 November 2019, I set out to the Education and Skills Committee that, in following up on the analysis, the key areas to focus on would include partners conducting further work to ensure alignment of the curriculum and assessment journey from secondary 1 to 6; partners considering how better to support professional learning and development; and the maintenance of a clear focus on enhancing learning and teaching.

The papers that we released last week include further details on how that could be achieved. The actions that were set out include the following. Partners will remind teachers and schools of the materials and activities that are available to support professional learning—particularly for subjects whose course reports have identified specific issues—and the SQA will evaluate its approach to assessment and the on-going appropriateness of that approach. There will be identification of key priorities for support for learning, teaching and assessment, and Education Scotland senior regional advisers will discuss national qualifications results with local authority directors, in order to identify which schools need further support or challenge, and to identify how best to meet need in a collaborative and empowered system.

We will agree how to identify schools that need the most support to raise attainment, and how to identify follow-up action, and Education Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland will agree how to share performance across regional improvement collaboratives and to include follow-up action within the plans of those collaboratives.

There will also be longer-term work to ensure alignment of the curriculum and assessment

journey from S1 to S6. All partners will consider co-ordinated enhancement to support professional learning and development, and all partners will provide evidence to feed into on-going discussions on performance. There will be a focus on delivering those actions in order to support future performance.

I also highlight other actions that are under way. They include expanding teacher numbers to a 10-year high and increasing the focus on enhancing learning and teaching, strengthening leadership, reducing workload, and promoting teacher empowerment. We are empowering schools with the resources and flexibility that they need in order to close the attainment gap and to meet the distinctive needs of pupils through pupil equity funding.

We are increasing the capacity of local authorities and schools that face the greatest challenges through the Scottish attainment challenge, and we are strengthening the capacity to support improvement in our education system by creating regional improvement collaboratives and by expanding the work of Education Scotland, including the appointment of six senior regional advisers and 32 attainment advisors—one for each education authority.

An additional action that was identified was that we will continue to raise the profile of the mixed economy of awards and pathways, including consideration of a second national achievement day celebrating the impact of the wider range of pathways. We should never forget that one of the key aims of curriculum for excellence is to support all children and young people to achieve their potential, and to do so whatever form that might take.

Statistics that were released this week show that the number of young people who achieve one or more awards, which is monitored as part of the developing the young workforce strategy, reached 17.1 per cent last year, which was up from 14.8 per cent the year before. It is entirely appropriate to consider the drivers of exam performance and to better understand how we might best support future performance. However, that should be done in parallel with recognition of the significant achievements that are to be celebrated in Scottish education.

We have more young people leaving for positive destinations than ever, and there have been significant improvements in school leavers achieving one or more national qualifications at levels 4 to 7 over time. Specifically, performance at level 6—higher—has improved. When the Government took office, significantly fewer than half of pupils—41.6 per cent, to be precise—left school with a higher or equivalent, or better. Direct comparisons cannot always be made because of

changes to precisely how statistics are collected, but I can say that the latest figure is that more than 60 per cent—60.5 per cent—of pupils are at least that level.

In addition, where we can make direct comparisons, we find that the number of pupils who get a higher or better is up by more than 10 percentage points on 2009-10—from 50.4 per cent to 60.5 per cent in 2018-19. The attainment gap is closing there, too. Among those who achieve higher level awards or better, the gap between the most well off and the least well off has fallen by a fifth since 2009-10.

It is not the case that some subjects matter more than others. However, when we look at the subjects that are taken by the most pupils, pass rates in the majority of the top 10 have increased since 2015: maths, chemistry, modern studies, physics, biology and geography—major subjects—are all up.

We should also acknowledge volatility in pass rates. Last year saw an increase on the previous year in the pass rate at national 5, and a fall from the previous year in the pass rate at higher. We cannot expect continual increases in pass rates. The published papers set out pass rates by exam, and did so with a clear warning that, where subjects have small numbers of entries, changes in pass rates should be considered with caution. That is important advice from the SQA that should assist constructive and dispassionate consideration of the content of the papers.

It is clear that there are plenty of achievements by our children and young people to celebrate and to build on. We can celebrate current successes and at the same time recognise that time might yet still be needed to fully achieve what we have been working towards.

I remain committed to the changes that we have instituted, and continue to believe that they are the right things to do. In that, I am also committed to working with our partners to continue to monitor performance, to learn, and to drive further improvement. The Government has engaged constructively with Parliament on another element of the process through a review of the curriculum, the terms of which I was pleased to set out yesterday.

It is right to consider exam performance, and it is right to share the messages from that. That is what I said I would do, and that is what I have done. There is plenty to celebrate in the achievements of our young people, and we will continue with our efforts to ensure that there can be many more in the future. The published papers set out what future actions are needed. Those actions will be taken in order to ensure that every

young person in Scotland will be able to achieve their full potential.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I will allow about 20 minutes for that.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of his statement.

I took up the education brief only a week ago, but it is clear to me that much good work is going on in Scottish education. Many people are working passionately to deliver the best possible education.

However, from the volume of correspondence in my inbox and what we learned in the past week, I know that the number of people who leave school with at least one qualification has dropped, and that the number of people who leave school with the gold standard of three or more highers is at its lowest since 2014. We know that there was a significant drop in pass rates at higher level in key subjects including English, maths and history. Rates in some subjects dropped by as much as 10 per cent, which goes far beyond acceptable annual variation.

We know that the remit for the review of curriculum for excellence has been expanded after political pressure from Conservative members and others, while the cabinet secretary was protesting that everything was fine.

Yesterday, we learned from a well-respected piece of research by the University of Dundee that Scotland has lost its coveted place as the top nation of the United Kingdom in children's reading.

The jargon and excuse-filled statement that we have just heard from Mr Swinney simply will not wash.

Does Mr Swinney disagree with teachers who think that a 10 per cent drop in exam pass rates is way more than anticipated and acceptable annual volatility? Does he accept that attainment at many levels has been in decline for the past five years, which seems to suggest that the reforms to the curriculum and examination structure have not been as effective as they were intended to be?

Does Mr Swinney accept that the attainment gap is the result of a higher decline in attainment among the least-deprived pupils, rather than of a levelling up among the most deprived?

We all want to get this right, but until the education secretary has the humility to accept that when something is not working it needs to be fixed, we will not do so. That will be a shame that rests on his head and that of his party for a long time to come.

John Swinney: I know that Jamie Greene has only recently assumed his role, but if he looks at what I said—and at what I said yesterday in my speech at Wester Hailes education centre—he will see that I make it expressly clear that I do not believe that everything is perfect, and that I believe that there are issues that we need constantly to improve in Scottish education, and to which I face up.

I take some reassurance from the assessment of the international council of education advisers, which met last week. The council's judgment, which I quoted yesterday, is that the Scottish education system is using all the approaches and making all the interventions that the council would expect of a high-performing education system. That is not to say that everything is perfect; it is to recognise that we are using interventions that are designed to strengthen performance.

Jamie Greene referred to the reading survey results that were issued today. Of course, the Conservatives regularly make a lot of the programme for international student assessment figures, and the PISA analysis that came out relatively recently—just before the turn of the year—indicated a significant increase in performance in reading in Scotland, up to the point at which only five countries in the world have discernibly stronger performance in reading than Scotland. That is from a survey that the Conservatives believe to be the strongest assessment of performance.

There will be exam volatility. If Jamie Greene is going to argue that exam pass rates must constantly increase, he will be at odds with all prevailing opinion on education, which recognises that we cannot have constantly rising pass rates. There will be volatility in individual subjects. However, I made the point in my statement that the majority of the large-volume subjects saw an increase in pass rates at higher.

Jamie Greene said that there has been a five-year fall in attainment. I have in front of me the figures on the percentage of school leavers who attain one pass or more at Scottish credit and qualifications framework levels 4, 5 and 6. I accept that in the past year, 2018-19, there were slight falls in those figures, but if we go back five years to 2013-14, we see that the rate for highers then was 58.1 per cent; it is now 60.5 per cent. That is an increase. If we go back even further to 2009-10, the percentage of young people achieving one pass or more at SCQF level 6 was 50.4 per cent; it is now 60.5 per cent. That is a huge increase in performance.

I am absolutely committed to working to close the poverty-related attainment gap and I am determined to make whatever necessary interventions I can to ensure that that happens.

There is clear evidence across a majority of indicators that we are closing that gap. It will take time, but the Government's resolve to secure that objective is absolute.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I thank the Deputy First Minister for early sight of his statement, if not for early sight of the report. I remember some convoluted excuses from my teaching days, but today's opening explanation was a classic of the genre. However, we now have the analysis and I have three questions.

First, can we agree that the key finding is a four-year trend of falling attainment in the majority of subjects at all levels, except for a slight one-year improvement at national 5?

Secondly, will the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development review not only have the analysis made available to it but be expected to consider whether the trends are driven by the curricular structure?

Finally, I have been struck by the response from a number of teachers that they see the problem as the loss of specialist subject principal teachers in most schools and of specialist subject advisers in all authorities. Will Mr Swinney take positive steps to reverse that unplanned change to the way in which our schools are structured?

John Swinney: On Mr Gray's first point, we have to look at performance over a number of years. When we do that, as I have just rehearsed with Mr Greene, we see a strong rise in the attainment of young people—the percentage of school leavers attaining one pass or more at SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6—over the duration of this Government. I heard Mr Gray's point about the pass rate at higher, but he knows full well that there is no statistical difference in the pass rate performance over three years. Mr Gray is a man who knows his numbers; he is experienced in that area as a former teacher. He knows that there is no statistically significant difference in three years of those numbers, with the exception—which I have always accepted—of the fall in the pass rate between 2017-18 and 2018-19. However, Mr Gray must accept that the reverse took place in the national 5 pass rate, which fell in 2017-18 and went up in 2018-19. That analysis must be looked at over time.

The second point was about the OECD review. The OECD will be free to look at whatever it considers is appropriate. It can consider all aspects of those questions as it undertakes the review, which will be independent of Government. It is not for me to prejudge how the OECD goes about that exercise.

Thirdly, Mr Gray knows, from what I have said before, that I think that the loss of subject specialisms in schools, which has taken place

over a number of years, is a matter of regret. That is why, under the career pathways work that I commissioned from Professor Moyra Boland of the University of Glasgow, I have supported the development of career specialisms in the teaching profession to ensure that some of that capacity can be restored. The second thing that I have done is make investments in Education Scotland over the past two years, strengthening the subject capability within it and its regional capability to support improvement in our schools. Those reforms will benefit schools in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The guidelines are that the front-bench questions should take five minutes, but we are almost halfway through the session. There are back benchers who will not be able to ask questions today.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): On Tuesday, I asked the cabinet secretary about sharp falls in the pass rates for specific subjects, such as higher history, and the need to investigate those declines. There is a clear trend across most higher subjects, indicating a systemic issue as well as problems with specific courses. Teachers have repeatedly identified the problem of excessive performance indicators creating a perverse incentive to move towards a burdensome tick-box culture of teaching. Will the Scottish Government take action to address the number and role of performance indicators?

John Swinney: I would be very pleased to explore the specifics of the issue that Ross Greer raises. As he knows, I have taken steps to remove many performance indicators. I removed unit assessments, which were burdensome—I accept that. I requested that those be removed over a three-year period. We have removed all manner of pointless management bureaucracy in the broad general education—for example, regarding experiences and outcomes and whether they are satisfied in all circumstances. If Mr Greer wants to write to me with some specific points about indicators, I will happily consider those, because I have no interest in the collection of pointless information if it distracts teachers from enhancing learning and teaching.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of his statement.

The cabinet secretary said yesterday that pupil equity funding has been provided on a sustained basis. However, our analysis of Government figures has found that the total PEF allowance for 2019-20 is lower than what was spent last year in 23 local authority areas. That means that support could actually be scaled back in some areas this year. Will the cabinet secretary commit to making PEF a permanent feature of Scottish education, with multiyear settlements, so that investment

decisions can be made for children for the long term and provide greater certainty to schools and staff?

John Swinney: Let me reassure Beatrice Wishart that we allocate £120 million of pupil equity funding each year. If that money is not spent in that year, the allocations are protected and preserved to enable them to be spent in subsequent years by the individual schools concerned. If a school does not spend all its PEF allocation in one year, it does not lose that allocation—that allocation is carried forward. If there is an example of somewhere that has not happened, I would be happy to explore it, because that should not have happened.

The Government had a manifesto commitment to sustain pupil equity funding until March 2021. Some months ago, I confirmed that we would extend that to March 2022, because we will formulate a budget in the spring of next year, which will cover the financial year to the end of 2022. PEF will be a permanent feature of education spending for the length of the line of sight that I have in this parliamentary session. If there is any carry-over from one year to the next, I assure Beatrice Wishart that that should be available to individual schools. If she has any examples of that not being the case, I encourage her to write to me and I will follow the matter up.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Recent figures show that, in my area of North Lanarkshire, 94.3 per cent of school leavers in 2018-19 went on to positive destinations after school. That compares with 86.9 per cent of school leavers doing so in 2009-10. How will the Scottish Government build on the excellent work that is already being done throughout the learner journey to prepare pupils for destinations after school?

John Swinney: There is some very good work going on in schools across the country. That is the case in North Lanarkshire, as I saw when Clare Adamson and I visited Braidhurst high school, in her consistency, where strong work is being done through developing the young workforce agenda, which connects school pupils with the world of work. That is enhanced by the availability of foundation apprenticeships, a strong new element of the learner journey that enables young people to progress.

There will be some groups for whom we face more significant challenges in enabling them to go on to positive destinations. Those will undoubtedly include young people with additional support needs and young people who are care experienced. As Clare Adamson will be aware, the Government is taking a range of measures, particularly in the light of the care review, to strengthen the outcomes for young people who

are care experienced and ensure that they can enjoy the same positive destinations as the overwhelming majority of Clare Adamson's constituents will be experiencing.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In its analysis document, which was published last week, the Scottish Government said:

“Pass rates are only part of the attainment story.”

That shows a casual lack of concern when we are faced with another year in which attainment has fallen across a range of outcomes. The Scottish Government seems to be ignoring the fact that those pass rates represent individuals who risk being left with the consequences of that decline in standards for the rest of their life.

Does the Deputy First Minister, indeed,

“welcome any discussion on this government's education record”?

Why has the Government failed to bring a full debate on education to this chamber for two years, and will he give a commitment today to ensure that more Government time this year is given over to debating what was once the Government's number 1 priority?

John Swinney: Subject to the agreement of the Parliamentary Bureau, there will be a Government debate on education on 17 March.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): In his answer to Clare Adamson, the cabinet secretary mentioned the need to focus on additional support needs. Recently released figures from the Scottish Children's Services Coalition highlight that, since 2012, spend per pupil with ASN has fallen by 26 per cent and that the number of specialist ASN support staff has decreased by 403. How does the cabinet secretary explain that worrying trend, what will he do to fix it and does he agree with me that we cannot address the ASN attainment gap without those specialist staff?

John Swinney: As Daniel Johnson will be aware, the Government has invested £15 million of additional expenditure into supporting ASN education. That will be subject to a decision that will be taken this afternoon—the Government's budget has to pass to enable that expenditure to be undertaken. I am sure that Daniel Johnson will reflect on that point.

I think that I heard an aside from Jenny Marra. I say to her that I am very pleased that local authority investment in education has been rising for three years in a row. That is a welcome investment in the education of our young people in challenging times.

I assure Daniel Johnson of the Government's absolute determination to invest properly. As he knows, I await the outcome of Angela Morgan's review of ASN education. I look forward to engaging with that review on the issues that it raises, so that we can directly address the issues Daniel Johnson has raised.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's outline of the review's remit and thank him for his communication with the Education and Skills Committee during the process. How will the review engage directly with teachers and hear the views of education practitioners across the board?

John Swinney: I intend to establish a practitioner forum as part of the review. That forum will enable practitioners' voices, and the voices of young people, to be heard within the review. It is important that the lived experience of those who are teaching and who are experiencing education in Scotland is heard by the OECD in the review.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am encouraged to hear that the remit will include the responsibilities for curriculum design and support. Does that mean that the OECD will examine the roles of Education Scotland and the SQA in that respect?

John Swinney: This is the first opportunity that I have had to acknowledge the reshuffle in the Conservative benches and its impact on Liz Smith. I thank her for her long interest in education. I had hoped, for a moment, that that interest had stopped, but she has just asked another question on education, so I presume that we are going to be stuck with it for some time—which will be a privilege and a pleasure for me to experience.

In relation to curriculum design, as I told Iain Gray, the OECD will look at any issues that it believes to be relevant. I am not going to prescribe to the OECD what should be explored; it is for the OECD to consider the topics and themes of the review.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The number of children who are leaving school in Dundee without any qualifications has risen again. It was 0.8 per cent in 2011 and is 4.8 per cent today. Those children have had every day, week, month and year of their education under the Scottish National Party, and they have been utterly failed by nationalism. Dundee has yet to set its budget. Will Mr Swinney pick up the phone to John Alexander today and tell him not to make cuts to education in Dundee?

John Swinney: I accurately predicted from Jenny Marra's muttering earlier on where she might be heading with her question. I am very pleased that Scottish local authorities have increased expenditure on education for the past

three years, and I look forward to local authorities continuing that trend.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the statement. Unfortunately, Alasdair Allan, Gail Ross and Stuart McMillan were not able to get in. When the Presiding Officers cut off members mid-statement during questions and answers, there are complaints. The other side of that is that members rather ramble on, both in questions and in answers, and other colleagues get missed out. I ask members to please think about how we can deal with the situation in the future.

Portfolio Question Time

Health and Sport

14:30

Transvaginal Mesh Implants (Removal)

1. **Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on when Dr Veronikis will come to Scotland to carry out full mesh removal procedures. (S5O-04171)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): This week, the chief medical officer wrote to Dr Veronikis to reiterate her invitation to him to come to Scotland for an observational visit. In their discussions, they have been looking at a provisional date of April or May. She also advised him of the offer of a contract of employment, subject to the detailed deliberations and agreement on processes and working in the NHS Scotland environment, which have previously been discussed with him and are standard for any visiting clinician.

We hope that Dr Veronikis will be able to accept that offer, subject to his availability. Today, the chief medical officer has written again to Dr Veronikis to get his response to her earlier letter, which contained the offer of a contract of employment.

Neil Findlay: Things are moving ahead very slowly, but I am pleased to hear that there is some progress at last.

In the meantime, women here are being told that they are having full mesh removal procedures, and those have been recorded on their medical records, only for them to then go to the US to be operated on by Dr Veronikis and find that he has removed 10cm, 15cm, 20cm or more of mesh from them.

This week, I got a response from the First Minister following the meeting that we had in November, which said that if women had such concerns, they should report the cases to the regulator. These women have gone through enough. They do not need the added stress of taking individual cases to the General Medical Council. I am asking whether the cabinet secretary—or, indeed, the First Minister—will now call in the GMC to look at what appears to be the systematic misleading of patients in the recording of procedures on patients' notes.

Jeane Freeman: I have two points to make in response to that. On the point about matters moving slowly, I completely understand what Mr Findlay is saying. I share that frustration, but there

are proper processes to go through to ensure that Dr Veronikis understands the environment in Scotland in which he would be operating, as he has acknowledged. Dr Veronikis has accepted that it is the right professional approach to come for an observational visit so that he understands what he needs by way of instruments and so on before he can come and operate. The offer of a contract of employment is a clear indication that that is where we want to be.

Mr Findlay has raised the point about cases before. We committed to having an independent clinician-led case note review, and that is under way. Professor Alison Britton has agreed to act as moderator for the review. It will involve independent clinicians who will be sourced by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and who will look at the cases of each of the individual women and discuss them with them. That is the right next step to take before we see what evidence exists that could—if necessary—be referred to regulators. We need to do that in a way that involves, as it has done, the royal college, Professor Britton and the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, to ensure that patients' views are fed into it. That work is well under way.

The specific reviews will begin in April. We will write to all the women whose information we hold, from the meetings that the First Minister and I have had with them, plus any others who have written to me. Others may want to come forward. We will write to those whom we know of at the moment to tell them exactly what will happen in their individual cases.

They will also be told how they can be involved and that we will take the lead in ensuring that their individual cases are looked at. It is a very serious situation, and I assure Neil Findlay that I will take further action if it is required.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): That was, quite rightly, a very long and detailed answer, but I must ask for shorter supplementaries and shorter answers. That was a very full answer.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): In a letter that I received from the cabinet secretary on 24 February, she said that work is currently on-going on drawing up the organisations, set-up criteria and validity for the new £1 million fund. Will women who are affected be involved in that, and what discussions have taken place?

Jeane Freeman: Yes. We are working with the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland. We already have a lot of information, which has come from the women who have been in touch with us and with whom we have met, about the specific

financial issues that have affected them. We will continue to involve them.

I hope to announce the exact details of the fund very shortly, including what the criteria are and how to apply.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): My constituent Julie is a full-time carer for her husband who has serious mobility issues. She is anxious and worried about her capacity to make the journey to Edinburgh, and the impact that it will have on her recovery. Will the cabinet secretary explore with me, perhaps at a later date, the issue of travel, recovery and rehabilitation for women from the west of Scotland who have to travel to Edinburgh?

Jeane Freeman: I am happy to tell Ms Maguire about the existing arrangements and how they might assist her constituent. I am also happy to look in more detail at the use of the fund, and whether there are aspects of care that can be delivered more locally.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease

2. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve outcomes for people with inflammatory bowel disease. (S5O-04172)

The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey): Through its modernising patient pathways programme, the Scottish Government has been working closely with health boards and Crohn's and Colitis UK in recent years to improve IBD services, pathways and patient outcomes across Scotland.

That includes the development of a series of self-management tools, care plans, a mobile app and supporting the pilot of a new specialist IBD community nurse model. In addition, we are currently trialling flare cards in NHS Lothian. Those provide people with quick and easy advice on the immediate steps that they can take to help manage unpredictable and fluctuating symptoms. The cards were co-developed with Crohn's and Colitis UK and will shortly be extended to a further two health board areas: NHS Grampian and NHS Borders, with the intention of rolling their use out across the rest of Scotland, subject to further evaluation.

Clare Adamson: I thank the minister for the information regarding flare cards.

Based on discussions in the cross-party group on IBD, I understand that different health boards have different pathways for diagnosis and treatment of people; some are using primary care options and some are using secondary care options. In that context, what is the Government doing to ensure that there are clear pathways and

protocols available to IBD sufferers across Scotland, and that those pathways are in line with best practice?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Clare Adamson—*[Interruption.]* Oh, no. That would mean that you would be answering your own question. I call the minister.

Clare Haughey: First, I pay tribute to the work of the Parliament's cross-party group on IBD and to Clare Adamson for the interest that she has shown in IBD over some years. The modernising patient pathways programme is leading on a series of national workshops with the gastroenterology community across Scotland, with a view to producing evidence-based standardised pathways for people who present with lower gastrointestinal symptoms, including those with an IBD diagnosis.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): Children and young people with inflammatory bowel disease are often misdiagnosed, which results in multiple hospital admissions and absences from school. An early diagnosis is a significant factor, given the huge rise in paediatric inflammatory bowel disease, which is mainly driven by Crohn's disease. What steps will the Scottish Government and the NHS take to improve diagnosis for children and young people who have inflammatory bowel disease?

Clare Haughey: Mary Fee has raised an important issue. The Scottish Government has been investing in research by Cure Crohn's Colitis and the Crohn's and colitis in childhood research project, which is led by Professor Charlie Lees, a consultant gastroenterologist based at the Western general hospital.

The project will help to determine what causes disease flare-ups in some patients, and has the potential to lead to the development of personalised therapy for colitis. The project that I referred to is the PREdiCCT—prognostic effect of environmental factors in Crohn's and colitis—study. There is investment in and research on this important issue in Scotland.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Investment)

3. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what investment it is making in the Scottish Ambulance Service ahead of the west of Scotland trauma network being launched. (S5O-04173)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): By the end of 2019-20, we will have invested £33.4 million in the Scottish trauma network, which includes the Scottish Ambulance Service. Funding is planned to increase to £41.6 million annually by 2023-24.

Thanks to the investment to date, the SAS trauma desk, which is based at the Glasgow ambulance control centre, is operational 24/7 and plays a vital role in the co-ordination of the service's response to trauma. There is additional investment in major trauma equipment across the service's emergency vehicle fleet.

Stuart McMillan: At a recent community council meeting in my constituency, where senior staff from the Inverclyde royal hospital spoke about the west of Scotland trauma network, concerns were raised by constituents about the impact of the network on local ambulance provision. Will the cabinet secretary provide assurances to my constituents that the Scottish Ambulance Service will be able to meet the needs of the local community when the trauma network is launched, and that it will not result in slower response times in Inverclyde, particularly as ambulances have to take patients up to Paisley and Glasgow?

Jeane Freeman: I understand that such concerns have arisen in that instance, but the Ambulance Service is really clear about our expectation that it gives consideration to the impact of any changes where additional demands are placed on its capacity.

The SAS is undertaking a national review of demand and capacity, which will include the anticipated demand on it from the west of Scotland trauma network. It will use its experience from elsewhere in Scotland where there are trauma centres—Aberdeen and Dundee, currently. The review of demand and capacity will help it to ensure that it is able to meet demands and, from that, it will set out its requirements of the health service in terms of additional resources and where those resources need to be deployed.

We are committed to supporting the Ambulance Service in that work and to seriously considering the outcome of its national review of demand and capacity, taking account of all the factors that we have outlined.

Urology Appointments (NHS Tayside)

4. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what the average waiting times are for a urology appointment at NHS Tayside. (S5O-04174)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): The average wait for a new out-patient urology appointment in NHS Tayside was 32 days during the quarter that ended in December 2019.

More than £9.6 million has been made available to NHS Tayside in the current financial year to reduce waiting times across all specialties. In autumn 2019, NHS Tayside opened a treatment centre that is specifically focused on reducing

urology waiting times. The focus is to enhance patient pathways and experience when accessing urology out-patient services.

Murdo Fraser: Despite the figures that the cabinet secretary quoted, I have been told by two constituents in just the past few weeks that they have been told that they have to wait 60 weeks to see a specialist urologist in NHS Tayside. I am sure that the cabinet secretary agrees that, for people with conditions that are sometimes painful and distressing, a wait of a year and two months is totally unacceptable. Will the cabinet secretary do more to help NHS Tayside to address that problem?

Jeane Freeman: I completely agree with Murdo Fraser and his constituents that that wait is too long. If he would care to send me the details of the specific cases that he referenced, I will pick them up directly with NHS Tayside.

All the boards have a trajectory from the waiting times improvement plan, and we have a weekly—in some instances, daily—focus with boards on the improvements that they are making against the investment that we have given them to improve waiting times.

I would like to see the information about the specific matter, have a detailed look at it with NHS Tayside and then get back to Mr Fraser.

Obesity Rates (School-age Children)

5. **Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether obesity rates in school-age children are reducing and what measures are being considered to make further progress. (S5O-04175)

The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey): The percentage of children who are at risk of being overweight has been fairly constant over the past decade at about 22 per cent, of which 10 per cent are at risk of obesity. However, there are increasing inequalities in child unhealthy weight between children who live in the most and least deprived areas. That is why our ambition to halve childhood obesity by 2030 and significantly reduce health inequalities sits at the heart of “A healthier future: Scotland’s diet and healthy weight delivery plan”, which was published in 2018.

We are taking action on many fronts. In the coming months, we will publish a plan to make it easier for people to eat well outside the home, and we will introduce legislation later this year to restrict the promotion of foods that are high in fat, sugar or salt. There is more to be done to strengthen support for children and families to eat well and have healthy weight in the early years.

Willie Coffey: According to Obesity Action Scotland, 16 per cent of children aged two to 15—

that is about 130,000 children—are at risk of obesity. As the minister said, the problem seems to be widening between the most deprived and the most well-off communities. Can the minister give us some assurance that the Government’s commitment to halve child obesity by 2030 can get back on track? What more can we, our families and our schools do to encourage healthy eating in the home and at school?

Clare Haughey: I assure Willie Coffey that the Scottish Government is committed to reducing the number of obese people across Scotland, and particularly the number of obese children. The Scottish Government is doing many things, but the issue is fundamentally one for everyone in Scotland, including public bodies, industry and front-line practitioners, all of whom have a part to play in improving Scotland’s diet and supporting children to eat well.

We welcome the commitment of local partners in North Ayrshire, the east region and a number of other localities to work across the system to lead innovative action in their local communities. That includes exploring opportunities through a wide range of levers, such as planning and licensing, to tackle childhood obesity.

Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services (Punitive Sanction Regimes)

6. **Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the use of punitive sanction regimes in drug and alcohol treatment services. (S5O-04176)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): The Scottish Government does not advocate the use of punitive sanctions in drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services. In line with the approach in the rest of our national health service, a person-centred approach to treatment and recovery is a key focus of our “Rights, Respect and Recovery” strategy, and it is highlighted as part of our eight-point treatment plan.

Ruth Maguire: The cabinet secretary will share my concern that punitive sanction regimes do exist in drug and alcohol treatment services. What will the Scottish Government do to ensure that that ends and that all treatment services meet people where they are and offer them the best chance of support and recovery?

Jeane Freeman: As I think members across the chamber understand, in addition to the significant additional investment that the First Minister mentioned at First Minister’s question time, which my colleague Ms Forbes will make clear in the budget debate to come, all of the investment should be focused on ensuring that all our

services, including mental health services, wrap around individuals rather than forcing them to fit into the nature of processes and services and how services want to run themselves. That was a clear signal and a clear recommendation that came to us from the Dundee drugs commission, and we are actively taking that approach in our plans for the coming financial year.

That significant investment, which is in addition to the £50 million-odd that sits with our health boards for this work, will be used proactively to ensure that we are listening, as Mr FitzPatrick was doing yesterday, to the voices of those with personal experience and service providers and users. We will ensure that the drug and alcohol treatment services are targeted at what individuals need and that they reach out beyond health into housing and other matters that are the responsibility of our local authority colleagues. In that way, we will put the services around the individuals and genuinely help them to move on with their lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7, which will be the last question, will have to be brief on all counts.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Meetings)

7. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and what was discussed. (S5O-04177)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): Ministers and Scottish Government officials regularly meet representatives of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. As Mr Sarwar will know, we have two oversight boards running on that health board. I last met the chair of the health board on 7 February. The second performance oversight group that has been established, which is chaired by NHS Scotland's chief performance officer, also met on 7 February and its second meeting will be held later today.

Anas Sarwar: The cabinet secretary knows my views on the leadership of the health board.

The matter of out-of-hours general practitioner services in Greater Glasgow and Clyde came up earlier, during First Minister's questions. The problem is not just temporary closures; it is a systemic problem to do with GP shortages. In 2017, there were 54 closures of out-of-hours services across the health board because of GP shortages; in 2018, there were 258 closures; and, in 2019, there were 816 closures. What urgent action will the cabinet secretary take to ensure that we have continuity of care for the people across Greater Glasgow and Clyde?

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful for that question. I need to correct Mr Sarwar in as much as the problem with out-of-hours services in Greater Glasgow and Clyde is not about GP shortages. GPs are willing to be involved in those services. The problem is that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has not paid attention to Sir Lewis Ritchie's review and it has not enacted his very clear recommendations. That has resulted in the instances that you mentioned. One of the reasons why I escalated the full board to level 4 of the monitoring regime is so that we can direct and improve the service.

It is clear to me from visiting those out-of-hours services, from Sir Lewis Ritchie's direct engagement with GPs and from my conversations with GPs, that GPs are very willing to work in those services. Many of them consider that to be a positive enhancement to their role. However, they need there to be a multidisciplinary team in those services, an appointment-based system and a location that is safe and offers them what they legitimately expect from working conditions.

The board has consolidated to four out-of-hours centres in order to ensure that it can deliver that service, under our direction. It will then expand from four to seven and then back to nine centres, in order to ensure that we have a robust, sustainable service. Out-of-hours services are critical to primary care, which is critical to integration. I could not agree more. That is the basis of the issue; that is why we are taking the action that we are.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to Fulton MacGregor for failing to reach his question.

Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill: Stage 1

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): I invite colleagues to join me in welcoming to our gallery Mr Alex Maskey MLA, who is the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly. [*Applause.*]

The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-21013, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill at stage 1.

14:53

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): I am delighted to open this debate today on the budget.

I thank the Finance and Constitution Committee for its report, to which I will respond ahead of stage 3. I also thank all the parties across the chamber—yes, all of them—for their consideration of the budget and for their constructive engagement in the budget discussions.

These have been unusual circumstances for all of us. It has never been more important for a budget to deliver stability and investment for Scotland's economy and public services, while accelerating our response to the climate emergency.

The budget that I presented to Parliament makes significant progress against our four key themes of increasing wellbeing, tackling climate change, reducing child poverty and increasing sustainable and inclusive economic growth. I recognise that there is ambition on all sides of the chamber, including my own, for us to do more in a range of those areas.

In order to provide the certainty that our public services require, I met all parties in good faith to secure agreement and ensure that the budget passes. I am therefore delighted to confirm that I have reached an agreement with the Scottish Green Party that will secure the passage of this progressive budget.

In addition to the spending measures that I outlined to Parliament earlier this month, the agreement that we have struck will deliver an additional £95 million for local authorities, meeting a key ask of all parties and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; an additional £18 million for Police Scotland, helping the men and women of our police force to keep us safe and taking total additional investment to £60 million; £25 million of additional investment for energy efficiency and fuel poverty measures to help tackle climate change; £15 million more for active travel, taking total investment to £100 million for the first time; and £5 million more to support the

development of rail infrastructure projects. Perhaps most significantly, our agreement secures an additional £15 million to support the extension of concessionary bus travel to everyone aged 18 and under, which I am particularly proud to be able to deliver.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful to the finance secretary for giving way. Could she clarify exactly what will happen with concessionary travel for the under-19s? Yesterday, the Green Party was trumpeting the new policy initiative that is to be delivered, but the wording in the finance secretary's agreement says that the funding will support "preparations" for a new scheme, with the aim, if possible, of delivering it next year. Is that a cast-iron guarantee, as the Greens claim, or is it simply a possibility, as the finance secretary says?

Kate Forbes: The member will know that, as a competent Government, we do not roll out programmes until we are sure that they meet due diligence and are well designed. There is due diligence and preparatory work to do, not least in engaging with young people to ensure that the system is designed for them and by them. I believe that the contribution that the policy will make to tackling climate change, helping household budgets and empowering our young people means that it should be very difficult to vote against the budget at decision time.

All parties were publicly clear about their asks, and there has been agreement across parties. In delivering additional local government funding, police funding and action on climate change and concessionary bus travel, the additional package meets demands from every party in the Parliament. Although a deal has been done to secure passage of the budget bill, I hope that all parties will recognise that it is a deal that delivers for the country as a whole.

I intend to fund the additional commitments through limited amounts of underspend from this year, taking a multiyear approach to non-domestic rates management without impacting local authority revenues, and an increased consequential assumption, including for the fossil fuel levy. That is not without risk, forced as we are to set our budget in advance of the United Kingdom Government's budget and with very little clarity on the block grant adjustments. However, I have made a judgment call, and I recognise that the country needs certainty—it needs the budget to be agreed and passed.

The ambition of our national performance framework is reflected through the budget's priority themes: tackling climate change, reducing child poverty, supporting inclusive growth and, in the roundest sense, improving the wellbeing of people in Scotland. Central to the budget are our efforts to

accelerate the transition to a net zero economy by delivering a green new deal for Scotland that works in partnership with people, places and businesses to deliver the transformation that we need to meet our world-leading climate change targets.

The budget sets out new proposals with increased funding in manufacturing, energy use and generation, how we heat our homes and how we use our land. It includes proposals to plant new forests and pledges record investment of £250 million over 10 years to restore our peatlands. All of that will support our efforts to end our contribution to climate change and to support Scotland's economy, which in turn will boost wellbeing.

The year 2020 will also be a landmark year for the devolution of social security benefits, with £3 billion in benefit spend transferring to the Scottish Government. That expenditure will reach approximately 800,000 people, making a real difference to real lives and wellbeing through a new system that is based on dignity and respect. That reinforces the importance of passing the budget bill.

We are doing all that we can to tackle poverty and inequality in this budget, including by providing £21 million for the new Scottish child payment. Worth £10 a week per child to low-income families with a child under six and described as a "game changer" by the Child Poverty Action Group, it will be introduced later in 2020. Once it has been fully rolled out, it will lift 30,000 children out of poverty. Alongside that, we are investing £110 million to mitigate the worst impacts of UK Government welfare reform. That includes providing more for discretionary housing payments and for the Scottish welfare fund.

The budget also has an outward focus and will help developing countries to grow in a fair and sustainable manner.

Another budget milestone is our record investment of £15 billion in health and care services, which represents an increase of more than £1 billion in 2020-21. That not only meets but exceeds our commitment to pass on all health resource consequential; it does so by allocating a further £100 million to support front-line spending.

The budget that I presented to Parliament provided local government with an increase of £494 million to support the delivery of core local services. Having listened to the case that was made by all parties and COSLA, through our agreement with the Greens, I will allocate a further £95 million to local government's core settlement, taking the total increase to £589 million.

Returning to the economy, we are focused on stability and growth at this time of uncertain global

economic conditions. Stability and growth are made all the more important by the nature of the hard Brexit that is being sought by the UK Government, which is clearly demonstrated in the negotiating mandate that was published this morning.

Alongside early progress on our £7 billion national infrastructure mission, this budget provides £220 million of fresh seed money for the Scottish national investment bank; continues to support city region and growth deals; increases the international trade and investment budget by more than 25 per cent; includes a £200 million commitment to additional low-carbon investment through the innovative green growth accelerator model; and delivers a 20 per cent increase in the transport infrastructure and connectivity budget.

We are also continuing to deliver further support for communities through a progressive public sector pay policy that is targeted at the lowest paid. We are investing more than £800 million to help to deliver 50,000 new homes in this session of Parliament. We are investing in improved bus infrastructure, electric vehicle charging and increased active travel. We are continuing to prioritise investment in education through real-terms increases for further and higher education and the provision of £645 million to almost double childcare from August.

To help to pay for that and other vital expenditure, the budget continues a progressive approach to tax that provides stability ahead of the delayed UK budget. Fifty-six per cent of Scottish income tax payers will pay less income tax in 2020-21 than they would pay if they lived elsewhere in the UK. A lower rates poundage will be paid on 95 per cent of properties in Scotland than is paid elsewhere in the UK.

I am proud to present this budget to Parliament. It is a budget that delivers for the people of Scotland and meets the key asks of all parties, despite the uncertainty and delay of the UK budget. All parties wished to see additional investment in local government. This budget delivers that. All parties wished to see more money for our police. This budget delivers that. All parties wanted to see increased investment to tackle climate change. This budget delivers that.

There is one ask of Parliament that I have not yet responded to. That was a request from parties for a £15 million increase in drug services, while our draft budget proposed an increase of £12.7 million. I am pleased to inform Parliament—although members might already know this—that Jeane Freeman has identified an additional £7.3 million from within her portfolio to help to reduce the harms and deaths that are caused by drug use. That will increase direct investment by the Scottish Government in drug services by up to £20

million, exceeding the demand that was made of us.

This is a budget that renews our social contract with the people of Scotland. It provides the resources that Parliament has requested. There might be parties that will contrive reasons to vote against it. They might want tax cuts for the rich or to turn this budget for public services into an argument against independence. The reality is that this budget delivers their key asks. It delivers for our public services, and it delivers for Scotland. Accordingly, I urge all members to support the budget bill tonight.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No.4) Bill.

15:05

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I pay tribute to my predecessor in the role, Murdo Fraser. He left big shoes to fill. I am glad to see that he is still beside me and will speak later in the debate.

I welcome Kate Forbes to her role as Cabinet Secretary for Finance, and note that the takeover of finance roles by Highland MSPs proceeds apace. I have enjoyed working with her on many other issues, so I am sure that our engagement in this portfolio will be constructive. In fact, since I was appointed to my role, we have met on several occasions to discuss the budget because my party was open and willing to engage in such dialogue. As Kate Forbes said, the discussions were candid and friendly, and were conducted in good faith. Although our parties might hold fundamentally different views on many issues, we all care that our public services are well funded and that Scotland prospers.

In that spirit, I will start with what we welcome in the budget. We welcome several of the announcements, including additional support for infrastructure and manufacturing. We welcome equally the funding for the police that was announced yesterday, although it should not have taken sustained pressure from us and others, including the police themselves, to shame the Government into taking action.

Let us look at what has not been delivered and the reasons why we cannot support the budget. We made an overarching request that there be no further divergence from UK tax rates, and we asked the cabinet secretary to undertake that if, in its budget on 11 March, the UK Government were to make changes to ease the tax burden on working people south of the border, the Scottish Government would match that. We did not seek a tax cut. We wanted to ensure that the tax gap widens no further, so that Scotland can remain

competitive and continue to attract the best talent. That commitment was not forthcoming from the Scottish Government; for that reason alone, we could not have supported the budget.

I do not want to focus on tax today, important though it is. When we met the cabinet secretary, we made other reasonable and affordable proposals. We outlined a proposal to reverse some of the Scottish Government's damaging cuts to drug rehabilitation services, and called specifically for £15.4 million for additional drug rehabilitation beds, over what is in the budget. Despite our productive conversations with the cabinet secretary, that was rejected on a day when an editorial in *The Times* rightly said:

"Scotland's record of drug deaths is a matter for national shame."

We sought funding not for combating drugs in general, but for a specific policy of providing residential beds. Scotland has seen a dramatic reduction in the number of drug rehabilitation beds. In 2007, there were 353 across 22 services; today there are just 70 places in three facilities. That is unacceptable, especially in this week, of all weeks, when we had two drug summits in Glasgow that were organised by the UK Government and Scottish Government to look at ways to solve this country's worst humanitarian crisis.

We also outlined to the cabinet secretary the problems that are faced by our cash-strapped councils. Although revenue funding has been addressed, £95 million split between 32 local authorities will go only so far. In taking account of inflation, is it any wonder that—as COSLA pointed out—most local authorities will have to increase council tax simply to make ends meet?

In that context, it is the Government's failure to fund the capital allocation to our councils properly with £117 million, which we also requested, on which I want to concentrate. I will illustrate what I say with an example from the Highlands that is close to home for me and the cabinet secretary. The example is road repairs. It is not a glamorous issue, but it is, nonetheless, crucial. Highland Council's core capital funding is expected to be £23.74 million, which is a reduction of one third from last year. Local councillors tell me that it is inevitable that road repairs will be affected by that cut to capital funding even with increased council tax. Yesterday, I saw photos of some of the roads in the north of Skye.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Does Donald Cameron agree that, given that Scotland has a backlog of £3 billion-worth of roads repairs, the wrong priority for Highland Council is to build new roads—which requires obscene sums

of money—as part of the Inverness and Highlands city region deal?

Donald Cameron: I think that John Finnie will agree that the priority is to fix the roads that are in such a bad state.

Yesterday, I was sent photos of roads in the north of Skye, which is in the cabinet secretary's constituency. The roads are riddled with potholes, the tarmac is crumbling and there are craters everywhere. The roads on Skye and the notorious Stromeferry bypass in Wester Ross, which is deep in the heart of the area that the cabinet secretary represents, are vital lifeline roads that connect small communities across Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch.

Kate Forbes: If that is the case, why did Highland Council issue a press release today that says that it is planning its biggest single investment in roads projects for years? *[Interruption.]*

Donald Cameron: As I have said, it is inevitable that the council will have to do that by increasing council tax because of the cut to its core grant. The roads will not be repaired now, which is what the budget means in practice for the cabinet secretary's constituents as they go about their everyday lives. That is the reality of her budget.

As I have said, our requests were not unreasonable, unaffordable or over the top. For truly extreme demands, enter stage left—or stage far left—the Scottish Green Party. Of course, it was going to be—

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Will the member take an intervention?

Donald Cameron: No, I have already taken interventions. I am not going to give way.

It was going—*[Interruption.]* It was going to be the Greens' big year. No more Patrick the poodle: 2020 was to be the year that the Greens finally stood up to the Scottish National Party, and the year in which they stamped their feet, banged their drums and made their blood-curdling demands. New road projects were to be cut, the dualling of the A9 was to be stopped, the A96 upgrade was to be halted, the Sheriffhall roundabout was to be completely revamped and they were going to get a definitive commitment to free bus travel for young people. However, one by one, the demands have either been abandoned or watered down so much that they have become meaningless.

Let us look at free bus travel—

John Swinney: Will the member take an intervention?

Donald Cameron: No, I will not take an intervention. I have taken many already.

What have the Greens received? They have received funding to “support preparations” to introduce concessionary bus fares “if possible”, subject to “research and due diligence”. There are get-out clauses wherever we look. How much have they received? They got £15 million. What would be the yearly cost of the proposal? According to the Greens themselves, it would be £80 million per year—more than five times the amount that they have actually received. That is not a commitment from the Scottish Government; it is a con trick. Patrick Harvie has been played like a fiddle—and not for the first time.

I will move on to a very serious issue. Underpinning the budget was the assertion that all the cash was accounted for. Yet again, we were told that there was no more money. However, it turns out that Kate Forbes has an even bigger sofa than Derek Mackay. She knows the respect that I have for her, but it makes a mockery of the budget process to insist that there is no more money, but then to produce it at whim.

John Swinney: Will the member take an intervention?

Donald Cameron: I am in my last minute.

How can committees that are involved in budget scrutiny and external organisations that are assessing the budget take the process seriously when the figures that we are presented with are simply not real? The budget process is becoming a charade and it demeans Parliament.

Of course, thanks to the UK Government, Scotland will benefit from an additional £1.1 billion in real terms, according to the Treasury. In fact, the Scottish Government figures are even higher—the draft budget refers to a whopping £1.5 billion in Barnett consequentials. There is no austerity, and here is the thing: people cannot complain—*[Interruption.]* People cannot complain about austerity and then inflict austerity on Scotland's local authorities in terms of their capital funding. Ultimately, the budget—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Order.

Donald Cameron: Ultimately, the budget comes at a time when the people of Scotland have to pay higher council tax bills, and when anyone who earns more than £27,000 will pay more income tax than they would pay if they lived elsewhere in the UK. As ever with this Government, people are paying more but getting less.

I move amendment S5M-21013.1, to insert at end:

“, but, in so doing, regrets that the Scottish Government has made no commitment to prevent further divergence from UK tax rates, and further regrets that the draft Budget

fails to fund a proper drug rehabilitation strategy or provide adequate capital funding for local authorities.”

The Presiding Officer: I call Bruce Crawford to open for the Finance and Constitution Committee.

15:15

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): Before yesterday’s agreement between the Scottish Government and the Green Party, I had intended to say that this afternoon’s debate would include calls from across Parliament for additional spending allocations in the budget, and that there would be the usual theatre, in which the Opposition would claim that there was money stuffed down the sofa to pay for that additional spending. In contrast, there would be weary sighs from the Government and protestations that the Opposition would need to say where the money was coming from.

Whatever is said, I am glad that, for the sake of stability and certainty in the public sector and the economy, an early agreement has been arrived at. I will leave it for others to comment on the merits or otherwise of the budget deal, because if I did so I would, rightly, be accused of straying too far from my remit as the convener of the Finance and Constitution Committee.

Whatever the circumstances, the job of Parliament’s committees is not to indulge in the theatre or speculation that surrounds budget deals. Our job is to get our hands dirty and to ask the difficult questions that can sometimes be awkward for all the political parties in Parliament.

The Finance and Constitution Committee’s report on this year’s budget asks the difficult and awkward question whether it remains prudent for Government and Parliament to agree an annual budget that allocates every available penny.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Bruce Crawford makes a valid point. Is it not ludicrous, however, that Parliament is told that there is no more money because it has all been allocated, only for magic beans to be found down the back of someone’s couch?

Bruce Crawford: I made reference to that in my opening, so I will not go back over that ground.

The committee asked that important question because of the increased volatility and risk that arise from tax and social security devolution. Further budgetary risks arise from continued economic uncertainty—which is likely to be exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19—and the UK Government’s decisions about European Union funding because of Brexit.

The operation of the fiscal framework adds to volatility and risk. The two most significant risks are that spending on demand-led social security

benefits in Scotland is higher than the corresponding increase in the block grant, and that devolved tax revenues in Scotland are lower than the adjustment to the block grant.

Given that the size of those revenues and expenditure can be estimated only when the budget is being set, an additional risk arises from forecast error. Once we know the numbers, that can result in substantial reconciliations. We are now starting to see that forecast error impact on income tax. At this stage, we have only initial outturn data, so it is too early to draw firm conclusions on the extent of the risk. Nevertheless, the committee notes that, across the next three financial years, the Scottish Government is likely to need to find about £1 billion to repay negative income tax reconciliations.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am grateful to the Finance and Constitution Committee’s convener for giving way. Does he agree that another strong theme in the evidence that the committee took from a wide range of sources is that uncertainties are made worse because of the order in which we are doing things—having to pass a Scottish budget before the UK budget has been passed? Does he agree that the witnesses that we have heard from will find it unacceptable if we are forced into that situation in the context of next year’s budgetary constraints?

Bruce Crawford: I will specifically address that matter. Witnesses did make such comments.

Of course, the Scottish Government has two additional budget management tools to help it to manage increased volatility. First, it has the power to borrow up to £600 million a year, with an overall limit of £1.75 billion. Secondly, there is a reserve with an overall cap of £700 million, and annual drawdown limits of £250 million for resource and £100 million for capital spending.

The Scottish Government’s view is that, given the far greater than anticipated volatility, those powers are insufficient. Although the fiscal framework is due to be reviewed in 2022, ministers have asked Her Majesty’s Treasury to extend the resource borrowing and reserve powers in the short term. The committee has invited the Treasury to consider the findings of our budget report in responding to that request.

However, that would not answer the question that I posed earlier. Indeed, if HM Treasury were to agree to increase the borrowing and reserve powers, that would make the question more immediate. Do we want to consider, as a whole Parliament, whether it might now be more prudent, when additional funding becomes available, to build up a reserve to deal with future volatility?

Alternatively, are we content that all new and additional funding be allocated, and that we deal with future volatility as and when it arises?

The forecast negative reconciliation of £550 million for 2018-19 is likely to present the Scottish Government and Parliament with a significant challenge in setting next year's budget. The cabinet secretary suggested to the committee that, were the Scottish Government to build up a significant reserve, there would be accusations that she was not using the Government's resources as well as she could. Today might well demonstrate that the cabinet secretary made a fair point.

Use of the reserve therefore raises the wider question about the need for a more strategic approach to budget management and the Government's medium-term financial strategy. In our pre-budget report, the committee indicated that we were somewhat disappointed by the lack of information in the MTFs regarding how the forecast £1 billion negative reconciliation would be addressed. In response, the Scottish Government stated its position that decisions on management of income tax reconciliations can be taken only in each budget year. The committee asks—reasonably, I think—how that approach is consistent with the principles and priorities that are set out in the MTFs, which appear to provide the basis for a strategic approach to management of reconciliations.

The committee also asks how the Government will seek to find an appropriate balance between increasing the size of the reserve and/or committing to further public expenditure. The committee recognises that there will always be political pressures to allocate all available resources annually. However, Government and Parliament now need to consider seriously whether that is a sustainable approach.

The committee believes that the possibility of shifting from an annual focus on allocations to a more medium-term approach needs to be considered. The committee therefore recommends that the next MTFs set out the basis for a more strategic approach to budgetary management that seeks to address medium-term volatility and risk. In addition, the possibility of multi-annual budgets for public bodies should be considered. That said, the committee fully recognises that that would be a significant challenge, given the lack of a recent UK comprehensive spending review, and given some of the reasons that Patrick Harvie outlined earlier.

I recognise that it will not be easy to engender meaningful wider debate, but I live in hope. However, I warn Parliament that the challenges that the committee identified will not go away. Come December, it is likely that the Government

will need to find about £500 million to address negative reconciliations.

There will also come a point in future budgets when Parliament will need to decide how to deal with positive reconciliations, which could be substantial. Should such additional funding be spent, or should it be kept in reserve to pay for future negative reconciliations? The answer will depend on our collective willingness to engage constructively on whether it is now prudent to plan beyond a one-year budget horizon. Our report is intended to contribute positively to that debate.

In conclusion, I thank our committee clerking team and our adviser, David Eisner, for their highly professional and considered input to preparation of our report.

15:24

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Although we welcomed the opportunity to meet the new cabinet secretary and we welcome her to her post as she deals with her first budget, we believe that the budget is a disappointment that is full of smoke and mirrors. It is all about the headlines and not the reality on the ground. The budget comes at an absolutely critical time for Scotland, after 13 years of mismanagement and underinvestment from the SNP, but—again—it does not deliver the transformational change that Scotland needs.

Before the celebrations begin on the SNP and Green benches, let us be clear that there will be cuts in our communities following today's budget. A decade of underfunding and austerity has come with a hefty price tag. There has been a reduction of 10,000 full-time equivalent jobs, which is 33,000 redundancies in our communities. People have had to deal with those job losses. It is fascinating to hear the Tories say that austerity is over, but it has taken them a long time—10 years—and we have not seen the evidence yet. We want to see the actual consequential. The worry is that the consequential that are coming down the track will involve smoke and mirrors, too. There is a procedural issue about our ability to examine those consequential when they are in place.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No—I need to make progress. I will give way to the member in a minute.

We are in a climate emergency, further and higher education services are under pressure and our local councils' finances are teetering on a cliff edge as the demand for social care soars. That is also impacting on our national health service. We have had a decade of Scottish austerity, inequality is growing and poverty has become normalised. The number of food banks has grown in response

to the erosion of the safety net that our councils play a key role in delivering. Councils are at the front line of tackling inequality, supporting our communities and giving young people the chances that they need to succeed in life.

The cabinet secretary asks us to celebrate the additional £95 million for local government that was found behind the sofa for today's debate, which I suspect will be the image that lasts for us all. However, that £95 million was just the gap or the underfunded element in the Scottish Government's commitments that had to be delivered by local government, so that money should have been in the budget in the first place. We have asked for fair funding for local government. We want to stop the cuts and ensure that there is investment to deliver on the programme.

Even with the additional money that the cabinet secretary announced yesterday, our councillor colleagues across the country will still have to make tough decisions. They are working hard, but they do not have the investment that is desperately needed, so they are having to make tough choices. The SNP Government controls the purse strings, but it does not take responsibility for its cuts.

The issue is not just with revenue expenditure, as the cuts of £117 million in capital funding mean that it will be tough to achieve the transformation that we need in our schools and council buildings and to provide the investment to meet our future needs. In my council—the City of Edinburgh Council—alone, the bill to refurbish existing schools and build new ones to meet the needs of the additional population will be £570 million, and it will need to borrow £260 million to meet that cost, which means that it will have to find an additional £17.5 million annually in revenue spending.

The SNP makes a big play about money for the NHS, but we have had mismanagement of that precious resource on an unprecedented scale. We have had cuts to integration joint boards and the loss of key staff in leadership positions. Six of our mainland health boards are in special measures, staff in front-line positions are under increasing pressure and patients are waiting longer to access general practitioner services or just to be treated. In the Local Government and Communities Committee, when I asked the cabinet secretary whether the budget will solve our social care crisis and end delayed discharge, she could not answer me. That is because so much of the additional resource that she wanted to talk about is already ring fenced and does not deal with the growing social care crisis in our communities.

The Local Government and Communities Committee has taken evidence on the lack of

investment in preventative spend. COSLA is not the only body that is raising that issue; many organisations are making representations on it.

John Mason: Many of us agree with the member that there should be more preventative spend, but does she accept that there needs to be disinvestment from other services and that the problem is that we have to take the money away from hospitals or somewhere else?

Sarah Boyack: No—it is about making the money that is spent deliver in practice. The non-core local government budgets that are going to be cut include those for libraries, sports and leisure facilities, recycling and parks and green spaces. Those are the bedrock of our communities, and they are crucial to developing health and wellbeing.

The key issue about wellbeing is that it is not properly monitored. All those issues and all the non-core local government budgets are vital if we are to address the deepening inequalities and poverty that are being experienced in our communities. Crucially, the cuts will undermine the important work of the third sector. We welcome the Scottish child payment, but it does not go far enough, leaving 210,000 children still living in poverty, 65 per cent of whom are in working households.

We will not see the urgently needed investment from our local councils in economic development and local transport infrastructure. There is an irony in the Greens backing down from their big, climate-based infrastructure demands and being happy with their top-up £15 million for cycling at a time when the roads that cyclists use daily are being damaged by pot holes, which are growing at an alarming rate. It looks increasingly as though the Greens are the green wing of the SNP and are not standing up for their core principles.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Is Sarah Boyack not embarrassed that, from putting hundreds of millions of pounds back into local government to providing free bus travel for young people—including for 150,000 young people in the Lothians—the Greens are delivering more Labour policy than the Labour Party?

Sarah Boyack: Are hundreds of millions of extra pounds going into local government? I do not think so, judging from the announcement that we have heard.

We are disappointed at the timid “in principle” commitment to free bus travel for under-18s. Let us hope that that policy fares better than last year's Green deal, which was meant to secure a three-year funding deal for local government. That is not happening any time soon.

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you.

Labour wanted an expansion of free bus travel to under-25s, which would have included students in further and higher education and young people in work, taking financial pressure off them, giving them affordable and greener options for travel and helping to turn the tide of bus passenger reduction as we try to address our climate emergency. The celebration will not include the 414,000 young people who will miss out.

We needed a radical and transformational budget to tackle poverty, create new jobs and deliver the infrastructure investment that we need to tackle the climate emergency and build the community services that we need across Scotland. This budget does not go far enough, passing cuts on to our local communities. Scotland's people deserve better.

15:32

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Nobody would expect to have to step in and take over the budget process at the last minute, not least in this unprecedented situation of having to pass a Scottish budget before the UK budget. Kate Forbes has stepped into that role with professionalism, and I thank her for her engagement during the process,

The Greens have always believed that our responsibility as an Opposition party is to put positive ideas on the table and find ways to make them workable, to achieve an impact for people across Scotland. That is what we have achieved since the SNP lost its majority in 2016, and we have made a real impact, particularly in local government. I recognise that Sarah Boyack has only just rejoined us in the Parliament, but, since 2016 hundreds of millions of pounds have gone back into local government compared with the cuts that were proposed in draft budgets as published.

We should not be in the situation of having to have the discussion every year. A UK spending review that would allow multiyear settlements in Scotland again is long overdue.

Sarah Boyack: I want to know how happy Patrick Harvie is about the cuts to non-ring-fenced revenue funding of nearly £900 million in real terms since 2013. Surely, we cannot celebrate that.

Patrick Harvie: "Since 2013"—that is the point. Since the SNP lost its majority, in 2016, there has been a significant change. The most recent change is the reversal of a £95 million cut. Less than an hour before the budget agreement was published, COSLA put out a press release

complaining about a £95 million cut to revenue, which has been reversed in this budget.

Will I claim that the budget achieves perfection? No, but it makes a substantial difference and it will have a lasting impact for people across Scotland. As a result of the additional revenue funding, Green councillors in Edinburgh have proposed more funding for schools, nursery teachers, meeting climate targets, tree planting, renewable energy and making the capital more wildlife friendly. In Aberdeenshire, the Democratic Independent and Green group has proposed that 17 secondary teacher posts and 25 pupil support assistant posts be reinstated. In Glasgow, the Green councillors have already secured their own budget amendment to the SNP's budget.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: Not at the moment.

That shows, once again, that an SNP Administration needs to be pushed beyond its comfort zone. The Greens rejected Glasgow Labour's proposals to slash teacher numbers across the city, and the extra funding will allow us to go further and faster. It means that we can propose that the Blairvadach outdoor education centre can and should be protected.

I will give way to Jackie Baillie on that point.

Jackie Baillie: I welcome any U-turn on the part of the Greens, because in Glasgow City Council the Greens voted with the SNP to close Blairvadach outdoor education centre, denying thousands of children outdoor education.

Patrick Harvie: Jackie Baillie might have been misinformed by Glasgow Labour councillors—that would not be out of character for them. The Blairvadach proposal was in the SNP budget and not in the Green amendment.

Capital resource is another serious issue for local government. The extra cash for active travel—taking the active travel budget to £100 million—as well as energy efficiency will support local government action.

We will need to wait for the UK budget to know what the full consequential will be. No one can be in any doubt that the absurd situation of forcing the councils to set their budgets and then the Scottish Government to set its budget before the UK sets its own budget is intolerable.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: No, thank you.

It needs to be a climate emergency budget, and the ground-breaking proposal for free bus travel for everyone aged 18 and younger will make a

massive difference. Some students in Scotland are paying upwards of £1,000 a year just to get to college. A student travelling from Bathgate to Edinburgh College's Granton campus will save more than £1,200 in an academic year. There are many other examples from around the country. A colleague from the south of Scotland, from Finlay Carson's constituency—Finlay Carson has been criticising the deal because he says that it offers nothing for rural areas—said:

"Frankly giddy about free bus travel for the kids. Last time we did a family bus trip it cost £34 and that wasn't even to our nearest large town! Good work @scotgp. #BetterBuses will make a huge difference to young people and low income families in rural areas."

The proposals will make a substantial difference.

Young people who are starting work are discriminated against under the UK minimum wage, because they earn less than older workers. Vast numbers of employers in retail and hospitality still pay young people poverty wages, and the legal minimum is lowest for the youngest workers. We will go further in the future, proposing that fare-free public transport be available for all—including everyone under 25. Free bus travel for the under-18s is a huge first step in that direction, and I welcome the fact that Green pressure has made that happen.

In concluding, I will say something about the wider infrastructure projects. The Infrastructure Commission for Scotland has made recommendations that sound strikingly like the Green Party policies of the past 20 years. Those recommendations are not about building more capacity but about improving the infrastructure that we have. They are about a presumption against new capacity in the road network, but I am sorry to say that the SNP has, so far, refused to follow that logic—as have the other Opposition parties. There is now a major question about Sheriffhall. We believe that a review, if it is properly conducted, will result in alternatives that will take traffic levels down instead of increasing them.

Every political party in the Scottish Parliament now uses the rhetoric of climate emergency. Last year, however, we saw that opportunism will always be too tempting for some. The truth is that the Greens have been saying for decades what the ICS is now proposing. No other political party has been with us on that, and some have still not moved on from the days when every other party in the chamber was backing absurd projects such as the M74 northern extension. We have made significant progress with the budget agreement, but, all too often, such criticism is also levelled at the SNP.

Today's Heathrow ruling is critical for the Scottish Government, too. It is not just about one airport; it sets a precedent that all Government

infrastructure decisions must be compatible with the climate change acts. It may well be that, in the future, the Scottish Government will need to be held to account in court, just as the UK Government was today.

For the time being, this budget agreement sets out important steps forward for young people accessing public transport, which will shift that transport demand away from private car use and save families money, and it puts investment into the other climate emergency priorities that the Greens have set out. I welcome the fact that that agreement has been reached, and I hope that, next year, the UK Government will not—for goodness' sake—force us again into this absurd situation whereby we have to debate a budget before we know what the consequential of the UK Government's decisions are.

15:40

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I pay tribute to Kate Forbes. I find her polite and respectful in our discussions. Even when we strongly disagree, she is respectful. I appreciate that. It creates a more conducive environment for constructive discussion. I received a letter from her yesterday in which she was respectful of the constructive way in which all the parties have engaged in the budget discussion.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance has a difficult job ahead of her, particularly with some of the legacy issues that she has to deal with, such as the £10 million loan to Our Power that was lost when that organisation collapsed. The Aberdeen western peripheral route is £65 million over budget. The IT system for agricultural payments is about £180 million over budget. The Royal hospital for sick children here in Edinburgh is about £90 million over budget. We know that the cost of the ferries in the west of Scotland has effectively doubled. The cost of the Baird family hospital and Anchor centre in Aberdeen is estimated at £35 million over budget. That is a considerable legacy for the cabinet secretary to deal with.

There are fundamental issues with the way our public services are working as a result of some of the decisions that her Government has taken, including in particular the lack of proper investment in mental health services that is causing considerable cost to the rest of the health service and to wider public services such as our police, schools and many other public services. We know there is a massive backlog in social care packages in many areas. We heard yesterday about the IJB in Fife that has a considerable deficit.

There are fundamental issues about the way our public services are working that mean that it is difficult for Kate Forbes to secure a balanced and effective budget. However, we must do away with the charade that the Government has left no flexibility at all for any other parties to put forward priorities that they would like to see reflected in the budget. Let this be the last year for that. The idea that there is no magic money tree has gone. The new phrase that appeared this year was “emerging underspends”. There were “sudden Barnett consequentials” and we saw the “non-domestic rates reprofiling”. Those are phrases that we are familiar with from some previous years, but we will be wise to them if they come up in future. She said that there was no magic money tree, but she has given it a good whack with a big stick. That argument has fallen. Kate Forbes was either bluffing or she was incredibly brave; in the end she was just bluffing. We have found that out.

The Liberal Democrats put forward reasonable and measured proposals for the budget. We had some fundamental disagreements about the overspend on several capital projects and on the way that mental health services and social care have been working. We were prepared to put forward costed and reasonable proposals. We looked at the COSLA advice about the £95 million shortfall that it saw in the revenue budget, but there is a £117 million shortfall on the capital budget that the finance secretary has not addressed.

That was just to meet promises that the Government has made on behalf of local government. Those are not local government promises, they are Government promises. At the very least, their costs should have been met already within the budget. The £590 million that COSLA identified as Scottish Government commitments should have been a fundamental part of the budget, but it never was. It should not have been up to other parties to make the case for the Government to meet promises that it made in previous years.

Forgive me for not accepting that that is enough. We know that the £200 million inflation cost that is also not included in the budget will have a direct impact on local government services. We will see more services closing. We will see it become more difficult for local authorities to fund the education that they need to provide in our schools—they are already struggling to do that. We will see it become much more difficult to provide social care packages and maintain the social fabric of our local communities. Forgive me for thinking that that amount is not enough.

The police estate is in a terrible condition. We have seen the reports about the state of police stations. I am afraid that that small amount of

money—£5 million—will not deal with the legacy issues that we have in our police estate. We should be seeing far more going to the police. I think, from what the Scottish Police Federation has said, that there is still a £20 million shortfall on what should have been the basic amount included in the budget.

The finance secretary criticises those who believe that independence is not a good idea. She criticises me for expecting her to accept, even in just this one year, that an independence referendum will not happen. We know that the reality is that it will not happen, so I do not know why the finance secretary—

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now. I do not know why she is holding back funds for that possibility, when everybody knows that it is not going to happen.

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now. I am not expecting her to give up on believing in independence. I have never expected her to do that, just as she would not expect me to give up on believing that the United Kingdom is the best constitutional future, but to hold back money for something that is not going to happen is a complete and utter waste of money, and I think that the finance secretary should reflect on that.

Kate Forbes: I do not criticise Willie Rennie for believing in the union. I criticise the fact that he prioritises the union over funding for education, infrastructure, mental health and everything else in this budget.

Willie Rennie: That point might have merit if the finance secretary was not holding back funds for a possible independence referendum this year. Everybody knows that that is not going to happen, so why are we doing that? Why are we wasting that money? That money could go to the police or to councils. The finance secretary is putting the constitution ahead of the priorities for this country and she should reflect on that.

I hope that the finance secretary has learned a lot from the process; I am sure that everyone in the chamber has learned a lot. Above all else, the one thing that we must do is ensure that our public services, our health service and our education system are properly funded. I am afraid that with this budget, they certainly are not.

The Presiding Officer: Before we begin the open debate, I advise members that we have used up most of the time available for interventions and so on. I do not want to discourage interventions—quite the reverse—so I ask all members to reduce their speeches from six to five minutes, if they

possibly can, as that will give us time for interventions. Trim your remarks, then we will have time for an actual debate. If not, I will have to drop speakers or take time off the closing speakers.

15:48

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Given the uncertainty about Brexit and the problems created by the delay in the UK budget, I am sure that this Scottish budget will be welcomed, as it delivers some certainty to local government, the health service and businesses. I am pleased that the Scottish Government and the Green Party have reached an agreement that boosts support for our young people, our police, climate action and local government. As one of our esteemed journalists said on Twitter,

“I have no doubt that if the Tories, Labour or the Lib Dems had secured the same Budget deal as the Scottish Greens, they’d be hailing it as a great victory.”

COSLA called for an extra £95 million; the Scottish Government has listened and delivered. There were calls for free bus travel for young people; the Scottish Government has listened and will deliver. There were calls for an extra £50 million for Police Scotland; the Scottish Government has again listened and delivered £60 million.

Understandably, I think that the most recurring ask, which came from every party, was for additional funding for our local authorities. Our local authorities provide some of our most crucial front-line services day in, day out. We all know that too well, so I hope that everyone can get behind the £95 million of additional funding for local government that takes the total Scottish Government support for local authorities to more than half a billion pounds. My constituents in Edinburgh Pentlands will benefit from our council receiving an additional £7.4 million in the next year.

I also welcome the proposal to introduce free bus travel to all young people who are under the age of 19. Over 110,000 young people could benefit from that in Edinburgh and the Lothians, including nearly 13,000 youngsters in my constituency of Edinburgh Pentlands, when it is introduced in 2021. As someone who spent over 20 years working in public transport, I know about the enormous benefits that free travel brought to those aged over 60, so I welcome that it is now being extended to our young people. We might even see a reduction in the number of cars on the school run—especially in Edinburgh with our award-winning bus company, Lothian Buses.

Further education—including Edinburgh College, where the Cabinet Secretary for

Education and Skills and I recently attended a celebration of its 50th birthday—is set to benefit from the largest funding increase in the college sector in over 10 years. That investment is welcomed by the sector. Shona Struthers, the chief executive of Colleges Scotland, said:

“It is extremely pleasing that the Scottish Government clearly recognises the critically important role colleges have in delivering the skills and qualifications for almost 265,000 learners to develop their careers and the positive impact these institutions have across Scotland’s communities and how they help increase inclusive economic growth”.

She went on to say that,

“The college sector’s revenue resource budget has increased by £33.5 million to £640 million—a real-terms rise of around 3.6%”.

Tourism is another important sector for Edinburgh and my constituency. Over 33,000 of the capital’s citizens are employed to provide services to the 4.3 million people who visit each year and who spend around £4 million in the city each day. This budget recognises that importance, but do not take my word for that. Marc Crothall, the chief executive of the Scottish Tourism Alliance, said:

“The Scottish Tourism Alliance welcomes the announcements made in”

the

“draft budget, many of which have been outlined clearly in our direct asks to the Scottish Government on behalf of Scotland’s tourism industry”.

He continued:

“We are encouraged at the supportive measures for businesses announced today, one of which will see 95 per cent of properties paying a lower poundage in business rates than the rest of the UK in addition to business rates relief for many businesses. This is hugely positive news for the tourism sector in particular and I am sure that many of our businesses will welcome the opportunity to capitalise on this relief and turn thoughts towards investment in their product and people.”

I have had time to touch on only some of the commitments in the budget. It also delivers a record £15 billion for health and care services, provides over £3 billion in social security payments, delivers £201 million to secure the full roll-out of increased early learning and child care provision, invests over £100 million to address the poverty-related attainment gap in schools and provides £20 million for the Scottish child payment, to support our wider action to address child poverty. All those commitments will help to ensure that Scotland is one of the best places to live and work.

In closing, I reiterate that the budget delivers on key issues that have been raised by all parties in the chamber. All of us should unite behind it and deliver for the people of Scotland.

15:53

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I welcome Kate Forbes to her new role as Cabinet Secretary for Finance.

It will come as no surprise that I will focus my comments on the budgetary aspects of education and skills. Quite simply, I think that at the core of a strong economy lies the simple truth that current and future generations of young Scots must get the best start in life—from early years to on-going adult learning and everything in-between. Arguably, it is one of the most humbling of portfolios to hold in politics. Arguably, it should be any Government's number 1 priority. Arguably, this Government has taken its eye off the ball.

I will start with some positives. I welcome parts of the budget, including some of the initiatives to tackle the attainment gap and fund childcare and to improve the skillset of our workforce and teachers' pay. However, warm words, manifesto commitments and budgetary promises are one thing and delivering them is another. This week should serve as a stark reminder to us all of what happens when policy delivery does not match promises. Tell that to those who did not get the results that they expected in last year's higher exams.

The stark reality is that our educational institutions have been under tremendous pressure for some time. Improving our education system will require not just political will, but vision.

What does the budget do to address that? Let us look at teacher numbers. There has been a recruitment issue in Scotland for many years. Last year, research found that areas of rural Scotland have some of the most severe teacher shortages in all Europe. I welcome any proposed rise in teacher salaries—there is no question but that they deserve to be recognised for the work that they do. The Scottish Government will probably argue that the rise is sufficient, but it comes after salaries have been capped at 1 per cent—well below the rate of inflation—for a decade. The increase also comes after two successive budgets in which teachers' taxes rose, despite the explicit and firm promise of the Deputy First Minister in 2016 that he would not allow that to happen.

Kate Forbes: Will Jamie Greene take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: Let me finish. This Government deems anyone earning more than £27,000 a year in Scotland to be rich. Members can make of that what they will.

However, it is about not just levels of compensation, but the wellbeing of our teachers. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found that Scottish teachers work

some of the longest teaching hours of any in the developed world, and a recent review found that 60 per cent of teachers reported that work has impacted their mental health, which is a trend that shows no sign of slowing down.

John Swinney: Will Jamie Greene explain to Parliament the proposals that he advanced to the finance secretary in the budget negotiation that would have reduced class contact time for teachers?

Jamie Greene: Mr Swinney knows fine well that teachers are under tremendous pressure. It does not help teachers when they have to teach multilevel classes with two, three or four levels of teaching in one classroom. The pressure that that is putting on them has to change. The way to fix it is to get more teachers into schools—it is as simple as that. *[Interruption.]* How is multilevel teaching conducive to a positive work environment for students or teachers? Answer that, Mr Swinney.

On the important issue of early learning and childcare, the Scottish Government will rightly point out its commitment to the expansion of provision. Members on the Conservative benches welcome the principle that early intervention gives children the best start. However, it is not just about promising money or signing cheques; we need to ensure that the expansion work takes place on the ground. We know that 71 per cent of private nurseries have recruitment issues, and that 40 per cent of partner providers in the private and third sectors cannot cover the cost of delivering services with the rates that they are getting from local authorities. There is a huge squeeze on places; parents know that, so the cabinet secretary must know that, too.

I could go into a lot of detail on the funding of further and higher education, but let us not forget that, in 2019, Audit Scotland said:

“Scottish Government capital funding falls short of what is needed to meet the estimated costs of maintaining the college estate.”

The same is true of universities, where Scottish applicants are missing out on places due to current structures. Universities are increasingly reliant on fee-paying students from other parts of the UK or outside the EU. There is a funding crisis in education that has been bubbling away for years, and such is the nature of that Pandora's box that no one wants to open it. It is my firm belief that no Scot, whatever their background, should be denied a place at a Scottish college or university when that place is deserved, wanted and merited.

This budget, like many before it, represents the status quo when it comes to education, but the status quo will not deliver the next generation of

teachers, nurses, doctors and engineers that we need. If this Government does not make education its number 1 priority, we certainly will. I support the amendment in Donald Cameron's name.

15:58

Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I congratulate Kate Forbes on getting off to a brilliant start as the new Cabinet Secretary for Finance. Her performances last week and today have fully justified her elevation to the Cabinet.

The one downside is that the Cabinet is no longer gender balanced: it has seven women and five men, so there are two vacancies for men. I say to Bruce Crawford, Richard Lyle and all the other men who have announced their retirement that they have missed their opportunity. They could be in the Cabinet to rebalance it. I will not make that mistake, Presiding Officer. *[Laughter.]*

However, let me be serious for a minute. I have been sitting here listening to the Tory and Labour spokespeople, and I think that it is time that we got some intellectual honesty into the argument. The Tory party—the unionist party—is complaining because we are not spending more money on education, on local government and on social care.

Jamie Greene: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: I say to the Tory spokespeople that we would be able to spend more money on all those things, but we have had our budget cut in real terms by £1.5 billion a year by a Tory Government in London.

If Mr Greene stands up again, I will take his intervention.

Jamie Greene: I am sure that Mr Neil will therefore welcome the £1.5 billion that he is getting from the UK Government to help to fund public services in Scotland. Go on, stand up and welcome that—let us hear it.

Alex Neil: We are just getting some of our own money back. The member should at least be honest. It is the Tory party that is the cause of the problem because of its austerity cuts over 10 years.

I say to the other big unionist party—

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Neil: Of course. It gets easier by the minute.

Liam Kerr: If Mr Neil's Government can spend millions more on bus passes, why has it not been able to find only £15 million to support much-needed residential drug rehabilitation beds?

Alex Neil: We cannot spend money twice. If we are spending it on one thing—the member should ask his wife—we cannot spend it on something else. If we did not have a cut of £1.5 billion, we could do all these things.

Let me talk to the Labour Party as well, because there has to be a degree of intellectual honesty from its front bench. *[Interruption.]* I know that Ms Baillie is running for the position of deputy leader, and then, no doubt, she will get rid of Mr Leonard from the leadership, but I say to her that she should not get too het up, because the cuts did not start with the Tories—they started with Alistair Darling. As you may remember, Presiding Officer, when he was the social security secretary and this devolved Parliament took a devolved decision to introduce free personal care, he stripped our people of £140 million in social security benefits because we dared to take a decision that was opposed by the Labour Cabinet in London.

We will not be taking any lectures from the Labour Party, because it started the cuts. It paved the way for the Tory cuts, and in the better together campaign, when those parties were joined at the hip, the Labour Party effectively gave intellectual support to the Tory cuts and the austerity agenda.

The most important speech so far—apart from this one—has been the one by Bruce Crawford. He is convener of the Finance and Constitution Committee, and he will be sorely missed in this Parliament when he leaves. As convener of that committee, he has spelled out some home truths that everybody in this Parliament will need to face up to in the months and years ahead. Through the fiscal framework, we are, in effect, going to lose £1 billion over the next three years, and that is on top of the austerity cuts that we have already had. If we consider the implications of the demand-led Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 and the changes to the block grant, we see that this Parliament faces a potential financial crisis.

The new finance secretary must do a number of things, starting with asking the new chancellor in London to bring forward the review of the fiscal framework from 2022 to now. This country cannot take another round of cuts imposed as a result of, in this case, a financial framework that has now become very detrimental to the people of Scotland—and it is the people that we have to think of.

We face those challenges—

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab) rose—

Alex Neil: Unfortunately, I cannot take Rhoda Grant's intervention—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Because you are sitting down. Thank you very much, Mr Neil.

Alex Neil: I am sitting down.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that their speeches should be five minutes. I will allow time for interventions. Mr Neil took two interventions. This is a debate, and taking interventions makes it lively.

16:05

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The finance secretary may have changed, but the annual ritual has stayed the same. The SNP publishes its draft budget and then we are told that there is no more money and that we should take it or leave it—or, in the words of Kate Forbes:

“When I say that I have deployed every penny on the face of the budget, I mean that I have deployed every penny; we have deployed every penny”.—[*Official Report, Finance and Constitution Committee*, 12 February 2020; c 40.]

We then wait a couple of weeks and—hey presto!—the pennies drop and a few million pounds suddenly appear.

Kate Forbes: We had, and we have deployed, every penny on the face of the budget. The nature of our going ahead of the United Kingdom Government’s budget is that we are dealing with estimates for consequentials. We have reviewed our forecast. The answer remains the same.

Colin Smyth: The cabinet secretary was clear that—suddenly—there were underspends and rates reprofiling, which she did not seem to know about a few weeks ago. I am sorry, but money appears to have been conveniently hidden down the back of the magic money sofa. That happens year in, year out. Frankly, that approach continues to mislead people.

The proposed changes to the draft budget today are still less than half a per cent of the overall budget. When we look back on this Parliament and take stock of the four SNP-Green budgets that we have had during that time, we will remember them as the biggest sustained attack on council services in living memory.

When SNP and Green MSPs rubber stamp the budget today, they will do so as councillors the length and breadth of Scotland are wrestling with the menu of painful cuts that they still need to make. Which of their community services will they cut? Which of their neighbours’ jobs will they axe? How much will they hike up the regressive council tax knowing that they will be delivering fewer services? All that because the SNP and Greens refuse to use the powers of this Parliament to vary income tax rates for those at the top.

While SNP and Green MSPs pat themselves on the back in this chamber, the debate that is taking place in council chambers after four years of budgets by the SNP and Greens is not about which services to trim; it is about which services to scrap.

The cabinet secretary says that she is giving councils the £95 million revenue funding that COSLA has asked for. Let me tell her what COSLA said. In its “Invest in Essential Services” report, which was published last month, it laid bare the financial crisis that is facing councils, which have had to make £2.1 billion of cuts since 2012.

This week, COSLA confirmed that, as a result of the Scottish Government’s draft budget, councils are £300 million—not £95 million—short in real terms. That is just for them to stand still, never mind to reverse the cuts of the past.

It is not just councils’ revenue funding that has been slashed in the budget; it is also their capital funding. That funding rebuilds our crumbling schools, resurfaces our pothole-plagued roads and delivers the parks and leisure centres at the heart of our communities. That budget has been cut by £117 million in cash terms alone this year.

It really is an insult to the hard-working council staff who teach our children and care for our loved ones as if they are their own, for the SNP and Greens to claim in this budget that they are giving councils the funding that they have asked for, when they know that, as a result of today’s budget, more council jobs will be axed on top of the nearly 40,000 lost since 2007.

Just as austerity was the political choice of the Tories, it is the political choices of the SNP and Greens in their budgets that have caused those council job losses and cuts in local services.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): On Monday, I met community councils from Biggar and Quothquan in my region. They have experienced cuts, cancellations and delays to bus services. Does the member agree that there must be funding if councils are to create bus companies for our communities and not for profit?

Colin Smyth: That is an important point. As a result of Labour’s amendments to the Transport (Scotland) Bill, councils will soon have the power to set up and run their own local bus service. However, the problem is that there is not a single penny in the budget that will enable that power to be used to reverse the massive decline in bus routes under this Government.

This year’s budget was an opportunity to change direction, bring an end to that austerity-driven record and pursue a progressive vision for the future. In reality, it has turned out to be more of the same: more timidity, more mismanagement

and more cuts. As the cabinet secretary said, Labour engaged positively by proposing a number of changes to the budget, but we were ultimately undercut by a Green Party willing to settle for less: less for local government funding, less for young people and less for Scotland.

That can be seen even in one of the positive measures that I support: the move towards free bus travel for young people. I welcome any step in the direction towards Labour's policy of free bus travel for under-25s. When we brought the issue to Parliament in March last year—in the only debate that there has been on the issue—every single SNP MSP voted against the proposal and some even questioned whether young people were in need of such support.

I welcome that positive change in policy, but I hope that the cabinet secretary will make clear today that every single young person under 19 will have free bus travel by the beginning of January 2021, because that is not clear from the budget proposal. The Government argues that work still needs to be done, but the Parliament voted in March last year to consider the costs and benefits of extending free bus travel to young people—

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. The member has to wind up.

Colin Smyth: I wonder what the Government has been doing since that time. If we really want to unlock opportunities for all Scotland's young people, we should deliver free bus travel for all under-25s. Yesterday's Scottish transport statistics showed the scale of the challenge that we face. Bus passenger journeys in Scotland have plummeted by 8 million in a year and by 107 million journeys since the SNP came to power. If we are serious about climate change, we have to get serious about supporting public transport—in particular, our bus services. One way to do that is to build on the success of Labour's bus pass for older people by extending it not just to some young people but to all young people. Doing so would deliver the real transformational change that we need to halt the dismantling of our bus network that is taking place under this Government.

16:11

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Understandably, the headline from the budget is the Government's investment in environmental justice. I will focus my remarks on the Government's continuing commitment to social justice, because environmental and social justice are closely linked.

In the rural parts of the South Scotland region that I represent, transport costs are a real challenge for people on low incomes and for young people in particular. The cost of commuting to work or education is high, so I very much welcome the commitment to deliver a national concessionary travel scheme, which will offer free bus travel for under-18s by January 2021. In Dumfries and Galloway alone, 20,000 young people will benefit from that measure.

The £151 million in the budget for energy efficiency also tackles environmental and social justice at the same time. I particularly welcome the £25 million of additional investment in local government energy efficiency measures to tackle fuel poverty, which is a huge challenge in areas of rural Scotland where people whose incomes are well below the national average live off the gas grid in homes that are hard to heat—a triple whammy.

That brings me to a major on-going social justice commitment of the Government that the budget delivers—the commitment to create 50,000 affordable homes over this parliamentary session. Some said that that could not be done, but it is well on track thanks to the energy and commitment of the SNP Government—in particular, the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning, Kevin Stewart. This year, there is £800 million to deliver on that commitment plus a further £300 million to ensure that building continues once that target is reached.

I saw the results of the house building programme myself this week when I joined Kevin Stewart on a visit to a new development of 27 homes just off the High Street in the town of Annan. What was a derelict industrial site has been transformed. The 19th century sandstone buildings that face on to the High Street have been restored as new homes, and place making and town centre regeneration are enhanced. The high-quality new-build terraced houses have solar panels and very high levels of modern insulation, and several have been adapted for people with disabilities. Again, social justice and climate justice have been delivered.

Furthermore, the house building programme is an important way of delivering on commitments to sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The Scottish Government invested £2.17 million in the development in Annan and another £1.5 million was raised by the developer, Cunninghame Housing Association. The main contractor was a local builder, Ashleigh Homes, which in turn used several local subcontractors. That represents an extremely big investment in what is quite a small community, and it is not the only one that is happening.

Our house building programme supports and creates jobs. Because of the Annan development and several others across Dumfries and Galloway that Cunninghame Housing Association is undertaking with Ashleigh, Ashleigh has been able to take on an additional two apprentices each year. In a rural economy, that is a big commitment that makes a significant difference to people's lives. Behind every house there is a human story, not just of the people who live in it but of those who benefit from jobs in the house building programme.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): I had great pleasure in joining Ms McAlpine in Annan on Monday. I am very pleased that she has mentioned Cunninghame Housing Association and the builder, Ashleigh, because they have been fantastic in Ayrshire and the south-west of Scotland. Ms McAlpine mentioned jobs. The current programme sustains 12,000 to 14,000 jobs. Another good aspect of the programme is the apprenticeships that it provides. As a result of that, a large number of women apprentices are now entering the trade. I pay tribute—I am sure that Ms McAlpine would, too—to Ashleigh for attracting young women into the construction industry.

Joan McAlpine: That is fantastic and I welcome it, particularly as the mother of a daughter who is an engineer. I am very pleased to see that kind of thing happening, and I congratulate Ashleigh on that.

Turning to the social justice commitment in the budget, I particularly welcome the £21 million that is being provided for the Scottish child payment, which will be worth £10 a week for every eligible child. I was delighted to learn that the first payments will be made by Christmas this year for each eligible child who is aged under six. When the programme is fully rolled out, it is estimated that 30,000 children will be lifted out of poverty. Families will also benefit from an uplift in the Scottish welfare fund allocation, which has increased by £3 million to £41 million. That move has been welcomed by a number of third sector charities in the area, including the Poverty Alliance, Menu for Change and CPAG in Scotland.

The budget includes £3.4 billion in social security expenditure for the most vulnerable in our society, but it is tragic that, alongside its own social security commitments, the SNP Government has to spend at least £1.4 billion to mitigate the worst effects of the Westminster benefit cuts.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please wind up.

Joan McAlpine: That is all the more remarkable when we consider that, over the past 10 years, Scotland's budget allocation from the UK Treasury

has fallen by £1.5 billion, which is an absolute disgrace.

16:17

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Fixing the roads, emptying the bins, music tuition, outdoor learning, parks, environmental health, planning, building control, driving growth—those are all things that councils deliver, all of which are put at risk by this budget. For too long, councils have been the poor relations of the public sector yet, increasingly, they are expected to carry out the donkey work for central Government. That has to end.

I have to admit that Kate Forbes had me fooled: I really thought that she was genuinely interested in ditching Patrick Harvie's madcap growth deniers. I really thought that she was genuinely interested in finding common ground with someone else—my word, she even had Murdo Fraser and Donald Cameron reaching out to find consensus. She had Messrs Fraser and Cameron going to the trouble of coming up with a set of reasonable proposals that would protect public services.

Kate Forbes: Those proposals were quite reasonable. In fact, I recall that one of them was that the Government should meet COSLA's demand that local government funding be increased by £95 million. That is in the budget agreement, which I hope Mr Simpson will support at decision time.

Graham Simpson: I will come on to that money for councils.

The sticking point was avoiding the tax gap between Scotland and the rest of the UK growing. We said that, as a minimum, the core funding for local government needed to be increased in line with inflation and that all the additional extra commitments that have been put on councils, the cost of which is £497 million, should be funded in full, along with any new or additional commitments. Whatever spin the Government puts on its settlement with the Greens, this budget will still see councils making cuts. The extra £95 million for revenue funding that was announced yesterday is still way short of what is needed.

When I questioned COSLA's finance lead, Councillor Gail Macgregor, at the Local Government and Communities Committee last week, she could not have been any clearer. She said:

"We would need about £300 million extra just to cover inflation and the shortfall. That would enable us to stand still".—[*Official Report, Local Government and Communities Committee*, 19 February 2020; c 12.]

When I asked her whether an extra £95 million would see every council in Scotland having to make cuts, she said yes.

Of course, there is nothing in this budget settlement about extra capital funding for councils. Cuts in services and increases in council tax across the board are what local government is facing with this sticking plaster budget. All councils will increase council tax again. That is rise on top of rise. We will soon get to a point where we have people living in council tax poverty. We may be there already.

Kevin Stewart: Yesterday, South Lanarkshire Council, which Mr Simpson used to be a member of, unanimously agreed a budget. I wish the same could happen in this place. Mr Simpson is wrong to say that there are no changes, because the deal means that South Lanarkshire Council is getting an extra £5.569 million in revenue funding and an extra £880,000 in capital funding. It is a pity therefore that the Tories will not play ball.

Graham Simpson: I hope that I will get that time back.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes. I have made sure of that. If you get a five-minute speech and take interventions, you get another minute if it takes that long. Be happy.

Graham Simpson: Jolly good. That does not answer the point that all councils will have to make cuts. COSLA has said that the budget results in a £117 million cut to capital budgets. The capital settlement puts at risk significant projects that would promote inclusive growth across Scotland.

Another of our reasonable asks was on homelessness. The draft budget makes £50 million available for the ending homelessness together fund but, as the Salvation Army pointed out last week, Scottish councils have submitted proposals for spending on homelessness of £130 million. We asked for a rather modest £10 million extra. Although I welcome the efforts that the Government is making to tackle homelessness, more is required. We should all be on the same page here, as it is spending to save.

Sometimes it is best to let ordinary people have their say. I recently met Motherwell mum Fiona Sharkey, who wrote to me about the threat to music provision in North Lanarkshire. She said:

“Music provision opens the world up to children and exposes them to environments and opportunities so radically different to the reality for many of growing up in North Lanarkshire.”

She went on:

“If NLC destroy this service, they not only impact all the staff who will lose their jobs, they threaten the future of children who are studying music and risk failing their exams because they find themselves without a teacher.

All of this will make Scotland a poorer place to live in, culturally and economically, now and for many years to come.”

Lo and behold, North Lanarkshire Council has cut music provision, although it has saved a pipe band. It has, however, cancelled Christmas—there will be no festive lights this year, folks.

Councils are not fringe organisations. They are increasingly being asked to do more and more for less and less. The cracks are starting to show and it cannot continue. This is the year when the pain has to end.

16:24

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): As always, I am delighted to take part in the budget debate, and I am pleased that an agreement has been reached.

The debate is hugely important, because we are deciding on our income and expenditure plans for the coming year. They impact on our health services, the police, local government and many other sectors. Our decisions impact on many people’s lives.

My first point is that we do not have enough money for all that we would like to do. Of course, almost all of us want more money for a whole host of public services—and for the third sector for that matter—and no one wants to pay more taxes than we have to.

A theme that we always return to in budget debates, perhaps because the Opposition parties keep forgetting, is that we have to set a budget that balances. Of course, anyone can just demand more money. The Conservative amendment today is disappointing, not because of the two areas of extra spending that it would like—in themselves, they are perfectly good—but because there is a lack of realism about how the budget works. I had expected better from a party that claims to understand numbers, and from Mr Simpson, who just asked for an extra £300 million.

In yesterday’s justice debate, a Labour member said to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice that the Government is responsible for the budget. That is true, but Opposition members are responsible for potential amendments. They are responsible for ensuring that every ask has a balancing cut. A phrase that was used yesterday was that the police are “underfunded”, and today at First Minister’s question time, Richard Leonard used the word “underresourced”. What do Opposition members mean by “underfunded” or “underresourced”? Do they mean that the police want and could use extra money? Yes, we would all agree with that. Do they mean that there is spare money sitting around? No, there is no spare money.

On the subject of spare money—

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I hear what John Mason says about the budget and I reflect particularly on our own city. Does John Mason agree with his SNP council colleagues, one of whom said that the settlement from the Scottish Government was “very disappointing”? Another SNP councillor, Allan Casey, said that there are “significant budget problems.”

He also said:

“I think Glasgow has been dealt a bad hand in terms of this budget.”

Does John Mason agree, and will he support me in arguing for greater resources for our city?

John Mason: I want more resources for Glasgow, Aberdeen, the NHS and lots of other things, but my point, if Johann Lamont has been listening so far, is that we have to live within our means.

On the subject of spare money, if there is a slight underspend at the end of March, it does not mean that there is a huge pot available for every need. Our budget is now some £40 billion and 1 per cent of that is £400 million. Yes, £400 million is a lot of money, even for Glasgow City Council, but as a percentage of our budget, it is within the bounds of forecasting error—we understand that the Office for Budget Responsibility is often 3.5 per cent out in its forecasting.

Another way of engaging in the budget process is not to take part in a realistic way at all. Johann Lamont did not mention the Labour councillor who walked out of the budget meeting. That is not a very responsible way to take part in a budget process or to help to come up with a budget that balances and commands support. Anyone who wants more money for health, local government or something else really has to say where that money will come from, and whether that will mean more tax or cuts elsewhere.

I will make a couple of points on consequentials, which were mentioned several times yesterday in the justice debate. The point of this Parliament is to make our own decisions on the priorities of the people of Scotland. Yes, we have passed on health consequentials straight to health, but that should be the exception rather than the norm. For example, we want to have a more caring social security system, so that means that we need to reallocate resources from elsewhere.

We should not be automatically copying spending patterns from England. Of course, borrowing can be another option. Westminster has the capacity to borrow without much limitation, and some here perhaps feel that we should follow suit. However, let us remember that the Westminster

debt is £1.8 trillion to £1.9 trillion, which is around £30,000 per head in the UK. Both Labour and the Tories have been guilty of irresponsible borrowing, and such a level of debt is not sustainable.

We should absolutely identify with councils, the NHS and others that are impacted by the tight finances that we all face. Glasgow City Council has made difficult decisions and has done well to protect spending on teachers and education.

A few people have said to me that we should look at the overseas budget. We should remember that it is only £10 million for the international development fund, which is a very small part of our national budget. It is one quarter of 0.1 per cent, or 2.5 pence out of every £100. The reality is that, in world terms, we are still a very wealthy country. We know that many of our citizens who are not well off themselves give sacrificially to charities such as Mary’s Meals or Tearfund, which are working to help vulnerable people in developing countries. Therefore, I think that we are reflecting the priorities of many of Scotland’s people when we allocate that very small amount to overseas needs. It is worth remembering that that money would not make a big difference to our budget here, but it can go a lot further in Malawi, Zambia or Rwanda.

We would all like to spend more on many things, but we have to live within our means and I think that this budget makes a very reasonable attempt to share out our resources in a fair way.

16:29

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): The Government’s budget document says that it aspires to

“the creation of a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish”.

If that is the case, it would have to provide adequate investment in our schools, colleges and universities, because there can be no clearer or more effective investment in our future prosperity and no more direct way to maximise opportunity for future generations.

That would be true for any Government, but for this one, which has declared education as its top priority, and closing the attainment gap as a “sacred” duty of the First Minister, it is surely a given. Yet, this Government’s track record over 13 years is one of systematic disinvestment in education, and the budget—as presented—fails to halt that trend, never mind restore that lost investment.

Let us start with colleges, which, in the draft budget, receive a small real-terms increase in revenue funding. However, that fails to restore the repeated swingeing cuts that those colleges have

had in the past decade. Figures that we have obtained from the Scottish Parliament information centre show that, next year, in real terms, the FE resource budget will be 10 per cent less than it was 10 years ago. What is more, next year the budget provides a capital allocation that is not only cut in cash terms but is less than half the requirement that the sector identified.

For universities, the picture is bleaker. Over the past five years, their resource funding has been cut by more than 11.5 per cent. The draft budget gives them no real-terms increase. As Professor Andrea Nolan of Universities Scotland said,

“The reality is that universities have no more money, in real terms, to spend on students and staff than they had last year.”

It is no wonder that university staff salaries have been squeezed, and that more and more university staff are on temporary or zero hours contracts or are now out on strike.

We are spending £700 less per year on students’ education, and the budget has no money to implement the promised improvements to student support. What kind of short-sighted Government chooses to squeeze FE and deprioritise universities, which are critical to our future? The answer is: one that is also daft enough to underinvest in schools.

Schools are the biggest item in council budgets. On the back of previous year-on-year cuts, today’s budget cuts council allocations by £300 million in real terms, so members should be in no doubt that schools will suffer. They have suffered already—since 2013-14, local government’s non-ring-fenced revenue funding has been cut by an alarming £899 million in real terms. It is no wonder that we spend £288 less per primary pupil and £129 less per secondary pupil than we did 10 years ago; that we still have 2,500 fewer teachers in our schools than we did when this Government first took office; and that the additional support that those teachers used to have has disappeared from many classrooms.

This budget will make those things worse. Members should look at the councils that have already set their budgets. We have already heard that, in Glasgow, the SNP-led council plans to close the much-loved Blairvadach outdoor centre, which has served the city’s children since 1974. It survived decades of Tory cuts and austerity but it could not survive the SNP at Holyrood and in Glasgow city chambers.

In Edinburgh, the budget that was passed last week cuts £1.6 million from devolved school budgets—so much for empowering schools.

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

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is winding up his speech.

Iain Gray: Yesterday, Mr Swinney made a speech in Wester Hailes education centre but he failed to mention that the school’s devolved budget has been slashed by more than £20,000.

This budget does little for colleges, nothing for universities and yet more damage to our schools. It fails to invest in our future prosperity and it fails to invest in excellence in our education system—*[Interruption.]* Worst of all, Mr Swinney, it fails to invest in the future opportunities for our children and grandchildren. It is not good enough.

16:35

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I should declare my saltire card along with my senior railcard. I am delighted that the Scottish Greens have secured free bus travel for under-19s as part of the budget deal. That is a transformational policy that will benefit more than a million young people across Scotland and their families. It will tackle poverty and isolation. It will make families better off; we heard an example of that from Patrick Harvie earlier. It will give young people the mobility and freedom that they need to access education and employment opportunities, not to mention the social benefits that it will bring them. It will help tackle the climate emergency, reducing congestion and toxic air pollution by getting more people on buses. It will give people an affordable alternative to private cars—and we forget at our peril the number of people who do not have access to a motor vehicle. It will help to rebuild a culture of using public transport, after decades of decline. It will bolster bus services across the county, putting tens of millions of pounds into the industry and getting more passengers on to seats that are otherwise empty, not to mention more fare-paying adult passengers, as a result of family travel being made more affordable.

Jamie Greene: Will the member take an intervention?

John Finnie: I am afraid that I have only three minutes, Mr Greene.

The benefits of making bus travel free for under-19s are profound for rural areas. Rural bus users often face much higher fares than urban users, which closes down opportunities for young people in rural communities and causes social isolation. As one young person said in a survey that was run by Scottish Rural Action:

“I had a part time job half an hour away. The cost of the bus fare was equivalent to two hours pay from a four or five hour shift, which became untenable”.

Individuals such as that young person will immediately be helped by what we have announced today, and so will those who do not currently have access to a bus route, because we are at a turning point for the bus industry. Bus use has been in long-term decline as public transport has been neglected by successive Scottish Governments, which have focused support and money on road building.

Last year, the Greens secured powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 to allow councils to run their own bus services. We will now see new life breathed into the industry as a result of the Greens working with others—including Mr Smyth—by getting their transformational policy of free bus travel for all young people introduced into the budget. It is no wonder that the announcement has been welcomed by so many diverse individuals and groups across Scotland: from Friends of the Earth Scotland to the Poverty Alliance and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. We are on a journey to transform habits, and we have seen in East Lothian that that can happen.

I am not surprised that the Tories will not back the policy today—their only priority throughout the process has been tax cuts for the wealthy. However, I am shocked and disappointed that Labour and the Liberal Democrats are lining up behind the Tories yet again.

A vote for the budget today is a vote to make bus travel free for more than a million young people across Scotland. I urge everyone in the chamber to put aside their political squabbling and to get behind this transformational policy to get Scotland moving, to address poverty and to tackle the climate emergency.

16:38

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Scottish Labour entered into talks to try and improve the budget. After 13 years of mismanagement, we and the communities that we serve are in desperate need of investment—investment in our public services, schools and community care, and in an end to potholes.

However, yet again the SNP and their little helpers, the Greens, have this year sold our communities short. They are parties that are more interested in flags than in people, and are more interested in division than in mending and growing our communities. We cannot support them in that. Although we welcome there being more money for local government, the deal will not stop local government cuts.

We will see continuing bed blocking. We will see young people being failed, as education standards fall, and more children with additional support

needs being left behind. This is a budget of continued austerity at the hands of the SNP and the Greens.

Alex Neil: If we give even more money to local authorities—I am not against that in principle—where will it come from? What would Rhoda Grant cut to give local authorities that money?

Rhoda Grant: There is an assumption that cuts would have to be made. First, I would delve behind the big sofa again and find some more money, but I would also look at the reserves, at a social responsibility levy and at tax rates for higher earners. Those are all levers that are in the Government's control, but which it refuses to use.

We wanted free bus travel for young people under 25. Even if the deal with the Greens delivers, 400,000 young people will miss out. The Greens have settled for an agreement to look at what might be provided for under-19s. There is no agreement to provide free bus travel for under-19s; there is agreement only to investigate whether that will happen. For a fraction of the price, the Greens could have delivered free bus travel for the under-16s tomorrow, but they settled for talks about talks.

Kate Forbes: On prices, I respect the fact that Labour was looking for free bus travel for the under-25s, but can Rhoda Grant tell Parliament what Labour's costings were for its proposal?

Rhoda Grant: I shared those costings with the cabinet secretary, and she shared her costings with me, although they did not appear to be based on anything. Our costings, which came through the Scottish Parliament information centre, are based on use of the Young Scot card. It would cost about £26 million to deliver our policy. The Government provided no real costings whatsoever, but simply assumed that the proposal would cost more than free bus travel for older people.

I do not believe that free bus travel for under-19s will happen. I hope very much that the Government will deliver, but we should look back to past budget sops. Last year, the Government told the Greens that it would consider scrapping the council tax. However, this week, I spent an hour in a meeting talking about amending council tax and varying the bands. That is going nowhere, and we are left with the regressive council tax.

Let us take the sop in the budget about fair ferry funding for the northern isles, which is another issue on which no progress has been made. Rather than providing a sustainable future for our ferries in the northern isles, funding is diminishing.

Bus usage has fallen by 8 million journeys per year. The proposal to provide free travel for young people under 19 is a fudge. We need to ensure

that bus travel increases. Giving free bus travel to the under-25s would improve bus services not only for them, but for all of us, and would encourage life-changing habits among young people such that they continue to use bus services into adulthood.

Iain Gray listed the budget cuts to further and higher education and schools. As he said, on the SNP's watch, there are 2,500 fewer teachers and ASN support has all but disappeared. This week, my colleague Jackie Baillie had a member's business debate about the fact that ASN children are being failed in school and that many are not being educated at all.

We wanted a budget that delivers a just transition rather than one that is just a sop, with crumbs towards meeting the net zero emissions target. We wanted a budget in which the whole £50 billion would be tested against a just transition and our national performance framework.

There will, we hope, be consequential from the UK Government. I reiterate my call to the finance secretary for negotiations to take place on those consequential. I ask her to bring them to Parliament so that we can consider how they can best be spent to improve the future of all our citizens.

The process could have been so different. The budget could have halted cuts, but our communities will continue to see their public services disappear. Since 2013, councils' discretionary spending has fallen by nearly £900 million, and that is after including the additional £95 million today. We want investment in our public services, and we would have backed a budget that stopped cuts, but this budget heaps yet more misery on our communities. Therefore, we cannot back it.

16:44

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

This has been a lively debate. If the award for the most statesmanlike speech goes to my good friend Bruce Crawford, the award for the most amusing, so far, goes to Alex Neil. Although he was, of course, totally wrong about everything that he said, he entertained us.

In these troubled times, it is good to have in life certainties on which we can rely. In Scotland, we can always rely on the weather in February being miserable, we can be confident that our football team will perform dreadfully against whichever low-ranked opponent it is playing this week, and we can guarantee that, despite all their posturing and bluster, the Scottish Greens will always end up voting for the SNP budget. So it has turned out once again this week, with the Greens lining up with their fellow nationalists.

This year, it looks as though they have sold themselves very cheap. Only a few weeks ago, the Greens were setting out their red lines for the budget. They were demanding that road-building projects be cancelled and that dualling of the A9 and A96 be stopped. They were even calling for a four-day working week to be introduced. None of those things has been delivered, thank goodness.

Instead, what is now being trumpeted by the Greens is the introduction of free bus travel for people aged under 19. Yesterday, press releases from the Green Party and social media comments from Green MSPs claimed their victory in delivering that policy to tackle climate change. However, it is a debacle; when we look at what has actually been agreed, it falls far short of a firm commitment. I will quote directly from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance's written answer yesterday. It says that there is

"£15 million to support preparations to introduce new concessionary free bus travel for young people aged 18 and under, with the aim if possible to begin in January 2021".—[*Written Answers*, 26 February 2020; S5W-27621.]

There will just be "preparations"—there is just a possibility, as the finance secretary confirmed earlier—and there is just £15 million against an annual estimated cost of £80 million. Mr Harvie can now explain how that is a firm commitment.

Patrick Harvie: I will be delighted if we can go into the next election saying that the only way to put an easily delivered policy into practice is to put the Greens into Government. However, I do not think that the Scottish Government will give us that opportunity, because that commitment is clearly deliverable. The only thing that would make the Young Greens happier would be if Mr Fraser told us that the Young Conservatives think that it is such a bad idea that they will never get on the bus, so they will not have to share it with them.

Murdo Fraser: We are, after that intervention, none the wiser as to whether the policy will be delivered.

It is not just on that policy that the Greens have been sold short. Yesterday, they were claiming that the proposed flyover at the Sheriffhall roundabout should be revisited. It is a vital infrastructure project for connecting Edinburgh to Midlothian and the Borders. However, because the project is being delivered as part of the Edinburgh and south-east Scotland city region deal, a change to the policy would require the agreement of the UK Government and local authority partners: it would be up to them. The finance secretary confirmed that yesterday in a television interview, so the Greens have been sold short again.

I have to congratulate Kate Forbes on what she has achieved so far as finance secretary. She has been in the job for only nine days, but already she

has stitched up Patrick Harvie far more successfully than her predecessor achieved in more than three years in the role.

Overall, the budget is a disappointment, but it could have been so much better. It was based on a 3.7 per cent uplift in real terms in the total available resource spending, thanks to the Boris bonus that is due to increased Westminster spending. Against that, as Bruce Crawford reminded us, we have to offset the negative reconciliation of more than £200 million from poorer income tax receipts than were forecast three years ago, and the downward effect of lower income tax forecasts relative to the rest of the UK on the amount of money that is available for the Scottish Government to spend. That all demonstrates, once again, that if we could grow the Scottish economy at even the same rate as the UK average, we would have many hundreds of millions of pounds more to spend on public services, without having to increase taxes any further.

Alex Neil made a speech about the fiscal framework, but he seems to have forgotten that the person who negotiated the fiscal framework was Mr Swinney, on behalf of the Scottish Government. If Mr Neil has a problem with what is in the fiscal framework, he needs to take that up with his colleague on the front bench.

Despite all the extra money that is available to the Scottish Government, and the fiscal transfer from the rest of the United Kingdom of £10.7 million, the budget still delivers cuts. There is an extra £95 million in revenue for local government, which is welcome, but there is nothing extra for capital. That means a real terms cut of £117 million in capital for local authorities across Scotland. It will mean that projects that are currently being planned—local roads and infrastructure projects, new school builds and refurbishments, leisure and recreation centre investments—will all have to be rethought because the SNP Government, backed by the Greens, is cutting the budgets of local authorities.

Right across Scotland today, local authorities are having to set budgets and make cuts. As Donald Cameron reminded us, they are having to make cuts in school-crossing patrollers, teacher numbers, classroom assistants, music tuition, the opening hours of libraries and leisure facilities and the opening hours of local recycling centres—from a budget that is supposedly focused on climate change. That is what is being delivered right across Scotland, thanks to the SNP and the Greens working together. At the same time, as Graham Simpson reminded us, many places are facing council tax rises of nearly 5 per cent this year.

In effect, the budgets of local councils across Scotland are being raided to fund the pet project of the SNP and Greens. If we see free bus travel for the under-19s being provided, the buses will be travelling on heavily potholed roads, because the Greens have stolen the money out of local government to fund that scheme.

The Scottish Conservatives engaged constructively on the draft budget; I thank the Cabinet Secretary for Finance for her constructive engagement. However, we cannot support the budget. Despite the extra resources that are available to the Scottish Government, the budget falls short of what Scotland requires. It will deliver more cuts, it does not tackle the drugs crisis, and for all the noise that they are making, the Greens have sold themselves short once again. It is a budget that Parliament should reject.

16:51

Kate Forbes: This budget delivers certainty, stability and stimulus for Scotland. It protects our public services and it delivers on the priority themes of tackling climate change, reducing child poverty, supporting inclusive growth and, in the roundest sense, improving the wellbeing of people in Scotland. At a time of turmoil and uncertainty resulting from the UK Government's actions, it is essential that we lead the way as a Parliament for the people of Scotland.

I will reflect on some of the comments that have been made by my colleagues, starting with the wider context. The Conservatives opened their remarks by saying, "There is no austerity." Only a Conservative could look at the past 10 years, during which, under a UK Tory Government, Scotland's discretionary resource allocation has been cut by 2.8 per cent—or £840 million—between 2010 and 2021 and say that. The Tories now talk about the windfall that they are kindly and benignly bestowing upon us, but only the Tories could describe a slight increase that does not reverse that decade of cuts as a bonus—whether it is Boris's or anyone else's. If the Tories are so proud of this year's block grant, why is it so late? Why are they waiting and forcing us to introduce our own budget ahead of the UK Government's, which is introducing even more uncertainty? For the Conservatives to say that there is no austerity is quite remarkable.

Despite the significant investment that we are making through this budget, the Tories have confirmed that they will not support the budget because of tax. They will vote against increased funding for local government, the police and health because of tax divergence. The intriguing thing is that such divergence would, of course, be the result of the UK Government's decisions to cut tax rates. In 2018, the then chancellor promised to

freeze the higher rate threshold in 2020-21; so if there is to be any divergence, it will only be because the UK Government has broken its promise and has, once again, prioritised tax cuts at the expense of other services.

Murdo Fraser: Can the finance secretary confirm that, if the Scottish Government were to match any changes in the UK income tax rates, under the fiscal framework negotiated by Mr Swinney, there would be no additional cost to the Scottish Government?

Kate Forbes: I am not prepared to outsource our decisions on tax to the UK Government or to wait for the Tories to hurry up and get their budget done while we bake in anticipated consequentials rather than agreed consequentials, which will come only on 11 March—the very date by which local government has to set council tax in consideration of our precious public services.

Jamie Greene talked about our teachers. What he forgot to say is that the starting salary for a fully qualified teacher is significantly higher in Scotland than it is elsewhere in the UK. The budget commits the latest funding to increase teachers' pay. After income tax and pay policy choices for 2020-21 are passed this evening, and ultimately at stage 3, a teacher at the top of the main scale will be around £950 better off next year than they are this year. Incidentally, a band 5 staff nurse at the top of the pay scale will be around £700 better off, and a senior nurse in band 6 will be around £890 better off. That is what the budget delivers.

Labour raised concerns about local authorities. Those concerns are why, in the agreement that we reached yesterday, we met COSLA's ask of £95 million. Capital has also been mentioned. Local authorities will be able to access the £1 billion schools for the future programme to invest in their school estate; they will be able to access over £800 million to invest in affordable homes; and there is also £201 million for city region and growth deals.

Rhoda Grant: Is the schools for the future funding just revenue funding, whereby councils borrow and the Government gives them some money towards that borrowing cost, rather than an investment by the Scottish Government in our schools?

Kate Forbes: Of course, it is an investment by the Scottish Government in our school estate. It builds on the very successful schools for the future programme, which saw the second-highest amount go to Highland Council, which is the member's local authority.

The budget also includes the new £200 million for the green growth accelerator, to help and support local authorities to invest in low-carbon infrastructure. The additional revenue funding of

£594 million, taken together with potential council tax income of up to £135 million, means that councils have the potential to access an additional £724 million in resource next year.

I think the reason why we have heard the predictable accusations and counter-accusations this afternoon is that this is a good budget. Yesterday's agreement is good for the communities and businesses of this country.

Bruce Crawford, speaking on behalf of the Finance and Constitution Committee, identified some of the risks and challenges that the budget faces as part of the fiscal framework. Those are recognisable and we must take steps to meet those challenges. I spoke to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury earlier today, to highlight some of the risks of the volatility that comes with the fiscal framework. We must work collaboratively to manage those risks and that volatility.

Despite that, and despite the uncertainty and the fact that we do not know what consequentials will come to us on 11 March, we have a budget before us that is the best available budget for Scotland. It delivers for local authorities, it delivers for the wider public sector and it delivers for the people of Scotland. It will continue to deliver on the key priorities of the people of Scotland. I urge all members to support the budget, to ensure that we benefit the people of Scotland and give people the certainty that they need at a time like this.

I urge members to vote for the budget at 5 o'clock.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): That concludes our stage 1 debate on the budget. I will give members an extra minute. I am not saying that the vote is on a knife edge, but I want to allow everybody time to come to the chamber. We will wait for another 50 seconds, until 5 o'clock.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): No member came in through the doors, but it is better to be safe than sorry.

There are two questions today. The first question is, that amendment S5M-21013.1, in the name of Donald Cameron, on the Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill at stage 1, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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) (Green)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 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)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)

White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 90, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-21013, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (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)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)

Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No.4) Bill.

Meeting closed at 17:02.

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

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