



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 18 March 2020**

**Session 5**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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## Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 18 March 2020

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

### Business Motion

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The first item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-21303, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out revisions to today's business.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following revisions to the programme of business on Wednesday 18 March 2020—

delete

2.00 pm Ministerial Statement: Education – COVID-19

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Economy – COVID-19

after

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

insert

2.00 pm Ministerial Statement: Economy – COVID-19

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Supporting our Communities – COVID-19—[Graeme Dey]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Covid-19 (Economy)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a statement by Fiona Hyslop on the economy and Covid-19. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:01

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop):** As Covid-19 continues to spread globally, there is major uncertainty in financial markets, supply chains and the functioning of the global economy.

The scale of the economic crisis could see gross domestic product shrink by 5 per cent over a three-month period, based on the economy operating at 80 per cent capacity. The 5 per cent hit to GDP is also contingent on most businesses still being able to operate and function during that period.

The overall economic impact is clearly likely to be significant, albeit potentially temporary, but the scale and duration of the impact are difficult to predict. Depressed economic activity this year will have implications for the public finances through lower tax receipts and higher welfare spending. That will have severe economic consequences, and we are treating it as an economic emergency triggered by the enormity of the health emergency.

The Scottish Government has three main aims. The first is to keep companies in business and with productive capacity so that they can recover. The second, related to the first, is to keep staff in employment with appropriate income protection and support. The third and most important aim is to provide support to staff so that they can self-isolate and provide care to loved ones. That is why it is in everyone's interest—individuals, business and Government—to help companies through this period.

The key impacts on business are through cash flow. However, that is not uniform and some businesses are being impacted immediately, while others will be impacted over a longer period of time.

We are aware of businesses reducing working hours and laying off staff. The pace of that is faster than we would see normally, which reflects the scale of impacts across some sectors of the economy. Our immediate focus is therefore on supporting well-functioning profitable companies that are facing an immediate collapse in demand.

I welcome the further support that was announced by the chancellor, and the Scottish Government will pass all consequentials to

businesses to help them through this challenging period. The First Minister has already confirmed that every penny that we receive will go to support Scottish businesses and their employees, and I confirm today that we will replicate the package of measures in full.

We have already confirmed our intention to effectively freeze the poundage rate next year, and I confirm today that we will mirror the package of measures that was announced by the chancellor. That will ensure that small businesses that receive the small business bonus scheme or rural relief will be eligible for a £10,000 grant. We will provide 12 months' relief for properties in the hospitality, leisure and retail sectors, and we will provide a £25,000 grant for hospitality, leisure and retail properties with a rateable value between £18,000 and £51,000.

Loans are important, but debt is still debt, and we need the United Kingdom Government to help companies with more support. We need an agreed economic framework in place with the UK Government. We must think beyond the last crisis. This is potentially of a greater order of magnitude and a different type of shock.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer talked about a bridge for business but we need more than a bridge; in many cases, we need to protect capacity until demand returns. We need substantial grant support and tax breaks to keep—where possible—companies in business and people in jobs, and a greater emphasis on supporting individuals and households. In particular, today, I ask the UK Government to reduce cost pressures on business through, for example, tax holidays through pay as you earn—PAYE—breaks, VAT reduction and the suspension of the apprenticeship levy; and to review competition policy to ensure that markets remain equitable and regulations are put in place to safeguard consumers from price hikes.

To date, we have had a positive working relationship with the UK Government. I spoke to Alok Sharma, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and, at my suggestion, he agreed to a quadrilateral telephone conference with the devolved Administrations, which took place this morning. I will continue to work closely with the UK Government and the other devolved Administrations, because this situation will require a co-ordinated response.

To support the health response, it is important that we repurpose any economy activity or capacity that we can mobilise. It is also vital that fair work principles support the current situation. This morning, I met the Scottish Trades Union Congress and a number of affiliate unions to discuss that.

I want to make clear what the Government expects of itself as an employer, as well as of private, public and third sector employers. Yes, we are in an emergency situation but, if we take the time with unions and our staff to work out what we do, the country will be better off.

Engagement with businesses and unions is crucial. I met the STUC and business leaders on 11 March. We have arranged calls three times a week with business organisations to share information and gather intelligence.

With other devolved Administrations and the UK Government, on 13 March, we launched the Covid-19 helplines to support businesses. That augments the [findbusinesssupport.gov.scot](https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot) website, which is the best way for businesses to find the information that they need. There is also a separate HM Revenue and Customs helpline for tax issues.

We are all operating in an unprecedented, challenging and fast-moving situation, and we need to keep that in mind. In light of the recent announcements, the helpline has been inundated with calls; it has gone from a normal day of approximately 50 calls per day to 100 calls per hour; yesterday, it received around 2,200 calls. The staff at the helpline should be commended for their efforts in dealing with that high volume of inquiries. Most of the inquiries were about new business rates support, and we are working hard to expand the information that is available on the website, so that fewer businesses have to use the helpline to get the answers that they need. We will take that approach as we move forward and we recognise the need to deliver better and at pace.

On 14 March, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance announced the Scottish Government's £320 million support package, which was an immediate response to the UK budget; it included a mix of rates relief and grants for small businesses. Further details are being worked up and will be publicised as soon as possible.

Our initial, immediate response was well received by business organisations, but more is needed, particularly after Monday's health announcements. That is why the scale of the response is necessary.

Our support for businesses is not just financial. We are looking at where we can temporarily loosen the regulatory burden on businesses, to enable them to focus their efforts, as much as possible, on business continuity or adaptation, so that they can continue to pay their staff.

The chief planner has already written to councils to urge them to relax planning restrictions around delivery hours for supermarkets. Today, he will write to local authorities to urge them not to enforce planning restrictions on pubs and

restaurants in order to allow them to operate temporarily as takeaways; that will enable them to adapt their businesses, while allowing people to remain at home in response to Covid-19. The guidance would be kept under review and updated as appropriate.

Having listened to the views of stakeholders, we have agreed to extend the go-live date for the deposit return scheme from April 2021 to July 2022. That will give businesses more time to prepare their premises for the scheme and, crucially, provide flexibility in the immediate term. We have also halted the legislative process for the transient visitor levy, or tourist tax.

The financial support that is needed cannot come from Government alone. We will look to share costs across the public and private sectors in a way that is fair and benefits mitigation but that also benefits prospects for recovery.

We are working closely with the banking sector to ensure that people and businesses are able to access the financial support that they need during this difficult time. The banks have moved swiftly, mobilising £20 billion of finance across the UK. The critical message for citizens and businesses is that anyone who foresees financial challenges in the future should talk to their bank now, even if they are not currently experiencing difficulties. The sooner that the bank is able to understand someone's situation, the more likely it is that it will be able to help.

We are in urgent discussions with the banks in respect of their contribution to tackling the crisis. The First Minister will convene an emergency meeting of the Financial Services Advisory Board in order to ensure a co-ordinated approach between Government and the financial sector. I will also be seeking an urgent meeting with the insurance industry to discuss how we can work with it to support businesses.

The Scottish Government cannot act alone in the current situation. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance will write to all local authorities urging them to respond positively to requests from ratepayers for payment deferrals for a fixed period. We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that individuals facing redundancy continue to be supported through our partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—initiative

We are already looking at what can be done in the areas of procurement and payment to help relieve the pressure on buyers and suppliers through procurement policy advice, which will, hopefully, help to free up resources to focus on business continuity.

We are working with suppliers to the Scottish Government to assess the impact of coronavirus on the delivery of relevant goods and services,

and the extent to which supply contingencies are already in place.

As well as working across Administrations, I am keen to work across party boundaries, given the scale of the situation that we are in. In the first instance, Kate Forbes and I will meet the economy and finance spokespersons of the other parties tomorrow.

Yesterday, my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport said:

“Our nation faces a challenge to our way of life and to public health in a manner that has never been seen before in our lifetimes.”—[*Official Report*, 17 March 2020; c 4.]

That challenge is not just a public health one; it is an economic one as well.

We live in unprecedented times, and collectively we need to work together for the benefit of people and families across Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will now be questions on the statement; I intend to allow up to around 3 o'clock for that. Those who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak buttons.

It has been agreed that questions can be directed to the other cabinet secretaries who are sitting on the front bench just now, so it would be useful if those who are asking questions could let me know which cabinet secretary they would like to respond: the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity; the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism; the Cabinet Secretary for Finance; or, indeed, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture herself.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I begin by reiterating what Jackson Carlaw said yesterday about support from Conservative members for the Scottish Government's general approach the coronavirus crisis, and I restate the Scottish Conservatives' support for the First Minister and her Government as they respond to the emergency. That is especially the case when it comes to the economy and assisting not only Scotland's business community but Scotland's workers, wherever they may be.

Last night, the Chancellor of the Exchequer unveiled a substantial package of measures to assist business, including £1.9 billion for the Scottish Government. I acknowledge and welcome the fact that the First Minister has confirmed that every penny of that will be spent on business support.

Some of the actions that have been outlined are applicable UK-wide and others are not. Given that a range of businesses in England will now have, in effect, 100 per cent rates relief, many businesses

in Scotland expected the same assistance, so I was pleased and grateful to hear the cabinet secretary confirm that the Scottish Government will adopt an identical approach and will replicate the UK package.

I listened carefully to what the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture said about the helpline, and would like to ask a question of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance. Can she tell us about the mechanics of accessing support, given the need for the process to be fast and straightforward? Businesses large and small urgently want to know whether they are eligible for support, and they want to know how, where and when they will be able to access it. Can the Cabinet Secretary for Finance give more details on that?

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes):** I thank Donald Cameron for his question and his reiteration of his willingness to work on a cross-party basis. When it comes to cross-Government work, we are trying to replicate on the financial side the good work that is already taking place on the operational response to the coronavirus.

On the specific questions that Donald Cameron has asked, my colleague Fiona Hyslop has confirmed that we will mirror what was in the announcement that the UK chancellor made yesterday. I confirm that details will be put online so that businesses can identify quickly and easily whether they are eligible. We will use the rates system, as the English local authorities will, to distribute the grants as quickly and effectively as possible—the £10,000 grants for all small businesses that are in receipt of the small business bonus or the rural bonus, and the £25,000 grants for businesses in the hospitality sector, with that being defined, again, by the rates system.

Rates relief will be relatively automatic, because it will come into force on 1 April, which is when businesses would be getting their bills, anyway. That will be for businesses in the hospitality, leisure and retail sectors. There will be a list online for businesses to use to identify whether they are eligible for the reliefs.

We are moving as quickly as possible to ensure that the resources will be distributed quickly. It is quite an operation to ensure that the businesses will get the resources that they need quickly, but I hope that further information will be online imminently so that businesses can check whether they are eligible.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I, too, welcome the statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture and her recommitment to taking a cross-party

approach, which Labour members will certainly reciprocate.

We said last week that we welcome the extension and underwriting of statutory sick pay to small business employees who self-isolate, but, of course, £94.25 a week is not enough to live on, so we want the Scottish Government to consider topping it up.

The cabinet secretary spoke in her statement—I think that I quote her correctly—of “staff in employment”, but she will know that not all staff in employment are employees. My question is about the people, a quarter of a million of whom are in Scotland, who are part of what is now known as the precariat—the self-employed delivery drivers, the zero-hours hospitality workers and the agency workers in factories across Scotland with unstable hours. What support can the Scottish Government give them when they self-isolate, when they are laid off with no work, or when they have to take time off to look after children—who, from next week, will be unable to attend school or nursery?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I made it clear in my statement that more needs to be done than tackling the business rates issue through grants, however strong that package is. That is precisely because of the points that Richard Leonard makes. It is clear that self-employed people and freelancers, as well as people who are in precarious contracts, have real and distinct needs. Some issues can be dealt with by the hardship fund that has already been announced, and additional information will be made available tomorrow in statements by Cabinet colleagues.

However, in terms of a package that is particular to the people whom Richard Leonard mentioned, I think that two things need to happen. In response to his first point, I say that eligibility for statutory sick pay is required. The lowering of the ceiling for access to benefits via Jobcentre Plus is welcome, but there will be people who are still earning above a certain amount who are not eligible for benefits, which will have to be addressed.

We are, for businesses through the grants system, operating quickly with the resources that we have in order that we can help to support people who are in employment. However, when I met the Cabinet Secretary for Finance yesterday, I agreed that we need to do something specific for self-employed people and freelancers.

I take the opportunity to say that I expect money from the public sector to remain in the systems where contracts are deployed. For example, Creative Scotland, which operates in an area in which there are many self-employed artists and freelancers, is looking at ways to keep money in the system in order to honour contracts and ensure regular incomes.



There is more to be done by the Scottish Government, and there is also a requirement on the UK Government. That is one of the issues that I addressed in the quadrilateral meeting at which I spoke to a UK Government minister, this morning.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to open questions. Many members want to ask questions. I call Andy Wightman, followed by Alex Cole-Hamilton.

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement. My question is for the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture.

In the current crisis, we need a special focus on businesses that are critical. We need to focus on business continuity and, above all, we need to focus on providing a basic income for everybody in the workplace. The UK's announcement yesterday about loan guarantees is useless for the many businesses that will be unable to get a loan because of their cash-flow forecasts. Non-domestic rates relief is useless for self-employed people or small business enterprises that do not pay non-domestic rates anyway.

Can the cabinet secretary explain why she said in her statement that she intends to replicate the UK package in full, when much of it, I argue, is not strictly relevant, nor does it prioritise ensuring that our economy comes out at the end of this focused on priority businesses, focused on continuity and focused on providing a basic income for everybody?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Despite the scale of what was announced by the UK chancellor yesterday, there is more to be done. We can do things differently. With regard to Saturday's announcement, we have already been more flexible with regard to what is required from the Scottish Government. Indeed, the statement by the Federation of Small Businesses and interview this morning indicated that there are things that we can and should do differently—I absolutely appreciate that.

On incomes, we need to explore realistically—I also raised this in the quadrilateral meeting of economy ministers this morning—a system of wage support that will maintain people in employment until such time as the capacity of companies can be restarted, should there be, as we might anticipate, downturns in some areas. Andy Wightman's question was quite specific, and what we do has also to apply to people who are not in employment. In that respect, there must be co-ordination between the UK benefit system and what we can do here within our limited welfare powers. My colleagues are considering what we can do through the hardship fund and other Scottish Government activities.

We cannot do everything immediately, but we have started at pace. Because of the scale of what we are doing and the pace with which we need to respond, we need swiftly to get as much resource, in terms of cash and revenue, into the system, and we need the capacity to respond flexibly to specific needs such as have been identified by Andy Wightman and Richard Leonard.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I restate that the Liberal Democrats fully support all the work of the Scottish Government at this time of national crisis. Edinburgh Airport provides 7,500 jobs in my constituency and sustains a much wider ecosystem of businesses across Edinburgh and Scotland. The impact of the virus will decimate its business to the point of unviability, and it is not alone. 21CC is an events company that has seen £2 million of turnover wiped out overnight. Corstorphine village playgoup, a charity that employs only five childcare workers but sustains other people to go work, is on the verge of collapse. They are examples of all kinds of business, along with taxi drivers, fitness instructors and hairdressers, that have been in touch with me in the past 24 hours and which all face an existential threat that will force them to shed staff if urgent reassurance is not given to them. Can the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture confirm that the measures that have been described will help all those businesses survive, be they a company, charity or sole trader?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member has asked that the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture respond.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I am happy to hear from whoever feels best placed to respond.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I hesitate to say who feels most able.

**Kate Forbes:** The brief point is that a number of the businesses that Alex Cole-Hamilton has mentioned will indeed be included in the specific relief measures or grant measures that have been announced today. However, he has touched on a number of other businesses; it is worth putting on record that, as four cabinet secretaries and more, we are working as a team to support all the businesses that will be impacted by the coronavirus. That includes the conversations that Michael Matheson has been having with Edinburgh Airport, for example.

We want to ensure that we work at pace. We have moved very quickly since yesterday's announcement to ensure that there is support in place for Scottish business and people. However, clearly, there is more to be done, and we are keen to work on a cross-party basis to understand the

concerns that members have and to respond appropriately.

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** Last night, I was contacted by a creel fisherman who is based in my constituency. He raised the concern that much of the fishing industry will not qualify for business support grants given that many businesses do not pay rates as they have no onshore premises. What support will be available for such businesses in the fishing industry?

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):** Maureen Watt is absolutely right to raise that issue—as members from all parties have—which is, primarily, about inshore fisherman and their crew, and shellfish businesses and processors who have suffered enormous economic shocks. Even before the virus, the loss of the brown crab market in China caused massive damage to many businesses, particularly in the shellfish sector. This crisis has exacerbated that.

I am able to confirm two things to Maureen Watt. The first is that I had a conference call with around 30 stakeholders who represent the whole of the fishing sector, during which we discussed a wide range of issues. Secondly, this morning I pursued discussions with officials and we are working hard on a package of support to be given directly to those who will need it most. Obviously, we need to work up that package specifically for the fishing sector. Maureen Watt referred to the fact that many of those businesses do not have an office or shop or any bricks-and-mortar premises. However, they do have a fishing vessel, and often those vessels are subject to loan commitments that are required to be paid. This is a different sector, and it needs to be treated very sympathetically. We are doing that. We are working on a package.

Presiding Officer, with your permission, I hope and expect to come back to the chamber as soon as I can with details to ensure that those people around the country who are suffering in the fishing sector, particularly the inshore sector, receive sufficient financial support to tide them over for the duration of this crisis. One of the challenges is that none of us knows exactly how long that duration will be.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** How will public procurement, including via Government agencies and funded organisations, be used to pump prime the economy to support businesses, contractors and the third sector?

**Kate Forbes:** As Fiona Hyslop said, we are very mindful of the fact that procurement can keep money in the system. Therefore, our commitment is to ensure that we continue to honour contracts.

We already pay 98 per cent of invoices within 10 days of receipt, and we are testing our payments processing systems to ensure that that level of performance can be maintained in the light of any direction to work from home, rather than at the office.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** I ask the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture how we and the wider public can support our local businesses better to help them maintain their cash flows at this difficult time?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Everybody understands that there are immediate pressures in that well-functioning organisations and businesses face a collapse in demand.

We have seen fantastic community responses, with people ensuring that the elderly can be supported in many different ways. However, if you have a local business that you want to see survive and continue to exist on your high street, in your town, please think of buying a voucher for future use. It could be a voucher for a restaurant where you want to eat a meal when all of this comes through and we want to get back together with friends and family. You could buy a voucher for your hairdresser, or wherever you want. Everybody can do something if they have cash, a salary and the capability to buy a voucher—people are saving money because they are not going out—please think of buying vouchers that support your local community. We can have a community social response, and we can also have a community economic response.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** May I ask for clarification on whether replicating UK business support includes 100 per cent rates relief for companies with a rateable value under £51,000? Will levers be attached to business support and assistance to protect jobs and ensure that the benefits are passed on? I am thinking, for example, of mortgage holidays in the buy-to-let market.

**Kate Forbes:** I confirm that rates relief for all businesses in hospitality, leisure and retail applies irrespective of threshold. Of course, we made the announcement on Saturday that it would extend to those under the rateable value threshold of £69,000, but our announcement today confirms that all businesses in those three sectors will get that relief. That overrules the commitment that was made on Saturday.

We have been clear in our engagement with business, in our announcements and in considering this relief package that we do not expect this package of support to extend only to business structures; it must be used to protect

jobs and ensure that employees have money in their wallets and the support that they need.

A lot of work is going on with the banks, in particular, to ensure that, when it comes to mortgages, debt arrears and other things, the banks are sympathetic on payments. Ms Hyslop will meet the banks next week to discuss how we can work together to support people.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** A crisis brings out the best in some people and the worst in others. In my constituency, Scotland's largest producer of alcohol-based sanitising gel, TR Bonnyman, Son & Company, has seen the price of alcohol that is supplied to it rocket from £500 per tonne to £3,500 per tonne. What steps will be taken to tackle individuals and companies that are allegedly profiteering from the impact of Covid-19?

**Fiona Hyslop:** When I spoke to the secretary of state yesterday, one of the issues that I raised was the potential for and therefore the need to prevent price hikes in energy and other areas. The example that Kenneth Gibson gave shows that there are people who want to exploit people and companies in very difficult circumstances.

I commend, in particular, the distilleries that are redeploying their equipment for use in relation to hand sanitisers, which is a good example of businesses responding positively.

Exploitation of the economy at this very difficult time is absolutely inexcusable. Everybody has a responsibility to support businesses, and anything that can be done in relation to competition policy and to ensure that such activity does not happen must be done. That is something that we will continue to monitor.

The member may forward his example to us and we will see what powers to regulate we or the UK Government have to try to restrict such unacceptable behaviour during an economic emergency.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am sure that I am not the only member who has been contacted by local businesses expressing concern about the time that it is taking to get through on the Government's helpline. Indeed, some people have given up altogether.

Given the importance that is attached to the line, will the Scottish Government look at increasing the resources that are available to it? I know that the people who are working on the helpline are working very hard already, but can more staff be allocated and can the helpline's opening hours be extended into the evening or perhaps the weekend, so that businesses can access the information that they are desperate to get?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The helpline was launched only last Thursday—less than a week ago—in conjunction with the UK Government; there is a dedicated Scottish helpline, which identifies support in Scotland. The announcement that was made on Monday—less than 48 hours ago—has precipitated considerable concern and business expectation. There was also the announcement, only on Saturday, of the immediate response to the budget.

We completely understand that people want to access information. Yesterday, I spoke to Scottish Enterprise, after a number of members had contacted me, to ensure that it is scaling up activity, in terms of the available resource.

I take the member's point about the helpline being a critical service, which people need to be able to access. I have talked about the sheer scale of activity in terms of the number of calls. We are committed to constantly updating and improving the information, even as of today. We will also make sure that there is the capacity for people to get responses when they need them. People will have to bear with us. We are going through an economic emergency and the service is scaling up at pace. We should thank the people who are providing that service for us, as I appreciate Murdo Fraser has just done.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** This is probably a question for the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture.

Glasgow has the largest number of pubs and clubs outside London, involving thousands of jobs. Many young people in the industry are on part-time contracts. I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware that the sector feels that it does not know what to do this weekend when people are being advised not to go out but pubs and clubs will still be open for business. Will there be any more clarity on that towards the weekend?

Could the cabinet secretary publish the current rules on staff lay-offs? If staff can get continuity of employment when we get to a really difficult point, it will be better for them than being dismissed from their employment, because they will retain their employment rights.

**Fiona Hyslop:** The point about fair work is absolutely critical. We need to keep as many people as possible in employment. When that is not possible, we have to find a way of supporting businesses through wage subsidies. There is no scheme for that at the moment, but I think that that is where we will end up.

I know that insurance is a major issue. From my conversation with the UK Government this morning, I understand that John Glen, the relevant minister, has had reassurance from insurers that they will honour contracts where there is provision

for a pandemic. That might not necessarily affect everyone; it depends on people's insurance policies. That is a bit of progress that has been made since yesterday, and it might allay some of the concerns that a lot of the clubs have.

On Pauline McNeill's point about rules and regulations, employers should absolutely support the employment contracts that people have already and honour their responsibilities under employment legislation. By giving businesses the confidence that they can continue for the next few months, the measures that we have taken are considerable. The rates relief for the hospitality industry for the year and the £25,000 grant will be very important measures for many areas. They will give people a bit of confidence, time to plan and time to talk to their banks to see what is possible so that they can continue their relationship with the many young people who work in that very important sector.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** In many constituencies such as my own, where the tourism and hospitality sectors play a major role, there is widespread anxiety about the economic consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak. I spoke to one small business in the islands on Tuesday that had just taken 70 cancellations in the space of one hour.

This is all coming at the worst possible time of year for cash flow. As things stand, many tourism and other businesses are wondering how they can get through the outbreak financially. I ask the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture what can be done to direct people quickly to sources of Scottish and UK Government help, particularly in tourism-dependent areas of the country.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture would prefer the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism to answer your question, if that is all right.

**Dr Allan:** That is fine.

**Fergus Ewing:** Dr Allan raises an important question about issues that affect a great many people throughout the country in the tourism, hospitality and leisure sector. Quite simply, many businesses operating in that sector have lost all their revenue: there are no visitors, and things have shut down. That means that we need to help those businesses survive and get through this period.

That is why I very much welcome the specific measures that have been announced for businesses in hospitality, leisure and retail, including the small business bonus rural relief grant of £10,000 and the £25,000 grant for hospitality, leisure and retail properties with a

rateable value of between £18,000 and £51,000. Those measures go far more towards what is required than the UK Government's initial response did. I do not say that with any criticism: it is a developing scene, and it is now obvious that the initial UK response was not adequate and has been substantially enhanced.

We will continue to listen very carefully to Dr Allan's constituents and others over the coming days to make sure that we know what is required to protect and preserve those great businesses in this important sector—arguably, it is the most important sector of the Scottish economy by some measure—particularly with regard to their staffing needs and the interests of their staff, in respect of which we believe, as the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture has already indicated, more needs to be done.

We will listen very carefully, but I hope that today's announcement will go some considerable way towards providing hope for people involved in those businesses, many of whom, quite frankly, have had very little sleep over the past week from worrying about the future and the survival of businesses that they have spent their lives building up.

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** Some people are taking their own view of the use of cash, with some shops taking cards only. However, some shops cannot take cards or electronic payments, particularly in rural areas, and some groups of people, particularly the elderly, rely on cash.

Will the Cabinet Secretary for Finance advise what conversations she has had with banks to ensure the continued circulation and availability of cash, particularly in rural areas?

**Kate Forbes:** That is part of a much broader conversation that I have regularly with banks around the provision of cash and, in particular, the reduction of free-to-use ATMs in rural areas. In the past, I have met the Payment Systems Regulator and Link, in order to ensure that people still have access to cash without the need to pay for it. I am also working with businesses to ensure that they continue to take cash, because businesses and individuals, particularly in rural areas, are dependent on it. People need to be able to access cash and they expect businesses to take cash, so we will continue to have that conversation.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I, too, have a number of tourism-related businesses in my constituency, including hotels, visitor attractions and cruise operators, which are reporting large-scale cancellations. Their immediate concern is cash flow and their ability to pay the wages of existing staff. Although the measures that have

been announced go so far, the rateable value of many such businesses is above £51,000.

Given that the Government advice is not to travel and to stay away from restaurants and pubs, the problem has been made worse. There also appears to be little prospect of insurance companies paying out. What urgent measures will the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism put in place to ease cash flow, so that staff can be paid?

**Fergus Ewing:** Jackie Baillie is quite right to raise those matters. The cruise sector operates in a number of constituencies, including mine, and has been a notable success. It is very important to ensure that it gets commensurate support, which we believe should be achieved through the measures that were announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture. I can meet Jackie Baillie to continue the discussion.

We all recognise that the announcement has been made in emergency circumstances. We have announced today that we will replicate in full the support that was announced by the UK chancellor yesterday. We all recognise that, in a 24 or 48-hour period, we cannot provide all the answers. However, we are absolutely determined to be open and transparent and to work with all members across all parties as quickly as we can to make sure that no one who has suffered the effective cessation of their business or a substantial diminution of their revenue will be left without financial support. That is the key message that we are determined to convey and to deliver on.

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** I have a question for the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism on supply of goods. People are worried about the lack of paracetamol in our shops and supermarkets. Can the cabinet secretary provide assurances regarding distribution arrangements?

**Fergus Ewing:** I have had two conference calls with supermarkets in the past week. I reiterate what I said in the chamber yesterday: the response of supermarkets and the broader retail sector has been excellent. They are determined to ensure continuity of supply of all vital foodstuffs, sanitary products and other necessities of life. As yet, I have not specifically raised the important issue that Annabelle Ewing asked about, but I will now do so in order to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of such products, on which many people rely, particularly at this time.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** As the cabinet secretaries for economy and the rural economy have both said, the announcement advising people to avoid restaurants and pubs, for example, has had a devastating impact on the

food and drink sector. Rates relief is obviously welcome, but the economic tsunami in that sector at the moment means that many businesses—in particular, the small ones—will go bust, or will at least lay off staff within a matter of weeks, if not days.

Are all the Governments considering a scheme that is similar to the one that has been proposed in Ireland, whereby businesses are being paid €203 per week to keep on staff who would otherwise have lost their jobs as a direct result of the health advice that people should not use those businesses? Is a similar scheme likely to happen?

**Fiona Hyslop:** There are two points to make. First, I reiterate that we are providing 12 months of rates relief for properties in the hospitality, leisure and retail sectors, and we will provide a £25,000 grant to hospitality, leisure and retail properties that have a rateable value that is between £18,000 and £51,000. That will capture a great number of businesses.

Colin Smyth's point about how we can keep people in employment is absolutely crucial. Yesterday, I spoke to Ken Skates of the Welsh Government, who was part of the quadrilateral discussion, and I have spoken to Diane Dodds, who is the Northern Ireland economy minister. We are all in agreement that the UK Government has to work with us on a cross-Administration basis so that we can understand what we can try to do to keep people in employment.

We have responded rapidly. After the budget announcement last Thursday, a package was announced by Kate Forbes on Saturday. After the announcement only yesterday evening by the UK chancellor, we have responded immediately with a commitment to replicate all the measures in relation to rates relief, but we accept that there is more to be done.

More needs to be done to ensure that we have a system for small and medium-sized businesses—especially restaurants and other parts of the hospitality sector, which is the most immediately affected industry, although other areas will also be affected—that will enable people to stay in employment and will support their incomes. I am not saying at what level that would be set or what scheme would be used. Other countries have set different levels. Such a scheme would help: I am determined to continue to find, in my discussions with the UK Government, a route to that.

Some businesses will have to close, for various reasons, but that need not mean that the business must end or that employment with it has to end. Let us find a way through this very difficult situation, and let us understand that there will be an end in sight. On that basis, we can make sure

that there is support to keep businesses operating and employees working, with their incomes being supported.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I do not mind which minister replies to this question. Quite a lot of assistance is being targeted at small businesses, particularly in the hospitality and leisure sectors, and rightly so. However, what will happen for larger businesses, such as hotel chains. Will they have to turn to Westminster for loans, or can we help them, too? What about businesses in other sectors—for example, the international summer school that is based in Glasgow?

**Kate Forbes:** There is other support in place. The UK chancellor announced yesterday, for example, that there is larger corporate loan support, and that the UK Government is expanding the business interruption loan scheme, which will be available for larger businesses.

What we are doing is important at the moment and includes targeting our support at the businesses that need it most urgently, right now. We fully expect that the economic impact will fall on small businesses, large businesses, businesses in rural areas and businesses in urban areas. Therefore, it is clear that regardless of where we target our support right now, support will need to continue in order that we can meet the challenges ahead.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** The health response is very much focused on flattening the curve of infections. Surely our economic response needs to flatten a different curve. The economic impact will fall most heavily on the people in our society who do not have the broadest shoulders. The last economic crisis hit the most vulnerable people hardest. We must ensure that the crisis that results from the virus does not also exacerbate inequality.

Why can we not ensure that the business support packages that are available are contingent on fair work practices? Precarious workers are being left on the scrapheap right now, already this week. Why is replication in their entirety of the United Kingdom's policies the right way of achieving the protection that many businesses are simply not offering?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Patrick Harvie has raised a very important point. We made it clear in our statement on Saturday, when we announced the immediate response to the budget on support for businesses, that we expect the fair work principles to be implemented by businesses. Indeed, going forward, Scottish Enterprise will award grants in its post-April activity in that context.

I make it clear that we have to get cash and resources out to businesses quickly; the rates

system is the quickest way to ensure that we tackle the cash-flow issue.

I absolutely agree about trying to ensure that we support people. That is part of my instruction, as an employer who is part of the Government; I expect public agencies and others to support, in relation to the fair work principles, the system that we have put in place.

On Patrick Harvie's question about supporting vulnerable individuals who might immediately be facing hardship, that will be the subject of a statement to be given tomorrow, which my Cabinet colleagues Aileen Campbell and Shirley-Anne Somerville have been preparing for in order that they can give their responses on what they can do in that territory. We have to help swiftly, and we do not want bureaucracy to tie up contingent grants. However desirable bureaucracy might be, it would stop people accessing resources.

I make it quite clear that, where we can, we will ensure that the fair work principles are carried through in distribution of public money. However, we are in an emergency, and we have to work swiftly. That is why we are taking the action that was described in today's announcement, which follows extremely fast on the UK chancellor's statement yesterday, to give businesses confidence that they can see themselves through this extremely difficult situation.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Will the supply chain of the hospitality sector be included in the support for that sector? The laundry company Fishers Services Ltd employs hundreds of people who service hotels across the country, and its trade has absolutely plummeted. Will it get business rates support?

Fishers laundries are operating under capacity just now, and I imagine that national health service laundries will soon be incredibly busy. Is there the potential for that business to work for the NHS? Can the cabinet secretary have a word about that with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport?

**Kate Forbes:** Willie Rennie mentioned a laundry business. It would be classified as retail, so the company could be in receipt of the £10,000 small business grant if it is already in the small business bonus scheme. It will also pay no rates, because rates relief will apply to everybody in hospitality, leisure and retail, irrespective of the thresholds. That includes laundry services.

We are considering redeployment. As I said earlier, we are approaching the issue as a team of cabinet secretaries. We are looking at various areas and we are working together collaboratively to ensure that opportunities to redeploy are taken at pace.

**Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary provide assurances that, as well as employed and self-employed people, people who operate as subcontractors will receive help and assistance? I am thinking in particular of people who work in the personal and social care sectors.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I made it clear in my statement and in my answers that, in terms of public sector procurement, contracts must be honoured to ensure that the system is in place to support different areas. Subcontracting is a clear example, in that context.

It is absolutely imperative that we support all businesses in all sectors, but it is clear that we have to prioritise. Anybody who supports the front-line response to Covid-19 in social care and health has to be a priority; obviously, there are companies that subcontract social care services.

I emphasise that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has clearly prioritised not just health, but social care. That includes everybody who is involved. Obviously, there is public delivery by local authorities, but some local authorities contract their provision. We must ensure the economic health of that sector in particular, in order to ensure that delivery of services that we all need and rely on for our friends, families and neighbours can continue.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** My question is for the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture. The cabinet secretary spoke earlier about the business support phone lines. Can she provide further information regarding timescales for the extension of that support, and are there any other means of communication that businesses can use to get information about the support that is available?

**Fiona Hyslop:** A lot of the information that people are seeking is available online. As part of the support services, I have already referred to the deliberate efforts by Scottish Enterprise in recent times to streamline that information so that there is a single portal through which people can access information.

I encourage people to look online first, because, as I said, a lot of the information that they are looking for will be available there. I am acutely aware of the extreme ramping up that is required for that service given Monday's announcement, which was made, quite understandably, for health reasons. That announcement has had immediate implications for the economic issues that face individual businesses. I gave assurances earlier that I have spoken to the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise, who assured me that it has ramped up its service and will continue to do so. I would also refer people to

findbusinesssupport.gov.scot, as I identified during my statement.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will let this session run on a little, but I would ask that members are quite quick with their questions because there are still a number of questions to get through.

**Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab):** This is a question for the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity. We have heard from health ministers that testing for clinical care workers will be made available as soon as possible to allow those workers who have shown symptoms but are not infected to return to work. Once that has been achieved, does the Government have any such plans for key workers in sectors such as transport and logistics, particularly those who work with essential goods and the production and supply of energy?

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson):** Mr Macdonald raises a very important issue. We are undertaking work to identify key workers in a range of different sectors who are critical to our transport and logistics system in order to maintain good connectivity. Everyone within the sector recognises the central role that our transport system plays in helping to support communities, individuals and our economy.

Our focus at present is on ensuring that we keep the country moving as best we can in very challenging circumstances. A number of elements are absolutely critical to continuing to maintain good transport connectivity and a number of the workforce play an important role in making sure that that is maintained. The Government is going through a process to identify key workers so that we have a good understanding of those who would require prioritisation, should the circumstances arise.

I can give the member the assurance that we recognise the importance of that across a number of different areas, including our energy sector, so that we can ensure the provision of energy supplies. That work is on-going and will be considered overall as part of the Government's resilience strategy.

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I do not mind whether my question is answered by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance or the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture. The Glasgow Kelvin constituency, which I represent, is home to many pubs, clubs, restaurants, and small and large businesses, as well as freelancers and creative industries. Many of those businesses are closing down and many people cannot pay their rent. Is there a timescale for the Government's help to be delivered and

what specific help can the Scottish Government give to self-employed individuals and freelancers who do not fit the specific categories that were mentioned earlier?

**Kate Forbes:** The timescale is as soon as possible. As I mentioned, the fastest way of getting out either grants or relief, which will obviously help with cash flow, is through the rates system. We are working with local authorities and assessors to try to mobilise the mass distribution of support as quickly as possible.

Sandra White mentioned clubs and pubs, which, along with music venues, cinemas, studios and galleries, are all classified as retail and therefore would qualify for 100 per cent rates relief, irrespective of their rateable value. Some of them will also be small businesses and so will get the £10,000 grant. We recognise the huge challenge facing those businesses and we want to get the money to them as quickly as possible. We need to do that in a way that is not burdensome or bureaucratic, which is why we are working through the rates system.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To follow on from the question about the creative industries, I want to ask about support for the film production industry, which has been severely hit. I have been contacted by a company that still has staff to pay and still has significant payments to make to freelance journalists, but which has found a healthy order book turned into zero turnover, which means that the company now has no collateral to borrow against. A significant package is required to maintain that sector, because it is in danger of disappearing. What advice does the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture have for it?

**Fiona Hyslop:** It is clearly a key sector. In my discussions with the unions this morning, the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union position was raised with me. Creative Scotland is working on what it can provide through its system, and it is important that we recognise that freelancers, particularly in that area, are supported. The sector will be covered as part of the leisure provisions in the rates relief that we have just discussed and through any grants that are available, depending on the size of the business.

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** I, too, am looking for details of what is available to the culture sector and, in particular, freelance practitioners, most of whom have already had most of their work cancelled. I would also like to know whether social enterprises and charities will qualify for support to survive the crisis, given that they, too, contract many people in the arts and culture sector and across the economy.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Clearly, rates relief exists for social enterprises and charities, and information on additional support for them will be covered as part of the social side of the response. In relation to freelancers and those who have had contracts cancelled, I make it clear that Creative Scotland is working on a scheme by which support to carry out work that now cannot be experienced, performed or seen by others can still be honoured. Creative Scotland will want to respond on how it will do that, but that is an important principle. Keeping money in the system for individuals is the key priority in what we are trying to do. We can do that for businesses through rates relief, and there are other means by which we can do it.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** My question is for the Cabinet Secretary for Finance. Like other members, I have constituents who are on insecure and even verbal contracts, who are struggling to understand what rights they have. I note and welcome the helpline that has been set up for businesses. Has the Scottish Government considered setting up something similar to assist employees and the self-employed?

**Kate Forbes:** In many ways, some of those questions will be answered when Aileen Campbell gives a statement on the response for charities, social enterprises and individuals. Part of our commitment was to a hardship fund to ensure that there is support. For example, where there are costs around council tax, that will ensure that council tax reduction can help with those costs. We intend the package to be a significant package of support for businesses in order to keep people in work, as well as for self-employed people and those who work on a freelance basis to help with their costs.

On the banking response, obviously a number of welfare provisions are reserved to the United Kingdom Government, and we continue to work with it to ensure that as many people as possible are supported. We are also working with the banks to ensure that, where there are issues with debt arrears and other matters, the banks work sympathetically with people and do not require payments to be made.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** My question is for the Cabinet Secretary for Finance. I have been contacted by a constituent who works for an English language teaching school. Understandably, the school has lost many students and is in financial peril, but it does not believe that it will be covered by the rates relief holidays that have been announced. Because of the nature of the buildings that such schools are in, many of them will have rateable values above £51,000 and so will not qualify for additional relief. I am told that the schools in the sector employ 390



people directly and 2,560 people indirectly. What can the Scottish Government do to support that important sector?

**Kate Forbes:** It is clear that nurseries face similar issues, which are having a significant impact. We are actively looking at that to ensure that support goes as far as possible.

One of the announcements that I made on Saturday was about ensuring that there was not an uplift in the poundage, so that nobody pays more tax next year. That covers all properties. It is clear that more help is needed in the case that Bob Doris mentioned, and I would be happy to speak to him further about what support we could put in place to help the English language school in question.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Three members still have questions. If they are concise, we will get them all in.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture said that we face a challenge to our way of life, and she will know that the widespread closure of cultural venues and the cancellation of performances is having an immediate impact on the viability of those venues and on the freelance creative crew and performers. As she said, Creative Scotland has made initial announcements and has secured existing awards, but is there scope for Creative Scotland's funding to be urgently refocused and directed towards individuals? Will additional resources be made available to support that?

**Fiona Hyslop:** As I said previously, Creative Scotland is responding, and I think that, once it is in a position to do so, it will make clear what provision it will make available to protect individuals and to make sure that the regularly funded organisations are flexible.

Our national companies and national collections are directly responsible to the Scottish Government. It is clear that they will not be able to meet their grant conditions in the way that we would have wanted them to, but we want to make sure that resources are still there so that they can pay individuals and ensure that individuals still receive the income that they need. That approach applies right across the board in the culture and heritage sector, not just to Creative Scotland.

**Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** I ask the economy secretary to look at the issue whereby North Lanarkshire Council has told the contractor to stop the contract for installing safety equipment such as fire sprinklers and alarms in houses on Friday. That will result in 100 redundancies and many apprentices losing their apprenticeships. Will the cabinet secretary talk to North Lanarkshire Council to find out whether there is a way in which

that essential work can continue, that the jobs can be saved and that arrangements can be made to ensure that nobody is put at unnecessary risk?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Mr Neil raises a very serious issue, which I will be more than happy to look into if he will correspond with me to outline what it is. There is an issue around procurement and contracting. It is incumbent on the public sector to honour its contracts to ensure that companies can keep themselves in business and their employees can keep their jobs.

As the issue that Mr Neil raises is a safety issue in so far as it relates to housing, I will be happy to pursue it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The final question comes from Anas Sarwar.

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank the economy secretary for the answers that she has provided so far.

I want to raise an issue to do with supply chains. It is clearly important that we ensure continuity of business, but it is also important that we maintain strong supply chains across the United Kingdom. If we do not have continuity of supply chains, we will not be able to get food and supplies to communities across the country, which will risk people going hungry. What communications are being had at a UK level to make sure that we maintain the logistics of supply chains to ensure that all communities across the whole of the UK, including rural and remote communities, are covered?

**Fergus Ewing:** Mr Sarwar has raised another important point, and I am glad that he has done so. The supply chain is crucial to keeping society running, to keep shops supplied, and to keep hospitals, prisons and all public sector agencies supplied with food and provisions and what they require to continue to operate.

I will make two points. First, the issue is partly to do with maintenance of haulage and the ability of drivers to carry on. I know that the UK Government is taking that issue very seriously, because I have participated in conference calls with George Eustice in which supermarkets, for example, have asked for appropriate dispensations to be given in relation to the very necessary working time directive provisions that ordinarily apply, but which need to be made more flexible in times of crisis, and those dispensations have been given.

Secondly, on Monday, I had a lengthy discussion with wholesalers in Scotland and their trade representatives. We discussed many of these issues and what they require in order to continue to operate. They are affected by staff having to self-isolate, which is a practicality that

just about every business in the country faces at the moment and which is likely to become far more serious over the short term. I assure Mr Sarwar that we are dealing with the matter on a continuous basis. If he has additional suggestions about what we might do, I would, of course, be happy to discuss them with him.

## **Covid-19 (Supporting our Communities)**

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a statement by Aileen Campbell on Covid-19 and supporting our communities. The cabinet secretary and her colleagues will take questions at the end of the statement, so there should be no interventions.

15:11

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell):** Yesterday, the First Minister told the Parliament that we are facing an unprecedented situation that requires an unprecedented response, at scale and pace, to help people who are most at risk in our community. I want to be clear to the chamber and to the citizens of Scotland that our actions will be guided by doing all that we can to protect the health, welfare and wellbeing of the people of Scotland.

We are in the midst of a worldwide public health emergency that is now being strongly felt here in Scotland. None of us has gone through anything like it before, so we need to respond in new ways. That means being flexible, adaptable and ready to respond to challenges as they arise. We want to show our support to all sectors and people in Scotland, and that support will be provided through funding, through communication and through our actions. Scotland's response to the pandemic will require everyone—councils, the third sector, businesses and communities in their widest sense—to work together and to step up to the challenge.

The First Minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport and the chief medical officer have already clearly set out the groups whose health is most vulnerable to Covid-19, and whom we are looking to shield most urgently. We will be working with third sector partners that have contact with, and already support, those who are clinically vulnerable to ensure that people receive the right advice on what precautions to take. Those who support them will also have the best information available on how to keep people safe.

Our focus, of course, will be on the people and communities that are most at risk financially and socially. However, wider society will also need our help, and we must recognise that many people will not be used to asking for or accessing such support. This pandemic will disrupt lives like never before, and it will cause financial hardship and have a negative impact on our wellbeing. Actions might include ensuring that people can access funds or food in times of financial crisis, that homeless people are looked after, and that people

are not lonely or feeling cut off with nowhere to turn if they are social isolating or social distancing.

We will do our utmost to respond but, as the First Minister said yesterday, we need to be open and transparent and to acknowledge that we will not always get things right. However, people should be assured that protecting and supporting our people during these unparalleled times is the absolute focus of the Government.

As a Government, we know that we must respond differently in these exceptional times, and that we cannot do that on our own. Therefore, we will work with partners and organisations in all sectors to ensure that those who are able to step up and support people and communities are enabled to do so by the Government. The nature and scale of the pandemic mean that a dynamic and adaptable response is required, so our funding package will be focused on delivery, not bureaucracy, and support, not red tape.

We want all sectors, whether the private, public or third sector, to think about what they can do. Our collective response will be directed by the fact that local authorities, local businesses, community groups and the third sector know and understand the support needs of their communities the best.

Today, on behalf of the Scottish Government, I will announce significant resources. However, let me be clear that, unless we work with local partners, the impact of our investment will not be felt by those who need it most, so my message today is that, if we can help our partners to help the people of Scotland, we will. Our partners should tell me their solutions or ideas to help those most in need, then we can work together to provide at pace the support that is required to do that.

I announce today that the Scottish Government will be making £350 million available to support people in need.

The £50 million in Barnett consequentials from the United Kingdom Government's hardship fund is being passed directly to local authorities to support their local resilience and hardship plans. The hardship fund for councils in England will be going to shore up their depleted welfare funds and provide more council tax relief. However, for two reasons, that will not happen in Scotland. First, we have maintained our support for the council tax reduction scheme over the past few years. Secondly, we will provide additional funds to support the scheme, if necessary, thereby freeing councils to use this money to directly address their local needs in the best ways that they see fit.

We will also provide an additional £45 million for the Scottish welfare fund, which is administered by our partners in local government and which makes community care and crisis grants available to

those in need in times of crisis and emergency. That more than doubles the current £35.5 million fund and will be accompanied by an increase in flexibilities and new guidance to make sure that the fund is able to fully support people in times of financial crisis.

We have a robust council tax reduction scheme in place that is already supporting more than 450,000 people and is ready to support more. Of that £350 million package, £50 million will go towards supporting the increased demand for Scottish social security benefits and the increased cost of the council tax reduction scheme that we expect to see.

We will establish a £70 million food fund to support households—including those of older people—who might be worried about accessing food, whether due to an income drop or self-isolation. Local authorities will be able to use funds to support those who receive free school meals and to work with all organisations in all sectors, including community groups and local businesses to co-ordinate the response. Funds will also be available to support strategic national activity.

We will provide £50 million for a wellbeing fund to provide support to our third sector partners in the main—but others, too—that will require additional capacity to deal with, for example, the societal challenges that are caused by self-isolation or distancing, which may compound the vulnerability of those who are already living in difficult circumstances, such as those experiencing fuel poverty or those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

A £40 million supporting communities fund will be established to underpin the inspiring work that is already under way in our neighbourhoods and communities, which will prove essential to our nation's resilience.

A £20 million third sector resilience fund will be established to help our valued third sector cope with cash flow and business health.

Finally, we will keep £25 million in reserve to allow us to flexibly respond and react with agility to the challenging times ahead that we cannot at this point plan for.

It is with such flexibility and responsiveness that we will respond to those who are seeking to help others. Just as we are responding nationally as a Government, we know that groups and organisations large and small want to do the same. In many cases, they are already planning their response so that they can support those who they work with every day and their local communities.

Some have already approached us with their plans and sought our assistance. I will provide

three examples of us agreeing funding today to let that support start immediately.

Last week, Age Scotland asked whether we could help it with a significant expansion of its helpline to increase its capacity to deal with a rise in the number of calls from about 100 a day to around 1,500 a day. Today, the First Minister announced that we are providing £80,000 to allow Age Scotland to provide that essential support to older people.

I am pleased to confirm today that we will be working in partnership with Social Bite to enable free food and essential supplies to be delivered to organisations working with those in need in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. We have made £500,000 available for that initiative, which will provide up to 3,000 meals daily and will be up and running by Friday.

We also want to help local grass-roots organisations. The Health Agency, which is a small grass-roots organisation in Wester Hailes—one of the most deprived areas of Edinburgh—asked us today for assistance to allow it to establish a volunteer buddy system that will provide a check-in phone call to people in their community, to ensure that crucial social connections are maintained and to provide food packages for the next three months to around 400 families in a community where around 85 per cent of children are eligible for free school meals. We said yes to the £65,000 that the Health Agency needs to work with the partners that it has lined up to take forward that response.

Those are just three examples of organisations large and small that are stepping up when society needs them; we will support them to do so.

We are also taking action to support people who rent their homes. This is a time for all landlords, whether in the social or the private sector, to be flexible and adaptable to their tenants at a time of national and possibly personal crisis. If tenants experience issues with paying their rent, they should go to their landlord and explain the issues. We, as a Government, and society as a whole, need landlords to help their tenants immediately as part of an overall society response. We cannot have people being made, or at risk of being made, homeless at this difficult time.

Today, we have written to social landlords to urge them to be flexible and to provide support and advice to tenants who experience financial hardship. We expect them to meet that challenge and support their tenants at this difficult time, when benefits might take time to be applied for or paid. We know that social landlords have their tenants' interests at heart, and national and local government will work with them to help with their contingency and resilience planning.

In the private sector, landlords will need to be equally supportive during the public health crisis. We need to get the balance right between protecting tenants and ensuring that landlords can continue to provide housing. To support that, through legislation, we will address a temporary change in the current Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016. Currently, landlords can move to eviction if a tenant is in arrears for at least three months in a row and if at least one month of rent is unpaid. At present, first-tier housing tribunals will not uphold that if the reason for non-payment of rent is a delay or failure in the payment to tenants of welfare benefits, such as housing benefit or universal credit. That is a crucial part of our current legislative protection. The temporary change that we will make goes further and will increase that rent arrears period from the current three months to six months. We do not want private sector landlords to be disadvantaged by a lack of rent. However, the reality of what we face means that, if landlords do not support their tenants, it is not just the tenants who will be negatively impacted; all of society will pay the price.

Many landlords have mortgages, and the banks have agreed a three-month mortgage holiday. We commend that and we urge private landlords who need that facility to apply for it. However, we need more; we need that holiday to be increased to six months and to provide for all mortgages, including buy to rent. Therefore, we will write to UK Finance and the United Kingdom Government to urge them to move to providing six-month holidays for all mortgages. Such a move would help tenants and landlords across the UK who need that vital support. To paraphrase Fiona Hyslop from yesterday, just as the people helped our financial institutions at a time of crisis, now it is the financial institutions' time to do the same.

That is our response to Covid-19 with regard to supporting communities. Using the powers that we have, we will build on the support systems that are already in place. We will step up our support, but we are aware that the safety net of statutory sick pay and 85 per cent of welfare benefit spending lie with the UK Government, including all policy and administration over income replacement benefits. Therefore, if they are eligible, I urge people to ensure that they get statutory sick pay. If they are not eligible and they have a fluctuating or reduced income or hours, or, unfortunately, have been made unemployed, I urge them to access universal credit, which is a benefit that covers a variety of elements, including income replacement and rent elements and child tax credits.

Many people might not have accessed the welfare benefits system before outside child benefit or a pension, but that is what the social security system is for. That is the social contract

we pay into: we pay for the safety net so that it is available in our time of need. This is definitely our hour of need.

Given that it is a time of great need, and although we welcome the actions of the UK Government to date, there are actions that only the UK Government can take, because that is where policy and administration of sick pay and welfare benefits lie. The numbers of people who rely on them will increase.

I understand that the UK Government is considering ways to further support individuals. In that regard, now would be a good time for it to reconsider its approach to welfare and to look to increase child benefit, increase the levels of sick pay and increase universal credit. UC must be made more flexible. Hardship grants—not loans—need to be made available.

The UK Government must also lift the benefit cap, increase housing allowance rates and, most importantly, reverse the cap on children. I appreciate that those are suggestions that the UK Government has been opposed to in principle before, but these are not normal times and I would urge it to reassess those policies, given the unprecedented challenges that we face. I say that not to score political points but because of the impending and massive need to support those who are already in hardship and those who will be plunged into hardship because of the impact of the pandemic. If the UK Government takes those actions, we will welcome that unreservedly.

Among the many negatives that we are seeking to mitigate today, what gladdens my heart are the countless acts of kindness and empathy that I have seen on display. There is no getting away from the fact that this is an uncertain time for everyone, including the Government. Life as we know it is postponed. We need to get used to a new normal. Although there is a medical need for social distancing, we cannot—we must not—forget that connectedness and kindness help to sustain our wellbeing.

Our communities are strong and they are resilient, and it is that strength, along with a deep desire to help, that is motivating so many groups, charities, organisations, businesses and, importantly, individuals, to do what they can to look out for one another, particularly those most at risk. That community response has been fantastic, is to be commended and is to be emulated. We know that people will want to help others and we know that we need to keep people safe.

Our first step has been to establish the funding packages that I have just outlined to the chamber. Our next step will be to move to directly work with partners and community groups to ask how they can help harness that community spirit, to back up

the measures to support people that I have outlined and to fill the gaps in lives that people may now face.

We will work fast to provide advice and information on how the public can help to fulfil that urge and determination to help, because I have seen that it is there in abundance and we need to harness it for the public good. We need to provide a safety net for people experiencing hardship, and we also need to provide a community safety net for people without close families or friends nearby to help them through these challenging times. If any groups or organisations can safely support others in their community—whether it is with befriending phone line services, helping people with the messages, walking the dog or other things that might help people cope with the social isolation and loneliness that they could now face—we encourage them to do so.

We are also aware of the pressures that will be created by people staying at home and the potential impact for services that offer support for victims of gender-based violence. We are offering weekly teleconferences with stakeholders to review impact and demand on services. Information on the support services that are available will be widely disseminated.

Scotland's response to tackling Covid-19 will primarily and rightly be a medical and scientific one, but the human qualities of kindness and empathy are critically important to helping our country emerge from this tough challenge.

I look forward to members' questions.

**The Presiding Officer:** I believe that, as well as the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People will also be available to answer questions.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. That was useful.

I want to make a small suggestion. Because we are in this crisis—it is a crisis, and a fast-moving one—it would be useful if both cabinet secretaries were to have weekly or maybe more-than-weekly conversations with spokespeople from other parties, so that, when we get to statements such as this one, we are all on the same page and are all buying into what the Government is doing. That is exactly what we want to do. As Jackson Carlaw has said, we are all in this together and we all need to pull together and work together. That is a genuine offer, and I hope that it is taken up.

I welcome what is in the statement—the announcement of extra money and of various new funds—and agree that we need to act quickly.

I want to ask about two areas: homelessness and rents. In the statement, there were a couple of mentions of the homeless, but no great detail. At a time when winter night shelters such as the one at the Glasgow City Mission are closing, I would like to hear about alternative accommodation for homeless people. Given the situation that we are in, we do not necessarily want homeless people to be in shelters, but there should be somewhere else for them to go. Will the cabinet secretary address that?

People who fail to pay their rent because they are suddenly put into financial hardship due to the virus could end up homeless. I welcome the news that the cabinet secretary wants to change the legislation, but will she say how quickly that will be done? I know that we are up against it with regard to the parliamentary timetable. Has she spoken to landlord organisations about the matter? There is a risk that landlords will get out of the private rented sector, and we would not want to see that.

**Aileen Campbell:** I appreciate the constructive points that Graham Simpson has raised. In response to his plea for us to continue to work with and inform Opposition members, I say that I and Shirley-Anne Somerville will absolutely work as best we can and establish a rhythm of ways in which we can keep everyone—most importantly, possibly, the Opposition spokespeople—updated and informed. I hope that he understands that some of this has been pretty fast paced, so it might not have been as easy as usual to ensure that information flows to Opposition spokespeople, but from now on we will keep them updated.

On homelessness, I covered a range of points in my statement, but we absolutely want to make sure that we are supporting people who are homeless and sleeping rough. We have already announced, for instance, the £500,000 to Social Bite in relation to the provision of food. On the closure of the winter night shelter in Glasgow, we are absolutely making sure that there are resources to help with that. We are also exploring and developing plans to increase capacity in the coming days, including through the use of hotel bed spaces and vacant student accommodation. We are trying to explore everything to find ways in which we can support people who need to self-isolate, and ensure that they can do so safely.

On Mr Simpson's question about people who rent, the legislation will need to move pretty quickly. It will be a fast-paced bit of legislation and we will implement it as quickly as Parliament can enable. Of course, it helps that the Opposition parties are indicating that they are fairly supportive of it. That will enable us not only to ensure that we have the appropriate scrutiny but to legislate quickly to meet the needs of the people. Kevin Stewart has engaged with and written to a range

of stakeholders about the provisions that we need to introduce on housing, homelessness and the rented sector more generally.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary and ministers for all that they are doing in the crisis. However, I think that the Government should go much further, and I want to set out where I think we should go.

The first thing is that tenants are going to be extremely vulnerable. The cabinet secretary knows that, and she has set out the reasons why she agrees with that. However, will the Government look at an approach that broadly mirrors what we are doing for mortgage payers? There should be no evictions across the board, regardless of housing tenure. That is the approach that we need to try to take. As the cabinet secretary said, there will be mortgage holidays for those who buy to let, but that needs to be passed on to tenants.

The cabinet secretary is right with the approach that she has taken with landlords, but it must be harder to evict. We want to talk about the cabinet secretary's proposal in detail, because we do not think that it goes far enough. We believe that the whole amount needs to be uplifted. We can see what she is trying to do with the extension from three to six months, but if someone is one month in arrears, they will still be caught out. We want the period to be extended, and we want to discuss that with the cabinet secretary.

We believe that the pre-action protocols that are in place for mortgage holders should also be considered for renters, to mirror that provision. The objective would be to prevent people from going into arrears and building up huge debts. That is a huge issue. We also believe that rent breaks are essential and should be common practice. I would like to discuss with the Government how rent breaks could become a central feature for renters during this period.

In the social sector, where we might think that it would be easier to provide rent holidays, local authorities are appealing for the Government to say whether it will underwrite that in some way. The concern is that, if a rent holiday is given in the social sector, that will have an impact on local authorities.

**Aileen Campbell:** I thank Pauline McNeill for her questions and the points that she has made. Generally, we agree that people should not be evicted because of this pandemic. We are seeking to do that through the legislation and the details that I set out in my statement. That is absolutely a place of agreement. We do not want people to be evicted. There should be no evictions during this period, when we are trying to cope and deal with the pandemic, the impact that it has on people and

the risk of that impact for people's mental health and wellbeing.

We will continue to engage. If members have ideas and thoughts that they want to share, we will continue to engage with them and have that discussion.

We also need to make sure that we align the provisions that I set out with the wider benefits system. We need to make sure that people are getting all that they need and are entitled to, in order to support them during this time, when people might be plunged into financial hardship. That approach can route people to other passported benefits and help them to keep their financial resilience intact.

We will continue to engage with social landlords and local authorities. I have announced a package of support measures that should be considered in order to ensure that people who are living in social rented accommodation do not have the fear of eviction over their heads or financial vulnerability placed on them if they have challenges in meeting their rent. A range of measures is in place, together with a significant and sizeable chunk of money. We also have a bit in reserve, so if some of those issues require us to put a bit of extra resource into other areas as the pandemic continues, we will be able to do so.

We need to be adaptable and agile. On the whole, we agree that no evictions should happen, and one way in which we believe we can make sure that there are none is through the legislation that we propose today.

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** I have two questions for the cabinet secretary. She has mentioned changes to the private rented sector. I have constituents who have received notices to quit, under either parts 1 and 2 of schedule 2 to the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988 or parts 1 to 4 of schedule 3 to the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we should have emergency legislation to suspend those parts of private rented legislation, in order to put into effect what she has just said, which is that she does not want any evictions to take place?

Secondly, the health secretary, the economy secretary and Ms Campbell, just a moment ago, have said that we are in an emergency. I have spoken to colleagues in local government. As the cabinet secretary is aware, local government is a category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. I am aware that local government has been asking the Scottish Government for very specific powers this week. When do the Scottish ministers plan to invoke the emergency powers under the 2004 act to enable

councils to respond quickly and flexibly to a wide range of responsibilities?

**Aileen Campbell:** We have outlined today a package of measures that we believe will bring about the thing that we are all united behind: to ensure that there are no evictions. Again, if Andy Wightman wants to feed in his thoughts, we can look at that, but we believe that this is a practical and pretty swift package of measures that will enable us to ensure that there are no evictions. That is our intent and that is what we aim to see happen.

With regard to local government's involvement in that resilience, both the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers are involved in the wider Government resilience discussions and meetings that we are having. We are in close contact with local authorities, at SOLACE and COSLA levels, to make sure that they understand what we, as a national Government, are doing and how we can help and support them, and we are discussing what they are doing through their local resilience plans to respond to community needs.

We can discuss the dynamics of what that might mean or look like. We are open to anything. We are not going to be precious about any of this. We need to respond quickly to the needs of our country. That requires us to be bold, imaginative and innovative, and to be a bit uncomfortable at times about what that might mean.

If local authorities want to continue to ask for those things, and they feel that they are not getting the response that they require then, by all means, we will continue that dialogue. However, members should be assured that we are already in dialogue with COSLA and SOLACE regularly, at the top resilience level.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** These are sensible measures, but we might need to return to the issue when the chancellor delivers his promised statement to renters. As that might change the environment significantly, perhaps we could come back to this and revise what we are doing.

I want to ask about the bins. How do we ensure continuity of waste collection, and are private skip companies being contacted to assist in these circumstances?

**Aileen Campbell:** As I indicated to Andy Wightman, we are in regular contact with COSLA and SOLACE. We understand that local resilience plans are looking at all those things—at how we keep society functioning as we cope with this pandemic, which is unprecedented in its nature. Let us not forget that that is the case. We are trying to respond to something that none of us has

ever had to respond to. However, those are the basic questions that people are likely to start to ask. It is unfortunate for the many people who are collecting the refuse that they cannot work from home. It is something that they need to do in person, in our communities.

The local resilience plans will accommodate all that. We will continue to ensure that the flow of information is shared where required and that, if people have concerns about their local areas, we can provide reassurance that we can keep society ticking on at the moment, in the way that we need it to, so that people can feel comforted that things are moving in the right way and that their homes are kept clean.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement. I have advised all my staff to familiarise themselves with its contents and to stand ready to signpost our constituents to the right help. It would be very helpful if all members of the Scottish Parliament could be sent an email that includes links to all the funds and mechanisms that have been mentioned, so that we can disseminate the information as needed.

My question is about fuel poverty. We have all received emails from people who have lost their income overnight, perhaps as a result of being on a zero-hours contract. I ask what the Government is doing to ensure that those people are not fuel poor. Can the cabinet secretary outline what is being done to help people pay their gas and electricity bills, so that they can keep warm?

**Aileen Campbell:** I responded to that question, in part, in the discussions that were had yesterday on some of the actions that we have to take forward, particularly with the energy companies. Energy companies will have a huge role to play in fuel poverty-related issues.

We are engaging with Energy UK on vulnerable energy consumers, and we were in contact with them today to get an update on their work. We have also asked stakeholders—Home Energy Scotland, Citizens Advice Scotland and others—to advise Government officials if they become aware of any people who may experience fuel poverty related to the pandemic. We continue to be involved with energy officials and suppliers to ensure that we can respond proactively.

There are also other measures outlined in my statement that may be of assistance, such as the Scottish welfare fund and other emergency measures that people can access. We hope that, with the flexibility that we want to attach to those, people will be able to get money and a response easily and quickly, should they need it.

The point that was made earlier is also very valid. As I am on Twitter and other social media, I

am conscious that lots of helplines are coming out, from third sector organisations and from the Government. They are creating quite a lot of clutter for people who might want to navigate the system. I take that point on board. We will see whether there is a way that we can try and corral those resources into a much better place, so that people can easily access the information, direction and guidance about where they need to go to get swift, quick help.

**Maurice Corry:** I too thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of her statement.

As part of their recovery, rehabilitation and wellbeing, our vulnerable armed forces veterans rely very heavily on groups that meet at their local veterans centres. In some cases, those groups even prevent suicide. Veterans could be at risk due to the centres being closed on Government advice. Support and protection of both veterans and the wider population's mental health is of great concern during this time of increased isolation.

Homelessness is also an issue for our veterans. I was pleased to hear the cabinet secretary's comments about action that she will take, along with the housing minister. I welcome that support.

What will the cabinet secretary do to ensure that a safe alternative form of support can be offered to our veterans over the next period, in place of the closed veterans centres?

**Aileen Campbell:** I appreciate that the member has a strong interest in veterans and does them a real service by continually acting as their champion in this Parliament.

The member's question gets to the nub of what I hope was clear in my statement, which is that we are not necessarily always going to be the direct answer to such issues, although we support organisations that are well placed to provide the support that he described.

If the member knows of groups and organisations that can step up to help people in their communities but require a bit of support to do so, I ask him please, through his contacts, to let them know that this door is open and we want to support them to do the work that they do well, which might need to be rejigged and refocused so that they can support people who might have been used to more social gatherings—for example, support might be provided online, in phone calls or in a host of other ways. I ask him to encourage such organisations to get in touch with us quickly.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Personal protective equipment has rightly been provided for hospital and general practice staff. However, as far as I am aware, no such provision has been made for the high street



pharmacy staff, including counter staff, who serve our communities. Anyone with symptoms can walk into a community pharmacy and say, "I have a fever and a sore throat; can you take a look?" What protection will the Scottish ministers put in place to help pharmacy staff, given that pharmacies will be required to remain open during this crisis?

**Aileen Campbell:** That is a real and pertinent issue. We will raise the matter with Jeane Freeman, to ensure that community pharmacists' concerns are addressed. I think that she answered questions yesterday about protective equipment for GP surgeries.

We need to ensure that when the health service, in its broadest sense, is asked to respond, staff feel that they are being kept safe and protected. I will ensure that Jeane Freeman and her health colleagues undertake to respond to Mr Gibson.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for her comment, in response to Gillian Martin, about access to advice, which will be useful. I am glad that she was so positive on that.

The cabinet secretary rightly mentioned the prevention of homelessness. I am interested in hearing more about what can be done to eliminate homelessness, given the particular vulnerability of homeless people to Covid-19 and the need to avoid the spread of the virus.

Constituents have written in to say that they would be interested to know whether vacant homes and tourist accommodation could be used to house homeless people and to try to deliver the long-term change that is needed if we are to eliminate homelessness.

What support will be available to people in the third sector who are working hard to support and protect their volunteers as they act to support homeless people?

**Aileen Campbell:** We are exploring whether we can use hotel spaces, vacant student accommodation and other currently vacant places where homeless people might be able to go to self-isolate safely if they require to do so. Resources for hand gels and sanitisers have been provided to keep people on the front line safe, but if members hear or detect that that is not happening, I ask them to let us know, so that we can try to rectify the matter as soon as we can.

I point more generally to the third sector resilience fund. Along with businesses, a lot of third sector organisations will be feeling vulnerable about their business models and ability to continue. We have outlined a package of support that third sector organisations can tap into, along with support to enable them to refocus what they

do to respond to the pandemic. We hope that that package of measures and practical support with resource indicates the value that we attach to what the third sector does in our communities.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The third sector will be one of the hardest hit sectors during the crisis. I very much welcome the resilience funds that have been set aside.

What action will the Scottish Government take, along with providing that financial support, to ensure that no voluntary organisations are forced into insolvency because of the cash flow difficulties that they will face?

**Aileen Campbell:** How we can continue to support our third sector and social enterprise during this uncertain time is uppermost in our minds. That is why we have made available a £20 million package for us to support some of those groups financially. They need to let us know if they require that support. We also have some additional reserves in place, so that, if other things emerge, we can adapt and change our approach. I hope that that gives the member the reassurance that he is looking for.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement. It is absolutely necessary to ensure that our population can continue to access essential food and goods in the supermarkets. How will the Government ensure food resilience, particularly in rural areas, for those who require emergency food but cannot get out of their houses because of self-isolation or illness?

**Aileen Campbell:** That is an incredibly important question. At the basic level, we want to keep people warm, safe and fed. Food resilience will be critical in the months ahead. That is why we have put in place a £70 million food fund to support families that would otherwise be unable to access food. That will also help us to cover some of the necessary support for free school meals and those older people who might also be vulnerable to food insecurity.

Some of that will also support community endeavour. I know that lots of community organisations in the region that Emma Harper represents will already be thinking about how they can help their communities to cope with food insecurity, how they can get food parcels to different people, and how the food banks might want to respond to that need. That is exactly what we want to hear, so that the food fund can get out to the communities that we know need the help.

We also understand that there will be particular logistical challenges in our more rural areas. We want to use that £70 million food fund to respond to that need, to respond to that community endeavour and, when we need to, to work with

local authorities to meet the needs of those families that might be vulnerable and of those older people who might require extra support at this time.

If Emma Harper knows of some organisations that she believes can be part of that response, she should let us know.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary rightly talked about the importance of volunteers at this crucial time. Does she share my disappointment that lifesaving volunteer first responders across Scotland were stood down last night by the Scottish Ambulance Service because of the concerns that I asked about yesterday about the lack of personal protective equipment? That is a real loss as we try to deal with the effects of this pandemic.

I will also give two quick local examples that relate to the food issues that have been raised. Loaves and Fishes in East Kilbride has had to close its doors because of a lack of supplies. It uses cash donations to buy food in local supermarkets, but it has found that the shelves are empty. The organisation is also worried about the safety of its volunteers.

Hamilton churches drop-in centre provides vulnerable people with hot meals in the evenings. It has also closed its services. We have volunteers who want to be present in the evenings and take part, but they are worried about the best way of going about that. What advice and support can the Government give to those local groups and many others that are ready and want to respond but which are finding that they are already facing barriers?

**Aileen Campbell:** I thank Monica Lennon for raising local issues that perhaps highlight some of the challenges that we will have to find ways of working around.

On our £70 million food fund, we have not ruled out purchasing food ourselves. We did some of that during our preparations for Brexit when we worked with FareShare to make sure that food was in place in case we had to respond to food insecurity issues that might have arisen. Thankfully, we did not have to use all those plans, but they mean that we have a network in place that can respond to some of the issues that Monica Lennon has raised.

We also need to recognise the work that Fergus Ewing is doing. He has engaged with a number of players in the food system to ensure that supply can continue. There is probably also a role for supermarkets, which are already responding to the panic buying that is happening across the country.

We are happy to work with the two organisations that Monica Lennon mentioned to

see what we can do to provide support. We have money in place to respond at the pace and speed that are required.

We will look at the point about first responders. We do not want to lose volunteers at this point in time—we do not want that to be the message that goes out. It may be that we can use those volunteers as first responders in other ways that are not necessarily medical. We will continue to work with our colleagues in health to ensure that the army of volunteers, who will be necessary and critical in helping our country to cope, are valued and supported, and we will ensure that their determination to support others is enabled in all senses of the word.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** My question is similar to the previous one. How can we and the wider public support the emerging and growing volunteer network to help those who are in isolation, and how can healthy local people get involved?

**Aileen Campbell:** There are probably a number of ways in which we can help. As I have seen in my own constituency, simply sharing what local communities are doing is one very practical way to help. As a Government, we need also to enable volunteers to feel that they can respond—and do so safely. For instance, when we are supporting people through our homelessness work, we supply hand gel. We may need to consider such measures in order to keep people safe, so that they keep well and we do not compound any issues further.

We are already seeing a number of volunteer networks grow to support the needs of the community that they are part of. We would direct such organisations to the funding that we have announced today, to make sure that they get the support that they need to continue the work that they are doing in their communities.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** One of the eligibility criteria for the Scottish welfare fund for a crisis grant is that a person cannot make more than three claims in any given year. Given the extraordinary circumstances in which we find ourselves, and the significant hardship that is likely to be caused by coronavirus, will the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People waive that requirement?

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** I am delighted to confirm that that is the case. As well as the additional money that is going into the Scottish welfare fund, it is very important that we provide guidance about the new arrangements, and one of the most obvious areas for guidance is the example that Jackie Baillie gave of the three claims for a crisis grant.

As Aileen Campbell has said a number of times, if members wish to see flexibility in other areas of the Scottish welfare fund, please let me or my officials know. We are working on the updated guidance for local authorities and would be delighted to work with members across the chamber if there are other areas in the guidance that we should take forward.

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I commend the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government on her statement. The £70 million food fund is especially welcome, but I am concerned that low-income families with schoolchildren, who will not be at school after Friday, might not be able to give them a hot meal each day.

Previously, most councils ran programmes during the summer holidays so that children could get a decent hot meal. Could we possibly ensure that pre-packed meals that can be heated are available for collection at local council offices or food banks, to help to feed our children during this crisis?

**Aileen Campbell:** If schools are shut, we have a very real and pressing concern about what children who are entitled to free school meals do next. Local authorities are working hard to make sure that that need is met, and we understand that they are already thinking innovatively about how they will respond. We will not prescribe what the response should look like, as local circumstances will change from authority to authority. There will also be lots of examples of community action that will be well placed to support pupils and families across the country.

The need for food is why we have announced the £70 million to help support community endeavour and ensure that we help families that require extra support at this pressing time. We will continue to keep members updated, and I again ask members to keep us informed about where they see need and communities that require a bit of support.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** All members know local third sector services, such as the recovery cafe close to my office, which is a lifeline to those who are suffering from addiction. Tackling isolation and loneliness is a key factor in the work of those organisations, which flies in the face of advice on how to deal with coronavirus. What advice and support can the cabinet secretary offer to those organisations, so that they can continue their vital work with some of the most vulnerable in our communities?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Brian Whittle raises an extremely important point. I am aware that there are a number of organisations that support people with addictions or mental health issues,

which usually meet on a social basis. That also goes back to the point that Maurice Corry made about veterans.

We are ready to support organisations that are going to have to look at how they provide their service in a different way. For example, some are looking to meet digitally, but they might not have the technology to allow that; that may require funding. That is why we announced funding today both for small community organisations and for national organisations. There are different funding streams.

I repeat what Aileen Campbell said earlier and suggest that all members go back to the areas that they represent and speak to those types of organisation, asking them what they need and whether they have the ability to adapt, or staff up—which is challenging, as they might be going through a diminution in their staffing numbers. If they need additional support, the funds stand ready to assist them. We are very aware of the social isolation and loneliness aspect of the issue; that is a really important area that we need to tackle.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement.

In relation to people who have lost their jobs, who might be facing eviction, and who have never been in the benefits system, I was concerned that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance said, when she was asked about a helpline that would mirror the one for business, that that is a matter for communities.

Will the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government acknowledge that, if we do not get this right, it will have not just a social impact but a massive economic impact and that the people who are facing those challenges deserve the same rigour and certainty as business is being given? Furthermore, does she agree that that is not an add-on but is essential work that is at the heart of what the Government does?

On a practical issue, has the cabinet secretary had any discussions with the credit union movement about the role that it might be able to play in ensuring that people can access the emergency funding that they need?

**Aileen Campbell:** I absolutely acknowledge the points that Johann Lamont has made. She is right: we must make sure that all the information is right and that it is appropriately signposted. Gillian Martin and Sarah Boyack also made such points.

We need to not see those issues in isolation from statements that have been made previously. In reality, we are working across the Government to ensure that co-operation and collaboration are happening.

We will make sure that there is appropriate signposting and that we can get the right advice to the people who need support and advice about employment rights. We have put packages and support helplines out there already—for example, the money talk team—so that people’s incomes are maximised and that they are directed to the appropriate places for additional financial support. We will continue to work to make sure that the process is streamlined, because people might feel that there are too many helplines, and we need them to go to the right one.

Although I have not had direct conversations with credit unions, my officials will be engaging with them because they should be able to access funding for third sector resilience, or other funding measures that we have announced today, to ensure their cash flow to enable them to respond to the needs of the communities that they serve.

**Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP):** As well as encouraging the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government to engage with the credit union movement, I ask her to respond to the Larder, which is a social enterprise in my constituency. It faces financial wipeout because 84 per cent of its income comes from catering training and employability contracts. Nonetheless, it wants to step in to reach and feed people who are at risk of hunger, and to advise people about how to cook, which is a crucial skill that I think will become more important.

At a very practical level, how can small local organisations such as the Larder quickly and easily access the range of support that has been announced today so that there is no wrong-door approach?

**Aileen Campbell:** There is definitely provision in the third sector resilience fund to support social enterprises, and we are engaging with social enterprise partners on that. If the Larder has business needs with which it requires assistance, it should apply for that assistance.

The work that the Larder does blurs into the need to tackle food insecurity. It is exactly the type of organisation that should perhaps be looking to refocus what it does to respond to community need and to access funding that we have announced today so that it can step up, feed its community and provide additional guidance. We are familiar with the organisation, and it does that well.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** We have just sent to the Deputy First Minister outline proposals for a home delivery service for young people who normally receive free school meals, so we warmly welcome the £70 million food fund. I have heard suggestions about cash compensation being dispensed to those families as an alternative

to meals. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the Government’s intention is to ensure that all eligible children and young people receive a meal that is delivered to their home?

I will follow on from Emma Harper’s point about rural communities. As well as making best use of council staff such as bus drivers, for otherwise suspended services, can the cabinet secretary confirm that the Government will engage with the Royal Mail on its offer to become an additional emergency service? Between them, there is the infrastructure to reach every household in the country for the purposes of such a service.

**Aileen Campbell:** I do not think that we will take a blanket one-size-fits-all approach to free school meals. For some families, perhaps cash in their pockets would be appropriate. All our work as a Government on tackling poverty is about ensuring that we get money into people’s pockets. It might be appropriate for other families to have meals delivered to them. If the Royal Mail is well placed to help us with that and it wants to work with us to do that, we will absolutely work with it.

We have also heard from third sector organisations. I know that I am not talking about exactly the same thing, but Social Bite, for instance, has said that it can get meals out pretty quickly to people who are vulnerable and homeless. We have heard about a range of third sector organisations and community groups that are doing likewise. Local authorities will also be finding their own solutions, which they will have in their resilience plans.

There might not be one answer to Ross Greer’s question; there might be a range of answers, but we have to trust our local authorities to find the right responses for their areas. They know their communities best. If Ross Greer thinks that support or more attention are needed, he can raise such issues in the regular dialogue to which we have committed.

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary will be aware of the thousands of students who study in my Glasgow Kelvin constituency and beyond it who are not eligible to claim benefits and receive only student loans and grant support during term time. Those students would normally find work in hospitality or tourism, for example, over the summer months, to fund things such as rent and food. Given the current situation, will the cabinet secretary look to offer such students access to financial support?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I am more than happy to look for other flexibilities in the Scottish welfare fund that can be used, and at whether there are eligibility issues. However, we are limited in what we can do simply because we have

powers over only 15 per cent of benefits, not the whole amount.

I am very aware that the Department for Work and Pensions and the United Kingdom Government as a whole are working at speed—as we are—to consider whether there are areas in which they need to build in more flexibility. I would be happy to pass on to them Sandra White's suggestion about students to see whether anything can be done. I am very keen to work collaboratively and supportively with the UK Government on what we can do in Scotland. If such action can be taken only by the UK Government, I would be happy to share ideas on that.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** This Sunday is mothers day, and many of us are already planning to include our older parents by Skyping them into what we are doing as families. That is what we have to do in this new reality, with many older people already being in self-isolation. Many older people in Scotland simply do not have the technology to be able to take advantage of Skype and other platforms that could include them in family events. Could some aspect of the wellbeing fund be used to purchase technological infrastructure to give to older people who are in self-isolation?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Alex Cole-Hamilton has suggested an interesting proposal. I will be happy to take that away and see what can be done. The challenge would be in how to deliver that in reality, because of the practicalities. We are keen to see what can be done for wider community activities to support older people if they do not have access to friends and family close by. I am happy to take that suggestion away and look at it very seriously. The practicalities might get in the way, but we might be able to come up with another solution to the challenge that Alex Cole-Hamilton has rightly raised. I am particularly cognisant that mothers day is coming up.

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** Across my constituency, unpaid carers will be facing an increase in a range of pressures in the months ahead. Can the cabinet secretary advise what steps can be taken to support carers who might have to self-isolate?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** We are giving serious consideration to what can be done to support unpaid carers. We might look to social security, at Scotland or DWP level, to pick up some aspects of that. We are keen to work with the DWP on that.

Gordon MacDonald raises another challenge that is rightly causing concern to many carers who have been in touch with me—the question of what happens if they have to self-isolate or feel unwell

themselves. Again, I reassure Gordon MacDonald that the health secretary and her officials are looking very seriously at what needs to be done to ensure that we continue to support people, particularly if carers are unable to deliver the care that they normally provide. I hope that we can reassure the member that we are very keen to look at that issue and that we take it seriously, because I know that it is of great concern to families across Scotland.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** The debate has been very interesting and positive, but the reality is that many people in Scotland are not necessarily following proceedings in the chamber, accessing them through social media or reading Government press releases. They simply react to what they see on the national news and in the media.

Many elderly folk live alone and have no family, so they have to rely on our system. Has the Government considered doing a country-wide mass mail-out to every household with specific advice on who to call, so that they can pick up the phone and speak to someone if they are running out of food, need access to medicine or cannot top up their energy, for example? Many people are simply confused by the rapidly changing advice and they might not be following some of the good advice that we are getting from the Government today.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Absolutely. That is a key point that we need to look at. There is no point in setting up those funds if people do not know that they are available and that the support is out there. I hope that the member will be reassured that we are looking to put in place very quickly a nationwide marketing campaign that will build on the encouragement that we are trying to provide for volunteering, so that people know how to do that safely, and that will reassure older people that they can ask for assistance.

We are working with the UK Government on those plans because we are keen not to send out mixed and confusing messages and that the UK and Scottish Governments do not issue different marketing. We are working closely to share ideas. I hope that I can reassure the member that those plans are developing very quickly and that we will also put plans in place to support people and show them how they can access that support.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** Following the assurances that the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government gave me yesterday about funding for food needs and community resilience being imminent, partners in Glasgow, including ng homes and Glasgow North West Citizens Advice Bureau, are today drafting an urgent bid and proposal in that regard. I am therefore delighted to

hear of the £79 million food fund, the £50 million wellbeing fund and the £40 million supporting communities fund. The bid is likely to be substantial and to straddle all three funds. How will the Government manage that? Should the bid go directly to the Government and the cabinet secretary? If the bid is submitted this week, as we hope that it will be, how quickly will decisions be made and cash be paid out?

**Aileen Campbell:** I thank the member for raising the good work that organisations in his constituency are doing. The honest truth is that the process just will be managed. We have said that we have to be adaptable and respond innovatively and quickly to need. It might be necessary to blur the lines between the funding pots, because there will, of course, be crossover between all the pots that we have announced today. If those organisations get their ideas into the mix, we can at least start to consider them and work out later how to route the funding.

Age Concern asked us for money last week. We have agreed that and it is now out the door, as was announced by the First Minister today. That is the kind of speed that we will have to work at. As I said at the beginning of my statement, sometimes we will not get things right, but we will endeavour to do what we can because we want to support the people who we are here to serve and represent. With that as our guiding principle, I hope that the decisions that we take are right and that they meet the needs of the communities and people we were elected to serve.

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** Will the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government consider liaising with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport about the possible issuing of guidance on taking fresh air and exercise outdoors for our physical and mental wellbeing? Can guidance be issued on which groups can go out for those reasons if they keep social distance?

**Aileen Campbell:** Absolutely. We continually work across the Cabinet. Some of the issues that we have discussed today do not fit neatly into one ministerial portfolio. There is a collective effort across the Government to respond to the needs of our communities. The points that Claudia Beamish makes are absolutely correct. Although, on the one hand, we are talking about self-isolation, we also need to recognise the importance of exercise and activity—as a former sports minister, I am acutely aware of that. We want to get the messages right so that people can maintain their health, not only in terms of the response to Covid-19 but in terms of their wider wellbeing, of which physical activity is a big part.

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** As has been said, it is difficult

to overestimate the impact that social isolation and loneliness can have on our health and wellbeing. There might even be people, such as the elderly, pregnant women or people recovering from addiction, for whom meeting in groups is an essential part of maintaining their wellbeing. Can the cabinet secretary suggest and give examples of ways in which such groups can implement innovative means of maintaining contact while exercising social distancing?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Some remarkable ideas are already being followed through on that, such as the community choir that Christina McKelvie told me about earlier—I do not believe that she is taking part in it, but others will be—and the accordion player up in Shetland that Aileen Campbell told me about yesterday, who is providing online festivities for older people. Innovation is happening, and that is without Government support. Today, we are announcing that, if the Government is required to step in to provide technology or support to allow such activity to happen on an even wider scale and for larger organisations, we absolutely stand ready to do that. Obviously, businesses are looking to do exactly the same thing and to move to online mechanisms where possible.

We need to encourage and support people to be innovative in dealing with the issue and to know that, as Aileen Campbell said in her statement, the Government is here and is ready and willing to support them as they innovate. That is an important message that we can take from today as we consider the social isolation that will occur in our society unless we tackle the issue head on.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary will know that, as a result of Government policy and pressures on council budgets, many former council assets such as community centres have been transferred out of council ownership to be run by local trusts. The income of such centres is plummeting as events are cancelled on a daily basis. Their charitable status means that they do not pay rates anyway, so any new rates relief scheme will not help them. What will be done to ensure that those community centres are given support to maintain their cash flow? The centres that have contacted me have made it absolutely clear that, without such help, they will have to close down, which will mean jobs and important community facilities being lost.

**Aileen Campbell:** Again, I point to the package of resources and measures that we have put in place. When we emerge from the current situation, the centres that Colin Smyth talked about will again become crucially important in ensuring the connectedness of communities.

Although none of the pots of money that we have announced today will respond directly to that

particular need, we will take away Colin Smyth's point and get back to him. We might need to be able to support such centres flexibly through the third sector resilience fund. We must think about community endeavour in its widest sense and recognise that, in some cases, there will be a business case for providing communities with such support. I hope that a way can be found for us to help communities that have already stepped up to the plate by taking on those assets and that now require us to support them to continue to run their centres.

## Portfolio Question Time

### Justice and the Law Officers

16:22

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is justice and the law officers.

#### Covid-19 (Prisons)

**1. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps prisons are taking to reduce the risk of the coronavirus, Covid-19, spreading among prisoners and staff. (S5O-04270)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf):** The safety and wellbeing of those who live and work in our prisons is a priority for this Government and the Scottish Prison Service.

The SPS's national coronavirus response group has implemented its national pandemic plan, which includes governors in charge overseeing the delivery of local plans that are tailored to the needs of their establishments. Those groups are meeting on a daily basis.

Like other public sector bodies, the SPS has in place robust phased contingency plans that reflect escalation demands. At this time, the SPS is following the advice of the chief medical officer, which means that anyone in custody who displays symptoms will self-isolate. Similarly, prison staff who display symptoms have been advised to follow the same advice and self-isolate.

The SPS is in regular communication with prisoners in custody to provide guidance on how to prevent the spread of infection and to update them on how the virus may impact their daily routine. That includes the sending of letters to every prisoner across the estate, as well as video messaging via in-cell televisions.

The SPS has established clinically led protocols for the testing, management and care of those who may contract or be suspected of contracting Covid-19, and it has secured a sufficient level of personal protective equipment to support those protocols, which are designed to minimise the risk of contamination spread.

**Gordon MacDonald:** How should visitors to prisons such as Saughton, in my constituency, proceed as we enter the new phase of self-isolation with Covid-19?

**Humza Yousaf:** Gordon MacDonald raises a hugely important point. In the unfortunate case in Italy, there were prison riots and a number of

people lost their lives. That was not precipitated by an infection or a case of coronavirus in the prison; it was precipitated by tensions rising because visiting was stopped altogether and prisoners were being kept in their cells for practically 24 hours a day.

We are keen not to do that, so we will follow the chief medical officer's advice. We will continue to allow visits, but visitors must follow guidelines. They will be asked not to attend prisons if they are displaying symptoms. They should follow the chief medical officer's advice, which is to self-isolate in those circumstances. There are posters at the entrances of all establishments advising visitors of that, and information is also provided on the external website and social media accounts.

As the member knows, the situation is fast moving and very fluid. We will continue to explore other ways in which family contact can be maintained, including via digital means.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Three members would like to ask supplementary questions. I wish to call them all, but I ask for questions and answers to be quick.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** As Gordon MacDonald identified, the Scottish Prison Service and Police Scotland are organisations that must, for the safety of the Scottish public, continue to interact with many different people and communities. Given the obvious current health risks to both groups, will the cabinet secretary outline any contingency plans that he has in place to help with personnel shortages? For example, has he considered bringing in retired officers or using trainees, if that were safe?

**Humza Yousaf:** I thank Liam Kerr for his very important question. Just over an hour and a half ago, I spoke to the chief constable, who has operational independence on the matter in relation to the police. It is fair to say that he and his senior management team are looking at exactly the kind of things that Liam Kerr suggested. The police are looking not only at those who have retired but at what more can be done with special constables, and I know that Liam Kerr has had an interest in that matter previously. Police Scotland is looking at a range of measures. The SPS is also looking at contingency plans in relation to those who have recently left the organisation but who clearly still have a number of skills to offer. I am happy to keep Liam Kerr updated as those plans develop.

**James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** Given the confined conditions in which prison officers and prisoners operate within the prison estate, there is clearly a high risk of the spread of Covid-19. If any prisoner or prison officer presents with any medical condition, including symptoms of Covid-19, can the cabinet secretary guarantee that they

will get an immediate and appropriate medical follow-up?

**Humza Yousaf:** Yes, that will certainly happen under the Covid-19 pandemic plan that has been put in place. It is essential that everybody—those within and outwith prison establishments—follows the chief medical officer's guidelines. Helping to stop the spread of the virus will, first and foremost, involve ensuring that our prison staff—who do an excellent job, as we all recognise—have the appropriate PPE. As things stand, the Prison Service has about a couple of months' supply of such equipment. I am speaking to the Prison Service about upping its stocks and whether we can assist with that.

Following the chief medical officer's advice, by people self-isolating if they present with symptoms, will be key. There are people in the Prison Service who are self-isolating, and I suspect that, unfortunately, more will end up having to do so. We will continue to follow the protocols that are in place.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I am particularly concerned about how elderly prisoners or those who have long-term pre-existing conditions can practise social distancing in the close confines of a prison, given that there is not an awful lot of spare capacity. How will the cabinet secretary manage that?

**Humza Yousaf:** That is very much part of the conversations that are taking place. We will have to think about radical solutions. In some respects, there is a greater ability to self-isolate or to keep people contained within the prison estate than there is outwith it. However, I do not for a second take anything away from the challenges for the Prison Service.

Willie Rennie raises an important point. We have an older population in prisons, and that population is growing year on year, so we are thinking about how we ensure that their health needs are met. These issues are all part of the pandemic plan. We have challenges within the prison estate relating to the numbers that are there. So far, we are managing those challenges, but we are keeping an eye on what more can and should be done.

### Firefighters (Pay)

2. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the firefighter pay negotiations. (S5O-04271)

**The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Denham):** The Scottish Government is not a party in the negotiations on firefighter pay, which is a matter between the Scottish Fire and Rescue



Service, as the employer, and the Fire Brigades Union.

In October 2019, following three years of discussion and negotiation, the SFRS made a final 17 per cent pay offer for the period between July 2019 and July 2022 in recognition of an expanded firefighter role. The FBU executive recommended the rejection of that offer and FBU members voted to reject it on 28 February.

Further negotiation on the issues is a matter for the SFRS and the FBU. The SFRS has indicated that, following the FBU rejection of its final offer for a specific deal for Scottish firefighters, negotiations will now revert to the mechanisms of the United Kingdom-wide national joint council.

**Jamie Greene:** I thank the minister for that helpful update on the Government's position on the negotiations.

I hope that the Parliament will permit me licence in my supplementary question to make it more suitable to topical developments.

What contingency plans are currently in place should significant numbers of firefighters be off work due to isolation in their households? Does the minister anticipate our fire service having to take on additional duties and responsibilities, given that the demand on all our emergency services will, no doubt, increase in the coming months?

**Ash Denham:** Over the past week, I have been in contact with the SFRS about its planning. It has already taken a number of measures to get ready for what we might face, and it has reviewed all its planning.

The cabinet secretary and I will have a meeting tomorrow with all our justice partners on the emergency services side, and we will go into detail on the emerging issues. I will be happy to keep members updated on that. It is built into the planning assumptions that staff numbers in front-line services will be reduced.

The fire service taking on additional duties is under consideration. I will be happy to keep members updated as we go forward.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that now would be a good time—as it would show good will—for the UK Government to restore the £50 million in VAT that it took from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service between 2013 and 2017?

**Ash Denham:** I agree.

## Don't Tolerate Hate Campaign

3. **Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to support the #DontTolerateHate campaign. (S5O-04272)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf):** Any form of hate crime or prejudice is totally unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Hate crime has a hugely damaging effect on victims, their families and their communities. No one should have to tolerate being attacked because they have a disability or impairment, and I very much commend Sam, Ivan, Alison and Sean, who have shared their experiences as part of Police Scotland's #DontTolerateHate campaign.

Although the number of reported disability hate crime incidents and the number of charges are low, we are not complacent and we recognise that disability hate crime is underreported. The Scottish Government welcomes the campaign and will continue to support Police Scotland to encourage victims and witnesses to report disability hate crime.

**Johann Lamont:** I am sure that the cabinet secretary will agree—indeed, he has already reflected this point—that the Police Scotland #DontTolerateHate campaign is important. No one could be unmoved by the disturbing testimonies of disabled people at the launch of the campaign about the reality of their experiences of abuse.

Given that one in five people in Scotland is registered as having a disability, yet that category of crime accounts for only 4 per cent of reports to Police Scotland, will the cabinet secretary consider how to remove barriers to disabled people reporting their experience of abuse? How will he make it clear that such abuse is a crime and will not be tolerated? Does he recognise that it is a particularly serious issue in these heightened times?

**Humza Yousaf:** I agree with everything that Johann Lamont just said, and I can provide some reassurances. She might be aware that we will shortly introduce hate crime legislation to the Parliament. At least, that is the intention, although it might be delayed by pressing matters. However, a hate crime bill will be introduced and it will have a strong emphasis on the hate crimes that people with a disability face. I hope that that will give legislative reassurance to Johann Lamont.

In terms of underreporting, as Johann Lamont is aware, we have third-party reporting centres. However, I will take the issue forward with the chief constable in our regular conversations. We have had a conversation about the issue and, like me, he recognises that underreporting takes place. We should work with people with disabilities to understand the barriers that exist and work collectively to remove them. However, I accept

Johann Lamont's central point that disability hate crime is underreported.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 has been withdrawn. Question 5 is from Alex Cole-Hamilton .

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Oh. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure which question I am asking.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Would you like me to read it out for you? *[Laughter.]*

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am delighted to offer the chamber some levity this afternoon.

### **Mental Health Workers (Police and Prisons)**

**5. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has had with ministerial colleagues regarding how many of the 800 additional mental health workers committed to in its mental health strategy will be deployed within police and prison services in Edinburgh. (S5O-04274)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf):** That is a brilliantly thought-out question—and the first time that I have seen Alex Cole-Hamilton speechless.

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell):** Let us hope that it is not the last. *[Laughter.]*

**Humza Yousaf:** On a serious note, Alex Cole-Hamilton makes an important point. Action 15 of the mental health strategy outlines our commitment to funding 800 additional mental health workers in key settings, including accident and emergency services and all general practices, and, crucially for the purposes of the question, every police station custody suite and our prisons, ensuring that local provision and support are at the heart of those plans.

On 4 December 2019, the use of action 15 funding in prisons was discussed at a ministerial meeting that was chaired by the Deputy First Minister on the Scottish Government's response to the expert review of the provision of mental health services for young people entering and in custody. Work on action 15 complements wider efforts to improve mental health outcomes for those in the justice system, including the work of the National Prisoner Healthcare Network and the refreshed Police Care Network.

I hope that I have given Alex Cole-Hamilton enough time to think of a supplementary question.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I hope that it will be a short supplementary question, Mr Cole-Hamilton.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** It will be, and I am grateful, Presiding Officer. I apologise.

In the context of the situation in which we find ourselves, mental health will be important, particularly for people who are in social isolation, sometimes for many weeks. I ask the cabinet secretary to consider the fact that, in a lot of ways, we will all have to become mental health care providers to our loved ones, friends and family. Again, I voice the support of my party for every effort that the Government has put behind mental health. What steps does the cabinet secretary intend to take to ensure that all the original work that we were doing on mental health does not fall by the wayside in the teeth of this crisis?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A short answer would be appreciated.

**Humza Yousaf:** Let me reassure Alex Cole-Hamilton. We take the mental health of those who are in our care—in prisons or police custody suites—extremely seriously. As part of action 15 and the additional mental health funding, we have already started recruitment into our prisons and police custody suites. However, I take the point that the member makes.

### **Toxicology (Waiting Times)**

**6. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is making with efforts to reduce waiting times for toxicology results. (S5O-04275)

**The Lord Advocate (Rt Hon James Wolffe QC):** The steps that the service has already taken or is taking to address waiting times include, first, an additional £300,000 investment for the University of Glasgow, which, under contract with the service, provides most of the toxicology services in Scotland. That investment is specifically for clearing overdue toxicology reports, recruiting additional staff and buying new equipment. The second step is that of agreeing an improvement plan with the university, to facilitate the prioritisation of cases; the third is securing agreement on simplified procedures for reporting certain categories of case; and the fourth is temporarily arranging to outsource a discrete bloc of cases to free up capacity.

As a result of the measures that have already been taken, since the end of last year, there has been a significant improvement in the weekly output by the university.

**Miles Briggs:** I thank the Lord Advocate for that answer. Does the Government accept that the

significant delay in receiving post-mortem results has caused a huge amount of distress to too many families across Scotland? Can the Lord Advocate update Parliament on any potential impact that the events surrounding Covid-19 will have, especially given the fact that the Crown Office relies on contracts with external labs and experts? When does the Scottish Government now expect the drugs death figures to be published?

**The Lord Advocate:** I absolutely acknowledge the impact that delays in receipt of final cause of death can have on bereaved families—I absolutely understand and appreciate that. I also acknowledge the hard work that is being done by the toxicology staff, and, indeed, all the staff in the service, in addressing the backlog of cases.

Covid-19 will have an impact on all aspects of public service. It would be foolish of me to seek to predict what that impact will be. As I mentioned in my first answer, considerable work has been done and is being done, which is delivering significant improvements in terms of the throughput of toxicology cases. That will continue, subject, of course, to any adverse impact as a result of Covid-19 on staffing levels.

I am afraid that I cannot be more reassuring at this time. All of us are having to make contingency plans in relation to a variety of aspects of public service. All that I can say is that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service will remain committed to the improvement work in this area, as in all other areas, and will act responsibly and appropriately in the context of the public health demands that have been placed on us all.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will allow an extremely quick supplementary question from Monica Lennon.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I will try to be brief, but this is an extremely emotive subject and my heart goes out to all those mums who will have to face mothers day not knowing why their loved one died.

I want to ask about the cold hard numbers behind the issue. Referring to the waiting times and backlog is not enough. We need some transparent information. What is the current waiting time? Families tell me that staff are advising them that it is between eight and 12 months. How big is the backlog? Figures that the Lord Advocate gave me in November, which covered the period from February to November last year, suggested that the backlog was at almost 2,000. From February up to now, how many cases have waited more than 12 weeks?

**The Lord Advocate:** I am grateful to Monica Lennon for her interest in the subject.

I am advised that, recently, the waiting time has been around eight months. That is in a context in which, prior to the difficulties that have been experienced, toxicology reports were being made available within between six and eight weeks, depending on the circumstances, and post-mortem reports were generally being made available within 12 weeks.

As of 13 March, the number of cases reported for toxicology and awaiting a report is 1,692. I am advised that the university anticipates that, with the various measures that have been taken, all 2019 cases are expected to be reported by the end of May this year. I regret to say that that is, of course, subject to any issues that arise as a result of the Covid-19 situation.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes questions on justice and the law officers. I apologise to Anas Sarwar for not reaching his question.

## Constitution, Europe and External Affairs

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** We are pushed for time, so brevity is appreciated.

### Fair Trade

1. **Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to promote fair trade. (S50-04278)

**The Minister for Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** On 24 February 2020, the Scottish Government published its first ever review of fair trade in Scotland, with a view to increasing fair trade sales.

As a fair trade nation, we are committed to ensuring that farmers and producers in the developing world are paid a fair price for their goods. That is why we are continuing our long-standing relationship with the Scottish Fair Trade Forum, which we core fund to promote fair trade in Scotland. I was delighted to meet the chair and chief executive of the forum at the end of last month, during Fairtrade fortnight, to discuss the direction of travel of their work. We will work with the forum to consider how best to take forward the recommendations that are highlighted in the review in the coming months and years.

**Graham Simpson:** The review that the minister mentioned, which is called “What Future for Fair Trade in Scotland?”, argues that Scotland must promote fair trade as part of the solution to the climate crisis. How does the Scottish Government plan to work with the United Kingdom Government

to promote fair trade at the 26th conference of the parties in Glasgow?

**Jenny Gilruth:** That is a fair question from Graham Simpson. The UK will host the 26th United Nations climate change conference, which is also known as COP26, in Glasgow in November. Fair trade at COP26 was highlighted in my recent meeting with the Scottish Fair Trade Forum. As part of our planning for COP26, the Government will consider how fair trade can be factored into the events, and I am happy to work with our UK Government counterparts to ensure that COP26 is used as a platform to promote and celebrate fair trade.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 2 has been withdrawn.

### **Interministerial Group on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development**

**3. Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the interministerial group on policy coherence for sustainable development that it announced at the Scotland's International Development Alliance annual general meeting in September 2019. (S5O-04280)

**The Minister for Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** Since the announcement of the establishment of the ministerial working group on policy coherence for sustainable development, key pieces of work have been taken forward by the Scottish Government. Just last week, with the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs, I met James Mackie from the European Centre for Development Policy Management in Maastricht, which is a leading European think tank with experience of working with other European countries on implementing PCSD. Following that, a cross-section of Scottish Government policy officials undertook a workshop that was delivered by ECDPM experts.

The first meeting of the PCSD working group is scheduled for May. As Minister for Europe and International Development, I look forward to leading the group.

**Claudia Beamish:** I thank the minister for that clear answer. With the eyes of the world being on Scotland ahead of COP26 in Glasgow in November, virus permitting, does the minister agree that all ministers need to get behind the working group to ensure that there is policy coherence across all areas of Government if it really is to do no harm, which it committed to in signing up to the sustainable development goals?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I absolutely agree with Claudia Beamish on that point. Policy coherence cuts across all portfolio areas, as she outlined. She will

know that, back in 2016, we published our beyond aid agenda, in which we committed to ensuring that different Scottish Government policies work together so that our development policy works in synergy, as it were; eliminating policy incoherence; and identifying other Scottish Government policies that can contribute positively to development outcomes. As part of that, the commitment to do no harm, which Claudia Beamish mentioned, is a particular focus of our work on policy coherence for sustainable development. To better align our policies across the Government with the UN global sustainable development goals will require co-ordination across portfolio areas, as Claudia Beamish outlined.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 has been withdrawn.

### **Humanitarian Emergency Fund**

**5. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to the independent review of the humanitarian emergency fund. (S5O-04282)

**The Minister for Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** The Scottish Government commissioned an independent review of its £1 million per annum humanitarian emergency fund in 2019, and we published the review report in full on 10 February. The independent review highlighted a number of successes of the fund, but the reviewers also identified areas for potential improvement. Thereafter, the Scottish Government discussed with stakeholders a range of options for improving the fund. The changes are being taken forward and they will be fully implemented in time for the financial year 2020-21.

We are preparing to appoint new members of the humanitarian emergency fund panel, with announcements to be made at the end of the month. Alexander Stewart will appreciate that, as a new minister, I am keen that we get this right. I have therefore requested to meet the out-going panel members as soon as that is possible in the current circumstances. I am also pleased to highlight that £1 million has been protected for the fund in the Scottish Government's 2020-21 budget, which demonstrates our on-going commitment to helping the world's most vulnerable.

**Alexander Stewart:** I thank the minister for that comprehensive response. The fund has three secondary aims: building public awareness and raising additional funding; promoting the Scottish Government as a responsible global citizen; and enhancing the transparency of the emergency funding. Given that the review highlighted

concerns in all three areas, what measures are in place to track progress on each aim? What immediate action will the Government take in the light of the review?

**Jenny Gilruth:** The humanitarian emergency fund was designed from scratch, so it is right that we work to improve its operation in the future, as Alexander Stewart highlighted. I met officials last week to discuss some of the points that he has raised today.

On public awareness, the fund is going to increase the level of communication about the activation of the crisis that has been identified, the short and medium-term needs of the crisis and the response of the Government.

Secondly, on responsible citizenship, the fund will use those communications to show that Scotland is taking a leading role in thinking differently about humanitarian emergencies. Thirdly, on transparency and accountability, the Scottish Government will hold public-facing events with support from the HEF panel to show the work of the fund and, importantly, to critically discuss our humanitarian response openly.

In summary, the increased focus on communications will help with enhanced transparency for the public about what is being spent and where. That also brings increased opportunities to explain more clearly to the public what the fund is trying to achieve.

### Erasmus+ Programme

**6. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on future arrangements for the Erasmus+ programme for Scottish and European students.

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell):** The Scottish Government has been consistent in arguing that Scotland should continue to participate in Erasmus+ for its substantial educational, cultural and economic benefits.

The programme is part of the wider discussions on Brexit, of course and, with the Presiding Officer's indulgence, I would like to say a word or two about those negotiations more widely. I have today written to Michael Gove and copied the letter to the leaders of the parties, asking him for the negotiations be suspended for six months, given the unprecedented situation that we are now in.

I pointed out to Michael Gove that the Scottish Government has paused work on preparing for an independence referendum this year, which my officials have confirmed with the Electoral Commission today in a letter about testing. Given

that we have to focus all available resources on current and future demands in what is an unprecedented set of circumstances, it follows that the preparations for a referendum this year will not take place. We strongly urge the United Kingdom Government that the time has come for an equivalent action with regard to the Brexit process. We ask it to institute a pause to European Union-UK negotiations for at least six months. It would be impossible in our view for businesses and others to cope with the enormous challenge of the coronavirus while at the same time preparing for a completely new relationship with the EU.

A pause is also necessary given the inevitable lack of parliamentary and public scrutiny of the negotiations and their progress over that period when all attention and effort will be focused on our collective actions to tackle and defeat the coronavirus. It will also be difficult for the joint ministerial committee (EU negotiations) to meet during that time, so there will be no opportunity for the UK's four Governments to provide oversight of the negotiations, as set out in its terms of reference.

We have worked closely together on the unprecedented legislation that we will discuss tomorrow on coronavirus. It is essential that we both take realistic positions at this time.

**Willie Coffey:** In the absence of any commitment by the UK Government beyond the current arrangements, can the cabinet secretary give a commitment that Erasmus+ will continue in Scotland and will maintain that wonderful experience for our students and their European friends?

**Michael Russell:** We are very committed to Erasmus+, as we are to other programmes. We have made it clear to the UK Government, as have the other devolved Administrations, that we wish Erasmus+ to continue, and the UK Government has indicated to us that it is listening to that. The proof of that will be whether the programme does continue; if it were not to do so, we would wish to continue to be part of Erasmus+ in our own right. That is a matter for further negotiation. As I have said, I think that that negotiation has to pause at this stage. I hope that is being listened to very intently. It means that a decision on Erasmus+ will be some time away.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement about the referendum. It would be sensible for the UK Government to follow suit with Brexit, so I echo his calls on that front. It is important that we recognise that this crisis needs our full attention, and that we need to address that and work together to achieve it.

**Michael Russell:** I thank Willie Rennie for those remarks. It is quite clear that we disagree on when and how a referendum should take place, but the imperative of the moment is clear. We have to defeat the tremendous challenge that we face. We can do that only across this chamber and across the four nations of these islands, and we shall endeavour to do so.

### Forced Organ Harvesting

**7. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the comments in its China engagement strategy regarding respect for human rights, what its position is on the recent full judgment of the China Tribunal on forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience. (S5O-04284)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, Europe and External Affairs (Michael Russell):** The conclusions that were drawn by the China Tribunal are deeply concerning. We will continue to actively monitor the human rights situation in China. We endeavour to ensure that the Scottish Government does not engage with any organisations that participate in illegal activity or human rights abuse. The Scottish ministers raise human rights issues in China regularly.

**John Mason:** It appears from the reports that organs from Falun Gong detainees, and possibly others, have been available on demand at two weeks' notice, which is virtually impossible from a medical point of view. Can the cabinet secretary further assure me that no Scottish universities or hospitals could, possibly unwittingly, be involved in helping that in any way?

**Michael Russell:** Clearly, we work very hard to ensure that no Scottish university, hospital or any other institution is unethically involved in any such barbaric practices, and we will continue to do so.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the portfolio questions on constitution, Europe and external affairs.

## Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Motion

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is consideration of Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body motion S5M-21271, on the reimbursement of members' expenses scheme. I ask Andy Wightman, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, to speak to and move the motion.

16:56

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. The motion has been lodged on behalf of the SPCB. We announced last week that, in order to provide members with as much flexibility as possible in the light of the impact of the coronavirus, we would make changes to the arrangements for employing temporary staff cover. This amendment to the reimbursement of members' expenses scheme allows the SPCB to do that.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament, in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 81(2) and (5)(b) and 83(5) of the Scotland Act 1998, determines that the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme, which was agreed to by resolution of the Parliament on 12 June 2008 and last amended by resolution of the Parliament on 15 March 2016, be amended to insert at the end of paragraph 3.4.1 In exceptional circumstances the SPCB may reduce or suspend the qualifying period of absence and suspend the requirement in paragraph 3.4.2 for adequate medical certificates or other relevant documents.—[*Andy Wightman*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question will be put at decision time.

## Business Motions

16:56

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-21305, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out revisions to tomorrow's business.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees the following revisions to the programme of business on Thursday 19 March 2020—

delete

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Ministerial Statement: COVID-19: Supporting our Communities

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: UK Coronavirus Legislation

*followed by* Portfolio Questions: Economy, Fair Work and Culture

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Female Genital Mutilation (Protection and Guidance) (Scotland) Bill

5.00 pm Decision Time

insert

1.45 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.45 pm Portfolio Questions: Economy, Fair Work and Culture

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Education – COVID-19

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: UK Coronavirus Legislation

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Female Genital Mutilation (Protection and Guidance) (Scotland) Bill

5.00 pm Decision Time—[*Graeme Dey*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-21297, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 March 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: UK COVID-19 Bill

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Air Traffic Management and Unmanned Aircraft Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 25 March 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills; Health and Sport

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Consumer Scotland Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Thursday 26 March 2020

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Communities and Local Government

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Financial Resolution: Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 31 March 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Scottish Elections (Reform) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 1 April 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Security and Older People; Finance

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time  
 Thursday 2 April 2020  
 11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 11.40 am General Questions  
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions  
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Environment, Climate Change and Land  
 Reform  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 23 March 2020, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Graeme Dey*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:58

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is consideration of 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions.

I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S5M-21287 to S5M-21295 on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S5M-21296 on designation of a lead committee.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (Procedure for Appointment of Members) Amendment Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland General Regulatory Chamber Parking and Bus Lane Cases and Upper Tribunal for Scotland (Composition) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Transfer of Functions of Parking Adjudicators) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Services Reform (Registers of Scotland) Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland General Regulatory Chamber Parking and Bus Lane Appeals (Rules of Procedure) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the UEFA European Championship (Trading and Advertising) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (Judicial Members) Amendment Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2019 Amendment Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Transfer of Functions of Bus Lane Adjudicators) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Liability for NHS Charges (Treatment of Industrial Disease) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question on those motions will be put at decision time.

I suspend the meeting for about 45 seconds.

16:59

*Meeting suspended.*



17:00

*On resuming—*

## Decision Time

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S5M-21271, in the name of Andy Wightman, on the reimbursement of members' expenses scheme, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament, in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 81(2) and (5)(b) and 83(5) of the Scotland Act 1998, determines that the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme, which was agreed to by resolution of the Parliament on 12 June 2008 and last amended by resolution of the Parliament on 15 March 2016, be amended to insert at the end of paragraph 3.4.1 In exceptional circumstances the SPCB may reduce or suspend the qualifying period of absence and suspend the requirement in paragraph 3.4.2 for adequate medical certificates or other relevant documents.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on the 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions, if no member objects. The question is, that motions S5M-21287 to S5M-21296, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (Procedure for Appointment of Members) Amendment Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland General Regulatory Chamber Parking and Bus Lane Cases and Upper Tribunal for Scotland (Composition) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

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That the Parliament agrees that the Public Services Reform (Registers of Scotland) Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

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That the Parliament agrees that the UEFA European Championship (Trading and Advertising) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (Judicial Members) Amendment Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2019 Amendment Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Transfer of Functions of Bus Lane Adjudicators) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Liability for NHS Charges (Treatment of Industrial Disease) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

*Meeting closed at 17:01.*



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