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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Tuesday 1 September 2020

Session 5



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 1 September 2020

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon, colleagues. Before I begin, I remind members that, as always, social distancing measures are in place throughout the building and in the chamber, so please be careful when you enter and leave the chamber.

Our first item of business is time for reflection, and our leader today is the Rev Erik Cramb from the Dundee Pensioners Forum.

The Rev Erik Cramb (Dundee Pensioners Forum): It must be an exciting day for you all as the new programme for government is laid out. As parliamentarians, you must be well aware of the tensions between power and service, and if you are not aware of those things, you certainly ought to be.

I will tell you a story from the Bible, in which two of Jesus's disciples—James and John—come to Jesus and say to him:

“When you sit on your throne in your glorious Kingdom, we want you to let us sit with you, one at your right and one at your left.”

In other words, they are saying, “Boss, see when you get into power, will you make us your top dogs?”

Jesus replies along the lines that “That’s not the way it’s going to work in my kingdom. Let me tell you this truth: whoever would wish to be great, must be a servant, and whoever would be the greatest of all, must be the servant of all.”

Perhaps the pandemic has taught us that truth. Are not nurses and care workers seen to be the greatest among us? As the programme for government is laid out today, to truly honour the positions to which you have been elected, you should all—in both Government and Opposition—aspire to use whatever powers you have as servants of all the people of Scotland. I say to you that yours is a high calling—remember that. It demands that you give your all in the service of others. Be the best that you can be.

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-22593, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out revisions to this week’s business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 1 September 2020—

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

insert

5.35 pm Decision Time

(b) Wednesday 2 September 2020—

after

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

delete

2.30 pm Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government’s Programme for Government 2020-21

insert

2.30 pm Ministerial Statement: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill – A Revolution in Children’s Rights

followed by

Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Government’s Programme for Government 2020-21

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

Insert

5.30 pm Decision Time—[Graeme Dey]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:04

School Pupils (Positive Covid-19 Tests)

1. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how many pupils have tested positive for Covid-19 since schools reopened. (S5T-02350)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Since the start of term, 77 young people aged 12 to 17 have tested positive, and 40 children aged 5 to 11 have tested positive.

Jamie Greene: I thank the cabinet secretary for those numbers. In his response, perhaps he will give an indication of the number of pupils who have been tested to elicit those positive results.

From its analysis of the data, does the Government know whether that cohort of positive results is from transmission from community to young person or from young person to young person, and whether there is any known onward transmission from young people to adults?

Will the cabinet secretary give a cast-iron guarantee that full and successful contact tracing has taken place for the households of every pupil who has tested positive?

John Swinney: Jamie Greene's first point was about the number of tests that have been carried out. The number of pupils in the 12 to 17 age group who tested positive was 77 and the number who tested negative was 11,208. In the five to 11-year-old category, 40 pupils tested positive and 28,664 tested negative. The positivity rate for five to 11-year-olds was 0.1 per cent. The positivity rate for the 12 to 17 age group was 0.7 per cent.

Full contact tracing is undertaken for all positive cases that are detected, and I pay tribute to the enormous industry that is put into that effort by the contact tracers. They have a really difficult job to do; they do it with proficiency and accuracy, and comprehensively.

On Jamie Greene's other point, in relation to the work that is carried out in schools, every effort is made to understand where infection has come from. On the evidence that I have seen, the virus is contracted mostly in household settings—not in every case, but that is the predominant explanation. It may also involve international travel, which has resulted in quite a number of the cases with which we are wrestling.

Jamie Greene: I thank the cabinet secretary for that helpful update on the numbers. That has clarified that there have been more than 30,000

tests of young people, of whom just over 100 have tested positive.

Last week, the Scottish Conservatives highlighted the issue of access to testing. Clearly, there has been a rise in the number of people seeking testing—perhaps that is a symptom of children going back to school. We have also called on the Government to supply every school with a number of home testing kits—that is a simple move that would benefit those from vulnerable households or who are unable easily to access mobile or drive-through testing facilities. Does the cabinet secretary agree with that suggestion? If not, why not?

John Swinney: Any individual who has the symptoms of coronavirus should access a test. That can be undertaken through various means—through drive-through testing facilities or testing kits that are despatched to individuals. I am satisfied that appropriate mechanisms are available to enable all individuals who have the symptoms to secure a test.

Increasing numbers of tests are being undertaken. In the first week of schools being back, 1,496 tests were undertaken in the 5 to 11 age group. In contrast, in the week ending 30 August, the number was 17,109, which is more than a tenfold increase in testing for that age group. I am confident that we have an appropriate level of testing in place to meet the needs of individual young people.

The Presiding Officer: Three members wish to ask a supplementary question.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): The cabinet secretary said that teachers and nursery and school staff would have access to testing on demand, to provide additional reassurance to those who work in schools. Will he confirm whether that additional testing route is now in place in all local authorities in Scotland? How many tests have been undertaken via that route?

John Swinney: That testing route is available in all local authority areas. I do not have the data on how many staff have accessed it, but if we can disaggregate the data in order to answer the question, I will write to Beatrice Wishart with the details.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Yesterday evening, I retweeted St Aidan's high school in my constituency, which had placed the open letter from Professor Jason Leitch on its Twitter feed. What was the rationale for releasing the letter, and how can we better disseminate the important information that is in it?

John Swinney: We took the decision to release the letter to provide greater clarity and information for parents on distinguishing between the

symptoms of the common cold, which is a common challenge and a prevalent problem at this stage in the year when schools return, and the symptoms of Covid, which are fundamentally different. The national clinical director's letter was designed to assist with that. It has been widely shared, and I am delighted to hear that it has been shared in Clare Adamson's constituency.

I pay tribute to schools, which adapted swiftly to the introduction of face coverings in secondary schools yesterday. I have spoken to a number of headteachers, who paid tribute to the extraordinary level of compliance from pupils with the guidance that came into effect yesterday.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Is the cabinet secretary satisfied that the resources that schools need to provide protection against Covid are being made available by the Government?

I raise that point specifically because I have taken it up with the education authority in Fife. Many teachers there have told me that local budgets that were meant to be spent on learning and teaching are being cut in order to provide sanitiser and personal protective equipment.

Will the cabinet secretary give me a guarantee that the Government will make that money available? Will he look specifically at Fife, where there are issues?

John Swinney: I have seen the reports to which Alex Rowley refers, regarding Fife and individual schools. The situation is this: the Government has made available £20 million directly to local authorities across Scotland, on the basis of a distribution formula that was agreed with local government, which is designed to meet the additional costs of school reopening. That is new money that the Government has put on the table.

We have said that where local authorities tabulate the extra financial costs of reopening schools in the post-Covid climate, the Government will look at those costs. We have also said that we are prepared to meet a further £30 million of costs.

The scenario that Mr Rowley put to me in which schools are being asked, for example, to dip into their learning and teaching budgets to provide sanitiser should not arise, given that the Government has put in place up to £50 million of new resources to meet exactly those costs—which it is imperative to meet—in schools so that our schools can be as safe as possible. If Mr Rowley has specific examples that he wishes me to pursue, I will be happy to receive information on those from him.

Scottish Welfare Fund

2. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government for what reason the Scottish welfare fund is reportedly being underutilised. (S5T-02357)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The figures that we published today show that crisis grants increased by 45 per cent during April and July, with expenditure increasing by 62 per cent. That shows that the continuing combination of United Kingdom welfare cuts alongside the economic impact of Covid-19 unfortunately means that the Scottish welfare fund is far from being underutilised.

As part of the £350 million community funding that was announced in March, we more than doubled the fund in anticipation that more people would need that additional financial support, not just during lockdown but throughout this year.

As the member knows, the fund is delivered by local authorities, and we continue to work with them to increase awareness of the fund. I am considering further ways in which we can ensure that people know about the fund and that as many people as possible who need that support are able to access it.

Rhoda Grant: The impact of Covid-19 on people with low incomes is stark, and many desperately need assistance to meet even their basic living costs. However, the data that the Poverty and Inequality Commission has published show that throughout April, May and June this year, the Scottish welfare fund was underused. Only £8.6 million was spent across those months, which is more than £1 million less than in the same period last year. That spend is only 15 per cent of the budget available this year, whereas at the same point last year 25 per cent of the budget had been spent. The commission has subsequently stated:

“in the 3 months at the epi-centre of the biggest public health crisis in over a century, it does not seem right that the money allocated to the Scottish Welfare Fund is not being used to maximum benefit.”

It is clear that the Scottish welfare fund is not being accessed by all those who need it. When the Scottish Government is considering how to increase access, will it commit to raising awareness of the fund and having a campaign to highlight how those in need can access it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The figures that have come out over the past couple of months are for crisis grants and community care grants. Local authorities spent 62 per cent more on crisis grants between April and July than they did in the same period last year, which shows that local authorities are responding significantly to the increased

demand for support from people facing financial crisis.

Demand for community care grants, which are provided to support people to live independently, is lower than last year. Given that a community care grant is typically six times the value of a crisis grant, it is perhaps not surprising that overall expenditure has been reduced. Some local authorities have reported that the reduction in demand for community care grants might be because there has been a reduction in new tenancies and house moves.

The Scottish Government is keeping a very close eye on the matter. As I said in my first answer, the Scottish welfare fund is delivered by local authorities. However, I am giving close consideration to what else needs to be done at a national level to ensure that those who require the support of crisis grants at this time are aware of their existence. I will work with local authorities to ensure that we do just that.

Rhoda Grant: Although the forthcoming Scottish child payment is welcome, we know that it will not be paid for another six months. Families across Scotland are struggling due to the effects of the pandemic, and they need help now. We know that there is money available in the welfare fund. The Poverty and Inequality Commission believes that a cash-first approach is the most dignified way of helping those in need. Will the Scottish Government therefore use the fund to create a one-off grant to eligible families, equivalent to what they would have received as a Scottish child payment, to see them through until that payment is available in February?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am afraid that it is not as simple as Ms Grant makes out. To set up a new fund that would replicate the Scottish child payment would require the data and processes to be available to make those payments. That is why we are working as fast as we can to deliver the Scottish child payment, which, despite all the difficulties that we have had because of Covid and lockdown, is being moved by only two months from our original timeframe. That demonstrates this Government's commitment to the delivery of the payment.

That is by no means the only thing that the Government has been doing to ensure that low-income families are supported. Much of it was set out by my colleague Aileen Campbell in her speech to Parliament last week, when she reported on the tackling child poverty delivery plan. We are implementing a number of different measures to ensure that we support families at this time, very much on the basis of a cash-first process.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Given that the Scottish welfare fund is delivered by local authorities, will the cabinet secretary outline what role local authorities have in ensuring that citizens are aware of the fund and how to access it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Mr Arthur is quite right to point out that the welfare fund is administered by local authorities. There is national statutory guidance, but awards are made at local authorities' discretion.

I am aware that the Poverty and Inequality Commission raised concerns that there are differences in the ways in which local authorities deliver the fund, make people aware of it and support people to access it. That is done through local publicity and local referrals. If there is something that can be done at a national level, I am keen to do that, but I am also keen to work with local authorities to make sure that they are delivering on their obligations, as I am sure that they would like to do.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I very much welcome the Scottish Government's early action in March to double the Scottish welfare fund, but does the cabinet secretary agree that the real issue here is that the increased demand during the pandemic is further evidence that UK welfare benefits are simply not sufficient for people to make ends meet?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Mr Brown makes a very important point; the crisis grants are there for assistance in times of crisis. It would be lovely if we lived in a time when people were not forced to get to that crisis point in the first place, because the welfare system at the United Kingdom level—from where the support for low income largely comes—was sufficient for them to deliver on their obligations to feed, clothe and house themselves and their families. Unfortunately, that is not the case, but we will continue to press the UK Government to stop people falling into crisis in the first place.

An important part of that is the continuation of the furlough scheme; if the UK Government decides to end it, I fear that that will lead people into requiring the Scottish welfare fund and further crisis grants. That cannot be the best way to deal with people at difficult times in their lives during the pandemic.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Women in particular have been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Will the Scottish Government consider utilising underused funds to prioritise the needs of lone-parent households or those with childcare and care responsibilities? A practical suggestion

might be supporting access to services that are currently available only online, because face-to-face services have not yet resumed.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Across Government, we have undertaken urgent work to ensure that we deliver support to those who have been digitally disadvantaged during the pandemic. I will take recommendations and suggestions from any party and I welcome Rachael Hamilton to her role as the new spokesperson on the issue.

I will give a suggestion back. One of the biggest reasons why people are falling into poverty during Covid-19 is the benefit cap. If the UK Government reduced or took away the benefit cap, people would not be falling into poverty in the first place and would therefore not need the crisis grant.

Advice Services

3. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what advice services are available to people across Scotland, and whether it considers that such services are adequate. (S5T-02361)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): Numerous organisations provide advice to people across the country, from small local community organisations to large national organisations including the Citizens Advice Scotland network, Shelter Scotland and StepChange. Of course, local authorities also provide advice services for their communities.

The Scottish Government recognises that access to independent advice plays a critical role in helping people to understand and exercise their rights and to seek solutions in a range of areas such as housing, debt and social security entitlements. That advice is funded through a mix of local and national Government funding, as well as from other sources. The Scottish Government invests more than £12 million in a number of projects that are delivered by a variety of advice services across Scotland.

John Mason: I thank the cabinet secretary for that reply. She mentioned citizens advice bureaux. That is obviously the thought behind my question, because, in Glasgow, five of our extremely trusted and well-known citizens advice bureaux might have their funding withdrawn by Glasgow City Council. I do not think that CABx are perfect; in some ways, they are old fashioned. I do not like people having to queue on the pavement to get into them, and they are bureaucratic. However, they are trusted and well known, and they provide a wide range of services. Is there a need for more emphasis on national rather than local funding?

Aileen Campbell: I thank John Mason for raising that critically important question in the

chamber. Citizens advice bureaux support people in our communities across the country. As he knows, the majority are individual charities, with each bureau being responsible for its own funding, including any core funding from the local authority as well as project funding from other sources such as the Big Lottery Fund. For example, through the Department for Work and Pensions, the network receives £4 million for delivery of a universal support programme. The Scottish Government also supports and funds CABx to deliver a variety of programmes through Citizens Advice Scotland. In 2020-21, our funding is £5.3 million to support the network to deliver, on our behalf, projects such as welfare mitigation, our money talk team and kinship care projects.

We use a great spread of bureaux across the country to support people who are vulnerable. In the context of the Glasgow bureaux, meetings are on-going to discuss how they can move forward, and I await the outcome of those meetings. Thereafter, we will work collectively to do what we can to make sure that those who are most vulnerable and financially challenged receive the help that they need in the most appropriate way.

John Mason: I thank the cabinet secretary for going into further detail on that issue. We heard from Glasgow City Council that some of the CABx put in very good applications while some put in quite poor ones. There seems to be inconsistency in the sector. Do we need the sector to be more joined up, and should the Scottish Parliament deal with CABx more directly instead of going through Citizens Advice Scotland?

Aileen Campbell: As I said, each citizens advice bureau works individually and is responsible for its own funding. As a Government, we have put significant resource into CAS to ensure that we get support to people who require it. The situation in Glasgow is one for Glasgow City Council to deal with—I am not privy to the applications, so I cannot determine whether there is a difference in the quality of those applications. However, I understand that there are on-going discussions in Glasgow. We await further information to see where those take us.

I am happy to engage further if there are ways in which we can ensure that the support is as well co-ordinated as possible. Ultimately, we are all focused on positive outcomes for individuals and we want individuals to get support in the right way. However, the situation in Glasgow is for Glasgow to deal with, and we await the outcome of the discussions. I encourage all parties to keep those discussions going.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise to Patrick Harvie and Pauline McNeill, who both wished to ask a supplementary question.

Programme for Government 2020-21

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a statement by the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, on the Scottish Government's programme for government 2020-21. The First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement.

14:26

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will start with a brief update on today's Covid statistics. An additional 154 positive cases were confirmed yesterday. That represents 1.2 per cent of the people newly tested and takes our total number of cases to 20,632. The full health board breakdown is available on the Scottish Government website. However, I draw attention to the fact that 66 of today's cases are in Greater Glasgow and Clyde. The situation there is causing us some concern. Further analysis is under way, and I will chair a meeting of the resilience committee later this afternoon to consider what action may be necessary to prevent further spread. I will provide a further update after that.

I can also confirm that a total of 264 patients are currently in hospital with Covid, which is six more than yesterday. Six people are in intensive care, which is one more than yesterday. In the past 24 hours, no deaths were registered of patients who had tested positive for Covid. The number of deaths under that measurement remains 2,494.

Those statistics remind us that the times that we are living through are far from normal. The pandemic continues to have a profound impact on our health and wellbeing, business and the economy and, indeed, our whole way of life. That is true in Scotland and across the globe.

It follows then that this is not a normal, business-as-usual programme for government. Today's programme is clear that suppressing Covid is our most immediate priority and will remain so for some time. That is essential for the protection of health and life and for economic and social recovery. Put simply, if Covid runs rampant again, our economy will sustain even deeper, longer lasting damage. This programme faces up to that inescapable fact.

However, we will not simply hunker down and wait for the storm to pass—we cannot afford to do that. We must end our contribution to climate change, improve biodiversity, invest in our national infrastructure, make our public services fit for the future, harness the economic and social opportunities of new technology, make homelessness history and lift children out of

poverty. Even amid the uncertainties of a global pandemic, this is a time to be ambitious, to use the disruption of Covid to rethink how we do things and to make sure that our immediate response to the virus works, not just in the short term, but also helps to shape a stronger, greener, fairer future.

We must treat the Covid challenge not as a brake on our ambitions, but as an accelerant. After all, if our response to the virus has taught us anything, it is that, when we set our minds to it, we can achieve progress more quickly than we thought possible.

The roll-out of a digital consulting system in the national health service had proceeded at a snail's pace for years, but it was completed in less than a month after Covid struck. A new hospital was created in a matter of weeks, armies of volunteers and public sector workers made sure that the vulnerable had access to food and medicines, rough sleepers were given places to stay and unprecedented support for business was distributed quickly and effectively.

None of us would have chosen to live through a global pandemic. We will always grieve the lives that have been lost, and we will never forget our separation from loved ones. However, we are also being reminded every day of the resilience of our human spirit, the power of human compassion and the ingenuity of human intellect. We must harness all of that for the future.

The programme for government sets out plans for a stronger, more resilient and more sustainable economy, with a laser focus on creating new, good and green jobs. It guarantees opportunities for our young people, and it refuses to accept that their generation will carry the economic scars of Covid into adulthood. It strengthens and reforms public services, including our national health service, and it takes the first step on the road to a national care service.

The programme for government promotes equality and wellbeing, with decisive action on child poverty. At its heart is the new game-changing Scottish child payment. It also starts to reimagine how we can live our lives in ways and in places that prioritise health and wellbeing, recognising the benefits of that not just to individuals but to the economy.

Let me turn to the detail and, first, to the necessity of suppressing and, I hope, eliminating Covid. Although nothing can be ruled out, we want to do everything possible to keep Covid under control without another national lockdown. That means building and supporting public health infrastructure that can break the chains of transmission and keep outbreaks contained.

Working with the United Kingdom, we have already expanded testing capacity, and we will

continue to do so. We will also make access to testing more accessible. Yesterday, the Scottish Ambulance Service took over the running of mobile test units, and it will continue to extend its reach. I thank the Army for its work in establishing and running the units so far.

By the end of October, 11 new walk-in testing centres will open across Scotland. Over the course of the winter, that number will rise to 22. We will ensure that decisions on who gets tested, and for what purposes, are informed by up-to-date scientific and clinical advice.

We will continue to strengthen the test and protect system. Built from the bottom up, the system harnesses the skill of Scotland's well-established health protection teams. It is working extremely well so far, and I am very grateful to everyone involved.

However, I can announce today a significant enhancement to the test and protect system. Later this month, we will launch protect Scotland—our new proximity tracing app—which will provide an additional means of notifying and giving advice if you have been exposed to someone who has tested positive, even if you do not know that person and they do not know you. More information will be given at the time of the app's launch—as well as important assurances about privacy and confidentiality—but I encourage everyone to download and use the app as soon as it becomes available.

Stopping the virus in its tracks, wherever possible, is our priority. However, we must be prepared for any second wave, if it happens. Our NHS is already restarting procedures that had to be paused, but it is also maintaining hospital and intensive care unit capacity to deal with Covid, if necessary. That includes keeping the NHS Louisa Jordan open through winter. We are replenishing stocks and strengthening supply chains to ensure that we have personal protective equipment for health and care workers, and I am pleased to say that much of that PPE is now made here in Scotland.

We are continuing to learn lessons to protect care home residents, which includes providing routine testing of care home workers. We are reducing the potential concurrent winter risk of flu by extending eligibility for the flu vaccine to everyone over the age of 55, social care workers and those who live with shielded people.

Keeping Covid under control is, of course, the responsibility of Government first and foremost, but we cannot do that alone; it requires a continued collective effort. We will succeed only if we all play our part. That is why I ask again that everyone across Scotland abides by the crucial

FACTS rules. Please do the right thing and help to keep our country safe.

The health crisis has caused an economic crisis on a scale that none of us have experienced before. We have an immediate obligation to protect jobs and help businesses survive. We have already made available more than £2.3 billion of emergency funding for businesses, and we will continue to provide as much support as we can. We also welcome the scale of the UK Government's economic interventions. However, the looming withdrawal of the furlough scheme risks a tsunami of redundancies. I am therefore calling again on the UK to follow the lead of countries such as France and Germany and extend the job retention scheme for a further 12 months—especially for the sectors hardest hit by Covid and with the longest road to recovery. Withdrawing that support while otherwise viable businesses are still unable to operate normally—in full and certain knowledge of the impact that that will have—would be unconscionable. It must not be allowed to happen.

We will take all possible action to support the economy in the short term, but this programme also lays foundations for the future. It establishes a national mission to create new high-quality green jobs. That mission is underpinned by significant investment in our national infrastructure, in securing the economic benefits of the green transition and in fully realising the potential of the tech revolution. I will set out some of those investments and supporting initiatives shortly.

Delivering on that mission, and responding to the immediate employment challenges of Covid, requires a massive focus on upskilling and reskilling the workforce. I can confirm that central to that, and to our programme, is a youth guarantee: a new partnership with Scotland's employers, backed by £60 million of Government investment, to guarantee everyone aged 16 to 24 a job, a place in education or a place in training. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture will publish the implementation plan for the youth guarantee tomorrow, but be in no doubt now that the guarantee signals our absolute determination that youth unemployment will not be a legacy of the pandemic. We are also earmarking £10 million to help employers recruit and retain apprentices. That will include incentives to take on apprentices who have been made redundant, and I can announce that, this autumn, we will launch the national transition training fund; backed by initial funding of £25 million, it will help up to 10,000 people of all ages retrain for jobs in growth sectors. We will also double to £20 million our flexible workforce development fund, which helps employers address skills gaps, and we will

establish a green jobs fund—initially worth £100 million—which I will say more about shortly.

Supporting workers to upskill and retrain is essential, but Covid has brought about fundamental shifts in how people work. Greater flexibility over working patterns is important for health and wellbeing, and many businesses see benefits to that as well. At present, our advice is of course to work from home if possible. However, we expect that when more people do return to offices, some will want to go on working from home, at least for part of the week. We will therefore set up a new centre for workplace transformation to look at how and where work takes place, and what support employees and businesses need to make that work.

The programme for government includes a range of measures to protect key sectors that have been badly affected by the pandemic, for example, tourism, the creative industries and our cultural sector—all crucial to this country's future. But investment in infrastructure is at the core of the programme. We will increase our investment in infrastructure year on year, so that by the end of the next Parliamentary session it will be £1.5 billion higher than last year. This month we will publish our new national infrastructure investment plan—informed by the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland—which will set out the framework for £32 billion of infrastructure investment over the next five years.

Part of that investment will be in digital infrastructure. The past six months have shown that access to the online world is a modern necessity every bit as essential as access to electricity. It is through technology that many of us have continued to work, learn, access life's essentials and stay in touch with loved ones.

Our £600 million R100 programme will make superfast broadband available to every home and business across the country. Scotland still has the only Government in the UK to have guaranteed 100 per cent access to superfast broadband. Work has already started on delivering the central and south of Scotland parts of that programme.

We have also established a voucher scheme—the most generous anywhere in the UK—to ensure that everyone in Scotland has access to superfast broadband by the end of 2021, even if the R100 installation is not scheduled to reach them until later or if they are in the hardest to reach areas.

However, better infrastructure alone will not secure the benefits of digital technology. We must also eliminate digital exclusion. During lockdown, by working with the third sector, councils and Scotland's tech industry, we established Connecting Scotland. That scheme has provided iPads and Chromebooks with internet connections

to people on low incomes. It helps tackle the causes and consequences of poverty.

The initial priority was to make provision for people shielding or at high risk of severe illness. The programme is now helping care leavers and low-income households with children. It connects families, improves employment opportunities and provides better access to health care and education.

We intend to significantly expand that programme in the coming year. I can announce that, by the end of 2021, Connecting Scotland will provide an electronic device, unlimited data, and two years of digital support and training to 50,000 people who would otherwise be without the digital access that the rest of us take for granted. This is a massive step and will help us to end the digital divide once and for all.

We have previously expressed our ambition for Scotland not simply to be a nation of users of digital technologies but to lead the way in the design and development of new technology. In recent years we have enhanced our international reputation as a centre for technology and data. However, last week's review by Mark Logan, Skyscanner's former chief operating officer, highlighted areas for urgent improvement. His recommendations—if implemented—will be truly transformational. This Government accepts that challenge. I confirm that we intend to implement those recommendations in full.

We will establish a network of technology incubators to mentor and train tech start-ups. We will create an ecosystem fund to help those start-ups to succeed. We will provide re-skilling opportunities for people whose employment has been affected by Covid, so that they can find new jobs in our digital industries. And we will work directly with the technology sector to deliver the Logan review's recommendations on education, entrepreneurship and investment.

Scotland already has significant economic and academic strengths in technology and data. Building on those is crucial for our future prosperity and success. This programme is a clear signal of our determination to expand these strengths, to address our weaknesses and to fully seize the opportunities of the digital age.

Our ambitions for a digital Scotland must go hand in hand with our ambitions for a greener Scotland. In two months' time, Scotland was due to host the 26th conference of the parties, or COP26. That gathering has been postponed, but the global challenge is more pressing than ever. Covid is, rightly, the most immediate priority that is addressed in the programme for government, but we must not forget that the global climate emergency is intensifying and that it, too, requires

our urgent attention and action. In the year ahead, we will make further progress towards Scotland becoming, by 2045 at the latest, a net zero emitter, thus ending for ever our contribution to climate change.

Last year, we set out the first phase of our green new deal, based on the principle that decarbonising Scotland is both a moral obligation and a significant economic and social opportunity. It committed an additional £2 billion of investment over the next session of Parliament to help achieve the ambitions that are set out in our climate change plan.

Today, we are setting out details of how £1.6 billion of that will be invested: by supporting green jobs, reprioritising road space for public transport use, planting trees and transforming how we heat our buildings. Our overall investment in decarbonising heat—which will in itself be more than £1.5 billion over the next session of Parliament—will help us to improve energy efficiency, to reduce fuel poverty and to ensure that, in just over 20 years, heating in Scotland will no longer be a source of greenhouse gas emissions.

That transformation, driven by our responsibility to the planet, will also create and support many jobs across the country. As indicated earlier, we will also create a £100 million green jobs fund. Half of that will be dedicated to helping businesses and organisations grow to significantly increase employment in low-carbon sectors; the other half will help businesses take advantage of public and private investment in the low-carbon economy.

We will also help other industries become green. A £62 million energy transition fund will help oil and gas businesses diversify, which is of course especially important for the north-east of Scotland. In addition, I can confirm that we will invest a further £60 million to support the industrial and manufacturing sectors' transition to net zero.

One of Scotland's biggest industrial employers and one of its largest emitters is, of course, Grangemouth. I can therefore confirm that we will establish a Grangemouth future industry board to support a just transition at that cluster, promoting economic activity while advancing the move to a low-carbon future. We will also do much more to support the circular economy and new energy technologies such as carbon capture and storage, and hydrogen. In addition, we will significantly increase peatland restoration, investing at least £250 million over the next decade to help meet our emissions targets, and support jobs in rural and remote parts of our country areas.

I can also announce that we will launch later this month the first round of our green investment portfolio, marketing more than £1 billion of low-

carbon projects to investors across the world, and, of course, the Scottish National Investment Bank will shortly open its doors for business. Capitalised to the tune of £2 billion over the next decade, its primary mission will be to drive the transition to a net zero economy. The bank will be a key source of patient finance in the years ahead; it will support the new technologies, projects and infrastructure that will put Scotland at the forefront of the transition to net zero. I can confirm that the bank is already in discussions about a range of projects for early investment, including supporting supply chains for zero-emission public transport. The Scottish National Investment Bank, which in my view is the most important economic development of this session of Parliament, will be key to creating the low-carbon, high-technology and highly skilled economy that we want and are determined to build in Scotland.

The Government will continue to do all that we can to help individuals and businesses adapt, survive and succeed. Covid has presented us with significant challenges, but those challenges are being compounded completely unnecessarily by Brexit. The UK Government's decision not to seek an extension to the transition period, despite the economic crisis caused by Covid, will cause avoidable harm to many Scottish businesses. It is an act of self-sabotage that we simply do not understand but must nevertheless respond to.

At the same time, we also face restrictions on our ability to protect key sectors as a result of the UK's plans to create a so-called internal market that undermines this Parliament and risks lowering standards. Nevertheless, Brexit demands that we work in partnership with business and the third and public sectors to make sure that Scotland remains an attractive location for inward investment. I can therefore announce today that we will publish before the end of this year, as an accompaniment to our export strategy, a new inward investment plan, with the express aim of creating 100,000 high-quality jobs over the next decade.

Brexit and the way in which it is being implemented immeasurably strengthen the case for Scotland becoming an independent country with the ability to shape our own destiny and contribute positively to Europe and the world. If this was a programme for government in an independent Scotland, it would not have to contemplate the damage of Brexit at all. Instead, it could set out even more far-reaching plans for an immediate extension of the job retention scheme, not a plea for another Government to do so; the greater use of borrowing powers to further stimulate our economy; transformation of our national grid to support faster development of renewables; a migration system that welcomes talent at all levels and supports people to make

Scotland their home; and a universal basic income and a social security system geared wholly, not just partially, to lifting households out of poverty.

That is why we will publish, before the end of this session of Parliament, a draft bill setting out the proposed terms and timing of an independence referendum as well as the proposed question that people will be asked in that referendum. Then, at next year's election, we will make the case for Scotland to become an independent country, and we will seek a clear endorsement of Scotland's right to choose our own future.

The rainbows that appeared in windows across Scotland earlier this year were an expression of hope in the face of adversity. They were also a tribute to the dedication of our health and care workers. We owe them—each and every one of them—an enormous debt of gratitude, and that must be reflected in how we value and reward them. We are now in the final year of the three-year national health service agenda for change pay deal. We are already working with trade unions to agree the negotiation of a new pay award for 2021-22. As part of that, we are considering options to recognise the enormous contribution of staff during the pandemic. We also acknowledge the impact of Covid on the mental health of many front-line workers, and we will establish a mental health network, including a workforce specialist service, to provide confidential assessment and treatment for those working in the NHS.

Covid has reminded us how important it is to ensure the safety of patients. We will continue to support the work of the Scottish patient safety programme and, in response to the Baroness Cumberlege review, which was commissioned as a result of concern about mesh implants, I can announce that we will also establish a patient safety commissioner. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will set out more details next week.

Our immediate priority is of course the remobilisation of the NHS, but we will also reform access to services in light of the Covid experience, and we will expand the use of technology. Work to restart services that were paused because of Covid and to tackle the backlog of procedures is already under way. We are also expanding elective capacity through the national elective centre programme. The first of our new centres for elective surgery will open next month at the Golden Jubilee hospital. Construction will start shortly on the Highland centre; next year, it will start on new centres in Grampian and Livingston and on the second phase of the Golden Jubilee centre. A new national cancer recovery plan will be published in the autumn to drive forward

recovery and improvement of those vital services, and we will prioritise prompt detection of cancers through early diagnostic centres.

Crucially, in the months ahead, we will build on the rapid expansion of digital access to care that was achieved in response to Covid. Early on in the pandemic, we quickly upscaled the use of the Near Me video consultation service. In the week before that service started, just over 300 video consultations took place across the NHS. In the last week of June, the number was 17,000. Patient satisfaction with the service was high. That shows us how quickly progress can be made. While we recognise that video consultations will not be appropriate for every patient or every situation, I can confirm that we intend to move to a position where Near Me is the default option for patient consultations. We also intend to develop the use of near me in social care.

Accident and emergency services were transformed during Covid, and we will learn from that experience. A new 24/7 service operated by NHS 24 will help patients who are not in need of immediate emergency care to access clinical assessments by phone or online before attending an A and E department.

We will support the pharmacy first initiative, which allows common ailments to be treated by community pharmacists. That is part of a wider set of reforms to community health services. Our aim is to ensure that multidisciplinary teams, in a network of community treatment and care facilities, just like the one that I visited yesterday at Sighthill, provide as much care and treatment as possible, in communities and close to home.

Covid has undoubtedly highlighted and exacerbated health inequalities, so we will promote healthier and more active lifestyles for all. We will invest £500 million over the next five years to support active travel. That will help local authorities to develop new walkways, reallocate road space and increase access to bikes. We will also implement low-emission zones in our four biggest cities to improve air quality. The first of those zones has already been established in Glasgow, and the others will be operational by early 2022.

We will work to encourage healthier eating, and we will take forward plans to tackle obesity and support healthy weight. We will continue to tackle the harms that are caused by alcohol and tobacco.

We will deliver on the key recommendations of the drug deaths task force, for example by tackling the stigma that too often prevents people from seeking treatment and by funding vital research into drug deaths in Scotland.

A central commitment in last year's programme for government was major reform and expansion

of mental health services. This year's programme continues that journey. Again, we will build on the approaches that were adopted during the pandemic. During lockdown, the reach of the distress brief intervention programme was expanded. That provides support for people in distress who contact emergency services but who do not need emergency clinical help. Evaluations have shown that such an approach saves lives. I can therefore confirm that we will expand the distress brief interventions programme across every part of Scotland. We will also work with health boards to retain the mental health assessment centres that were established during the pandemic, and we will deliver the major expansion of mental health support for children and young people that was announced in last year's programme for government.

So far, I have focused largely on the national health service, but the pandemic has reminded us of the vital importance of social care services, and of the extraordinary professionalism, dedication and compassion of those who work in that sector. However, it has also underlined the need for improvement and reform. I can therefore announce today the immediate establishment of a comprehensive independent review of adult social care. The review will seek the views of those with direct experience of adult social care and will make recommendations for immediate improvements. However, more fundamentally, it will examine and set out options for the creation of a national care service. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will set out more detail on that in her statement later today. However, I can confirm that we will ask the review to produce its first report by January, so that we can quickly start to act on its findings. The quality of adult social care matters deeply to us all. This is a moment to be bold and to build a service fit for the future. The national health service was born out of the tragedy of the second world war. Let us resolve that, out of the Covid crisis, we will build the lasting and positive legacy of a high-quality, national care service.

The past few months have reminded us once again that quality public services and a strong economy must go together. We will continue to invest in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and in Police Scotland. I am extremely grateful to both those emergency services for the work that they have done to help the country through the Covid crisis.

In the wider justice system, we will work with courts, the legal profession and victims' organisations to tackle the backlog of cases that Covid has caused, and we will continue to promote and expand the use of community interventions as more effective alternatives to short-term prison sentences.

We will also progress plans to modernise the prison estate, and will prioritise replacements for HMP Barlinnie and HMP Inverness. By the end of 2022, we will have delivered a new national women's prison and two community custody units for women, in Glasgow and Dundee, to ensure that the needs of women in our criminal justice system can be better addressed.

In this session of Parliament, we will also introduce a new domestic abuse bill that will legislate for emergency protection orders to better safeguard those who are at immediate risk of domestic abuse. That bill is one of four that we will introduce before the end of this parliamentary session. The others will be a budget bill, a bill relating to medicine and dentistry education at the University of St Andrews, and a truly landmark bill to incorporate into Scots law the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, about which I will say more later.

Seven additional bills are already before the Parliament and will continue their progress in the weeks ahead. They include: the Defamation and Malicious Publication (Scotland) Bill; the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Bill; the Heat Networks (Scotland) Bill; the Forensic Medical Services (Victims of Sexual Offences) (Scotland) Bill; and the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill. On the last of those, I know that some concerns have been raised. I give an assurance that we will listen carefully to them: the freedoms of speech and of expression are fundamental in any democracy.

I turn now to housing. We will continue to make ending homelessness a national priority, and we will provide more support for new housing. We will update the "Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan", having learned from the approaches that were taken during the pandemic, and we will significantly scale up the housing first programme.

We will also take action to reduce the risk of people becoming homeless because of Covid-related financial pressures. In the initial stages of the pandemic, we legislated to stop people being evicted; we will extend the protection against eviction for rent arrears to March next year. However, I can announce today that we will also establish a £10 million tenant hardship loan fund to support people who are struggling to pay their rent because of the pandemic.

We will also continue to invest in new social and affordable housing. Investment in housing is also an investment in our economy, in jobs and in our communities. Before lockdown, we were on track to deliver by the end of the parliamentary session 50,000 new affordable homes, 35,000 of them for social rent. We are working with the construction

sector to catch up and to hit that target as soon as possible.

That has been a £3 billion investment; we intend to expand on it. We have already committed a further £300 million of housing investment in the next financial year. That will secure much-needed homes and will support about 10,000 jobs. Later this year, we will publish a new 20-year vision for good-quality zero-carbon housing with access to community services, transport links and green space.

For social housing, we will set new standards on carbon emissions, digital infrastructure, access to outdoor space and room for home working. That vision will be based on extensive consultation. The social renewal advisory board—whose recommendations have been influential in several areas of the programme—will help to ensure that the vision reflects our experiences of the pandemic. It will also be backed by substantial new funding for the remainder of the next parliamentary session, which will be confirmed in the capital spending review later in the year.

The past few months have, because we have been able to travel less, reminded us just how important our local communities are. The concept of the 20-minute neighbourhood has attracted growing global interest in recent years. The basic idea is that people in any part of a town or city should be able to find shops, green space, public services and leisure facilities—and, ideally, work—within 20 minutes' walk of a good affordable home. We intend to work with local authorities and others to turn that vision into a reality through our policies on transport, regeneration, housing and the environment. To support that, we will invest £275 million in community-led regeneration and town-centre revitalisation.

The pandemic has reinforced what we already knew: the quality of homes and communities impact directly on our health, happiness and wellbeing, and those impacts are unequal. With our plans in the programme for government to invest in quality housing and better neighbourhoods, we aim to transform that for the better.

As our support for housing is, the social safety net is an investment in our collective wellbeing. During Covid, we have expanded the Scottish welfare fund, increased payments for carers and provided additional support for emergency food supplies. Social Security Scotland now delivers eight benefits to people across the country. Four of those benefits are new and do not exist elsewhere in the UK, and the other four are more generous than the UK benefits that they replaced.

In November, our new social security system will reach its most significant milestone, when it

starts to take applications for the new Scottish child payment. The first payments will be in the pockets of eligible families in February next year. Despite the six-month disruption by Covid, that is just two months later than was initially planned. The Scottish child payment will give eligible families £10 a week for each child, initially for children under the age of six, and then, when it is fully implemented, for children up to the age of 16. Together with support that is available through the best start grant, the Scottish child payment will be truly game changing, in our fight against child poverty.

During the winter, we will also start to make payments through the child winter heating assistance programme, which will provide £200 per child for families of severely disabled children.

Social security is part of the social contract between Government and citizen; it is an expression of our solidarity as a society. It is more important than ever to support, strengthen and invest in it: this Government will do exactly that.

The child payment—like the baby box—symbolises our determination to ensure that every child has the best start in life. This generation of children and young people has experienced a year that is unlike anything that we could have anticipated. We have a duty to ensure that the impact of the past few months does not disadvantage them in the years to come.

One of the most important pledges of this Parliament was our commitment to ensure 1,140 hours of free childcare a year for all three and four-year-olds, and for eligible two-year-olds. That commitment was on course to be delivered from August. Inevitably, Covid has delayed it, but we remain committed to delivering it in full. A firm date for completion will be agreed between the Scottish Government and local authorities before the end of this year.

In schools, closing the attainment gap remains our defining aim, but we must not underestimate the impact that the closure of schools will have had on that gap. We have already confirmed pupil equity funding of £130 million for the next financial year, and we have allocated an additional £80 million this year for recruitment of additional teachers and support staff, to help young people to catch up in their education.

We have already established a review of the awarding of Scottish Qualifications Authority qualifications, and we will ensure broader consideration of our approach to assessments and qualifications in the future.

I can also confirm that we will fund additional university places to ensure that no young person loses out on higher education as a result of the issues with this year's qualifications. Having met

our interim target, we will continue to work towards the objective of closing the gap in access to university. Our aim is that, by 2030, at least 20 per cent of university entrants will be from our 20 per cent most-deprived communities. In the more immediate term, we will work with universities and colleges to help them to deal with the substantial impact of Covid.

I also want today to renew my personal promise to children and young people with experience of care, and to recommit to full implementation of the independent care review's recommendations. Fiona Duncan, who chaired the review, has already been appointed to lead an oversight board to hold us to account.

We will also respond to the Black Lives Matter movement and the global resistance to continued racial injustice. This programme sets out how, on health, the economy and in communities, we can better recognise and respond to the challenges that are faced by minority communities. We will also work to educate young people on our past, and on the need to challenge racial injustice in the present. We will sponsor an independent expert group to make recommendations on how to raise awareness of Scotland's role in colonialism, slavery and historical injustice, and how that manifests itself in society today.

Finally, I can confirm that we will shortly introduce one of the most ambitious pieces of legislation in the 20-year history of devolution. We will, to the maximum extent that is possible, fully and directly incorporate into Scots law the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. That will mean that public authorities, including the Government, will be required by law to act in ways that are compatible with the convention's requirements to recognise, respect and be accountable for the rights of children in what we do. The implications of the bill will be profound, far reaching and long lasting. It is a commitment that exemplifies the importance that the Government attaches to the rights, opportunities and future of all our young people.

That view to the future is the note that I want to end on, but first let me reflect on the past. It is less than three weeks since we commemorated the 75th anniversary of victory over Japan day and the end of world war two. One of the many impressive things about that world war two generation is the way in which, even in desperate times, they resolved to build a better world. They created institutions, from our national health service to the United Nations, that have stood the test of time and serve us to this day.

The crisis that we face today is different and in many ways less extreme, but it is without doubt the biggest challenge that our generation has faced. It would be easy to focus on nothing but

Covid, and of course the effort to suppress it will occupy us for some time yet. However, we should also seize this moment to imagine and start to build a better future.

That is why the programme, as well as tackling Covid, renews our commitment to end, once and for all, Scotland's contribution to climate change. It acknowledges the social solidarity of recent months and aspires to our becoming a more equal country. It will invest in the skills and technologies that people will need for the future. It lays plans for homes and neighbourhoods that we hope can be cherished for generations. It commits to the vision of a national care service to match the post-war national health service. Above all, it seeks to ensure that Covid will not be the defining experience of the current generation of young people, and aims instead to improve their education, enhance their life chances and guarantee their human rights.

This is a programme for government that necessarily prepares us for what might well be a difficult winter, but it also encourages us to lift our eyes, to find hope in our hearts and to plan for brighter days ahead. I commend it to the chamber.

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister will now take questions on her statement.

Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): I thank the First Minister for the advance sight of her statement. She has called the action to protect, support and create jobs our "national mission", and I agree. To that end, I welcome a number of measures that have been referenced today, including increased investment in digital infrastructure and further support for youth training.

Such moves are welcome, but they remain insufficient. The First Minister will know that 99.3 per cent of all Scotland's businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises. She will know that they support more than a million jobs and comprise more than half of all private sector employment, so it is disappointing that, although her statement today ran to more than 6,000 words, she missed out two: small business. Small businesses are vital to what happens next because, when global shocks happen, it is the efforts of individuals that pull countries out of the mire.

In the three years following the 2008 crash, 88 per cent of the people who went from unemployment to employment did so through an SME or through self-employment, so getting help for small business right is a fundamental part of getting our national response right.

Scotland's small businesses have some specific practical asks. The first is for reassurance. While we all hope that we do not have to experience another Scotland-wide lockdown, the recent

experience of Aberdeen shows how disruptive to small businesses local lockdowns are.

Yesterday, we proposed the creation of a hardship fund for firms that are hit by such restrictions. Such a specialised fund would provide reassurance to small businesses that help was guaranteed if they were told to close their doors. Yesterday, the First Minister said that she would consider all good ideas, so will she commit now to considering that one and give small businesses that reassurance?

The First Minister: I thank Ruth Davidson for her comments. I absolutely understand the importance of small businesses to our economy and, indeed, to our society and our wellbeing as a country. That is why I am so very proud to be the leader of the Government that, in a previous session of Parliament, introduced the small business bonus, such is the importance of the small business community to everything that we do in our country.

So much of what the programme for government covers will help businesses of all shapes and sizes, including small and medium-sized enterprises, whether through the on-going emergency support or, in the longer term, our commitments to digital infrastructure, to helping businesses to fill the skills gaps that they have and to retraining the workforce to ensure that small businesses have access to a skilled population in the future.

We will consider all suggestions, but I make the point that I will always make when pleas for more funding are made, for understandable reasons. The budget of the Scottish Government is largely finite, because we do not have access to the borrowing powers that the UK Government has access to. If we want more money to flow through into help for businesses, the UK Government must make such decisions or give us the borrowing powers to make them ourselves.

In relation to Aberdeen, we made money available for a hardship fund there, and we will continue to look at every way in which we can support businesses. Of course, the biggest and most important thing that we can do to support business is to keep Covid suppressed so that we do not have further restrictions on businesses' ability to trade, and to take early action when there are increases in the transmission of the virus so that we keep our economy and, of course, our schools open.

The biggest threat that faces businesses of all sizes in the immediate term is the withdrawal of the furlough scheme, and I hope that members across the chamber will join me in calling on the UK Government not to withdraw that support prematurely so that the benefit of the support that

we can give, building on that foundation, is not taken away by the disaster that will befall businesses if the furlough scheme is withdrawn, as is currently planned.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister asks where the money might come from. I point out that £6.5 billion in Barnett consequential has been transferred from the UK Government to her Government. That is not allocated.

Yesterday, I walked down George Street in my constituency of Edinburgh Central, which is one of the major retail destinations of our country, and I was shocked at the number of businesses that have simply not opened their doors. I know that that will be replicated—or worse—in the shopping streets in towns across the country. In fact, the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland says that more than a third of firms that have been forced to close have no idea whether they will ever be able to reopen.

However, FSB Scotland also says that there are measures that the Scottish Government can take to help more of them to do so. A simple one is to put back the business rates revaluation, as small businesses cannot afford to pay rates that are based on pre-recession values when they have less money coming through their doors. England and Wales have already agreed to push their revaluation back to April of next year. Will the First Minister follow suit?

The First Minister: Yes, that is under consideration. I think that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance will shortly make clear our intentions on the next revaluation date. I understand that, unlike England and Wales, we are also looking at the tone date—we want to ensure that there is as small a gap between that and the revaluation as possible, because we understand the importance of that to businesses—but I will let the finance secretary set out the details of that when she is ready to do so.

I hope that this will be taken in the spirit in which it is intended: every year, we have a budgetary process that all parties have the opportunity to contribute to; some take that opportunity and some do not. This year is different. We must constantly look at how the money that we have at our disposal is allocated to help businesses such as the ones that Ruth Davidson is talking about, but no party should come to this chamber and make the claim that we have large reserves of unallocated money in our budget.

The sum that Ruth Davidson talked about is money that is allocated right now. It is helping our public services and businesses and supporting a range of priorities and initiatives across the country.

Unless Ruth Davidson or others are going to argue for increased borrowing powers or other sources of revenue, then, if they want us to spend money on one priority, they also have to be prepared to say where we should take that money from. I will listen to suggestions that are made, as we have tried to respond to suggestions throughout the crisis so far.

Ruth Davidson: I am coming to the First Minister with practical and constructive measures that have been advanced and supported by Scotland's largest business membership organisations. She asked me for the envelope and I told her it.

As the First Minister will know, many small businesses have needed to adapt their premises in order to meet the new social distancing and other public health guidelines that have been put in operation. If they had not done that, they would not have been allowed to reopen or trade again. Now, however, they fear that they are going to be hit twice over, once to foot the bill for those adaptations and again if the adaptations that they have made lead to higher property valuations, which decide how much they go on to pay in rates.

It would be a travesty if Scotland's small businesses, which have already been hammered by months of enforced closure and a continuing lack of footfall, were to be further penalised through their rates bills just for doing the right thing. Will the First Minister give them a categorical assurance today that she will take the necessary steps to protect them from higher rates bills caused by public health adaptations?

The First Minister: If Ruth Davidson had listened carefully to the first part of my previous answer, she would probably have heard the direction of travel in terms of the date of revaluation. One of the reasons for looking to potentially delay revaluation is the fall-off in business activity and the other factors that businesses have been dealing with.

We do not want, and I do not want, businesses that have already been hit by Covid and the changes that have been necessitated by that to be hit unfairly in addition to that. We will take steps in the way that we consider is best designed to protect businesses from the kind of effect that is being pointed out. It is right and proper for the finance secretary to do that work in detail and to announce it properly to this Parliament, but I think that anybody who is listening to me right now will get a fairly clear hint of the direction of travel.

Ruth Davidson: One of the best and biggest ways to help people back into work is to sort out childcare. I think that it is sadly typical of this Government today that its commitment to

childcare is delayed by its commitment to a referendum bill, which is front and centre.

The First Minister paused her pledge of 1,140 hours of free nursery care in July due to a shutdown of building sites that were adding the extra provision, but extending nursery buildings was not the only problem. According to Audit Scotland in March, those nurseries were still behind in recruiting staff, with thousands of places unfilled. The First Minister says that she will update working parents in December on when they can expect to see 1,140 hours finally being delivered, but will she commit today to using the pause to recruit and support enough nursery nurses through training to actually make it happen?

The First Minister: Ruth Davidson may be interested to know—or to learn—that there are many local authorities right now that are already delivering 1,140 hours. I saw today, I think, if I read this correctly, Shetland making that announcement, and there have been others over the past period.

The commitment to the policy is well on track. The Audit Scotland report back in March, before Covid, outlined the challenges with a project of this scale and ambition, and we should remember that it is a project of a scale and ambition that no other Government across the rest of the UK has committed to.

Yes, there are challenges, but that programme was on track and it will be completed. Many councils are already delivering it, and those that are having to get back on track will set out their revised plans as soon as possible. This will be one of the flagship commitments and achievements of this session of Parliament, and, when it happens in full, I look forward to Ruth Davidson congratulating the Government and local authorities on that achievement.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank the First Minister for advance sight of her statement. I share her concern that the public health crisis remains a major risk. It is a matter of concern and it must continue to be our top priority above all others.

There are many aspects of today's programme that I welcome. We have long advocated for a Scottish jobs guarantee scheme, and we hope that when the implementation plan is announced tomorrow, it is based on the real living wage. We welcome the commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and we have been calling for radical reform of our care system and the creation of a national care service for the past 10 years.

At the weekend, the First Minister said, of this year's programme for government:

"We have an opportunity, not simply to go back to how things were, but to address many of the deep-seated challenges our country faces."

I whole-heartedly agree.

One of those deep-seated challenges is the challenge of unemployment and the crisis of jobs. The First Minister has today promised a plan for new green jobs. We have heard these promises before, repeatedly. Meanwhile, multimillion-pound contracts have gone overseas and less than a third of the jobs promised have materialised. How do we know that this time, we will not simply go back to how things were, with broken promises, empty yards and offshored jobs? What is going to be different this time?

The First Minister: Of course, as Richard Leonard will know, we continue to work hard on an on-going basis to make sure that many of the economic benefits of vast renewables projects, for example, are enjoyed here in Scotland. That is an uphill struggle, and part of the reason for that is that so many of the levers, such as those on contract for difference, are still reserved to Westminster. If Richard Leonard wants to will the ends of something, he must also will the means, and I look forward to having his support in those arguments in the future.

If what Richard Leonard has been saying in recent weeks and months is sincere, as I expect that it will be, I suspect that there is an awful lot in this programme for government that he will welcome and want to get behind, so that collectively, across the Parliament, we can deliver on it.

The implementation plans for the youth guarantee, which is so important in making sure that youth unemployment is not a legacy of this crisis, will, as I said, be published tomorrow. Sandy Begbie, who has my gratitude for the work that he has done on that, has, I believe, had discussions with Opposition leaders to share the thinking on the guarantee. Generally, the Government's commitment to the living wage is extremely strong. We have taken a number of steps to advance that, and I am sure that an ambition around the living wage will be central to the youth guarantee implementation plan.

We have an opportunity out of crisis to rethink how we do things, but that is not to say that all of this will be easy. My responsibility is to make sure that we are using all the levers and resources at our disposal. The elephant in the room will always be that some of the levers, particularly those for economic interventions, are not in our hands. There will always be a real flaw in Richard Leonard's argument if he is still in the position of arguing that those levers and powers, and so much of the resources, should be in the hands of a Conservative Government at Westminster rather

than in the hands of this Parliament. I hope that I will be able to change his mind on that in the future.

Richard Leonard: I am reminded that, back in 2010, in its "Low Carbon Economic Strategy", the Scottish Government promised 130,000 jobs in renewables and low-carbon technologies by 2020, and, in the "2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy in Scotland", it promised 40,000 jobs in renewables by 2020. The list goes on.

Another deep-seated challenge that the country faces is the crisis of rising poverty, homelessness and the affordability of housing. Over the past 10 years, rents in the private rented sector have soared year on year. They went up by around 5 per cent in the city of Glasgow in the last year alone.

Back in June, Scottish National Party MSPs teamed up with the Tories to block Scottish Labour's fair rents bill, which was proposed by Pauline McNeill, from even being debated in this Parliament. There is still time. Although the tenant hardship loan fund is welcome, it is not enough. It is treating the symptoms and not the causes. The Scottish Government can still legislate now to tackle the fundamental issue of affordable rents by adopting the fair rents bill as part of the programme for government. Will the First Minister make that commitment, or is she content to simply go back to how things were?

The First Minister: That characterisation is completely wrong. We have legislated to reform the private rented sector, delivering and implementing many protections for tenants that were not there previously. That is a very welcome step forward. I have made it very clear that we are open to further progress on that, whether that is around rent controls or further protections for tenants.

That is why, in the face of the crisis, we have protected people against eviction. We are extending that, and a £10 million fund to help those who are struggling to pay their rent is a really good, positive step forward, which I hope that Richard Leonard will welcome.

We are also, of course, the Government that has invested record sums in building new social affordable housing. That is fundamentally the way in which we are addressing the housing crisis. I remember one of Richard Leonard's colleagues, Iain Gray—I am not sure that he is in the chamber right now—saying when he was the leader of the Scottish Labour Party that the problem with Scottish Labour is that it passed world-leading legislation but just forgot to build the houses to implement it. We have got on with building the houses, and we will continue with that investment.

We have limited legislative time between now and the election. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child bill is a flagship piece of legislation. I had discussions not long ago with the Greens, which partly led to today's announcement on the tenant hardship loan fund. We cannot always find extra time for legislation, but we are open to considering other things that we can do to try to deliver the protections that we want.

On poverty, the Government is introducing the child payment to lift children out of poverty. The previous Labour Administration did not do that, and no other Government across the UK is doing that. We are putting money where our mouth is when it comes to lifting children out of poverty. I hope that a Labour leader would welcome that.

Richard Leonard: The last time Labour was in power, child poverty halved, and I am not sure that I got a yes or a no to the question that I put. Therefore, I am not quite sure whether families who live in the private rented sector will take any crumb of comfort from what the First Minister has just said.

Over the past six months, no part of our society has been more tragically hit by Covid-19 than our care homes. It is clear that our care system is not fit for purpose, so I welcome the announcement of a review of the care sector. I hope that that review will include a review of the financing of the care sector, because it has been underresourced for too long. However, the deep-seated challenge that we face means that additional funding alone will not fix the broken system.

The First Minister has said for some time that she sympathises with my calls for a national care service. Today's announcement of a review is a welcome signal of intent, but there was a review of residential care in 2014 that led to barely any changes at all.

Time is running out. This is the final year of this parliamentary session. Will the First Minister take the opportunity to confirm today not only that she intends to create a national care service but when she will do so? Will she confirm that she will act immediately to level up the terms and conditions of the extraordinary workforce that delivers care, which she has spoken of?

In her statement, the First Minister drew a comparison with our national health service. Can she confirm that, as with our national health service, the profit motive will be removed from the care of our oldest and most vulnerable citizens, because we cannot be content simply to go back to how things were in the care sector?

The First Minister: Before I move on to a national care service, I will go back to the point about tenants. Richard Leonard used the expression "crumb of comfort". It is of more help

and comfort in the immediate term, in the face of a crisis, to have a £10 million fund than to wait six months for legislation. We are acting now to protect tenants, and we will, of course, continue to consider other suggestions for the longer term.

Richard Leonard did something on the Scottish child payment, and he is perhaps about to do it on a national care service. He spends weeks calling for something and, as soon as we commit to it, instead of welcoming that, he decides to grump and groan about it.

We will get on with the detail of that. I want to see a national care service. The vision of that should inspire and excite all of us. However, the difference between calling for something in opposition and delivering it in government is that, in government, we have to work out the detail, get it right, and implement it properly. That is why we will establish the review immediately and call on it to give an initial report by January so that we can begin to act on its recommendations. I hope that all the Opposition parties in the chamber will be listened to and that soundings will be taken from all of them in that review.

We can use this moment to continue to disagree on the details of that or to come together. I am not sure that all of us will be able to come together on these things, but those of us who broadly agree can come together and try to seize the moment as a chance for genuine transformational change. I hope that Richard Leonard will be in the latter camp.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The context of this programme for government is unprecedented. In the midst of a global pandemic, with the prospect of a no-deal Brexit fast approaching, and Tory moves to undermine devolution, it is no surprise that the opportunity to choose our own future is appealing to ever more people. However, the work to build a new Scotland has to start now.

There is much to welcome in the programme for government, not least the youth guarantee and a recognition of the need for a national care service, though I question the urgency and scale of announced actions. I welcome the green jobs fund, which we have long called for, but will the First Minister tell us how many jobs the fund aims to create, how many households will be lifted out of fuel poverty as a result, and whether the £100 million will be spent this year?

I warmly welcome the establishment of a transition board for Grangemouth, but will a similar board be established for the communities around the Mossmorran gas plant and the Hunterston nuclear plant, and wherever we seek to support communities in the long-overdue just transition to a greener Scotland?

The First Minister: We will absolutely look at replicating the approach at Grangemouth elsewhere. We established the just transition commission to guide us in making sure that, as we make the move to a net zero society, we are not leaving behind those communities that have been dependent on industries for a long time, and are not repeating the mistakes that we made in such industrial transformations of the past.

We will set out more details of the various funds that I have announced today in the budgetary process. I think that I said today that, in terms of decarbonising heat, which will help to not only create jobs but reduce fuel poverty, the commitment to funding over the course of the next parliamentary session is not £100 million but £1.5 billion. It is a massive investment that will help us to tackle climate change and provide the foundation for the green jobs recovery that I have been talking about.

I would love to do more on all those things. Right now, I would love to do what Governments across the world are doing, which is to use borrowing powers at a time when borrowing can be accessed to kick-start the recoveries and earn more wealth and revenue along the way. We have to operate within the financial constraints that exist, but we are maximising our operation as much as possible, while still crucially arguing for us to have the powers and access to resources that other independent countries the world over are able to take for granted.

Alison Johnstone: There are few more important policies than those that would guarantee a secure roof over our heads. We welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has finally recognised that tenants urgently need support, but £10 million of loans is inadequate. The proposed loan fund represents £30 per tenant and is, of course, debt. As we recover from Covid, Scotland faces a tidal wave of evictions. The First Minister said in her statement that

“we legislated to stop people being evicted”.

However, we did not. We legislated for a six-month delay. It is a fact that, currently, eviction orders are being granted by the tribunal as a result of notices to leave that were issued before emergency legislation was passed. Those who have been issued with notices to leave since 7 April will be subject to evictions proceedings in the tribunal over winter. The Greens have repeatedly called for real tenant protections, including a rent freeze and a stronger ban on evictions resulting from arrears accrued due to the pandemic. Will the First Minister reconsider the case for such measures, and at least prevent landlords from being allowed to evict tenants due to arrears when the tenant is in receipt of loan funds?

The First Minister: I hope that Alison Johnstone’s colleagues will tell her that I have signalled an open-mindedness to discuss all those matters. I will not go into the detail of our discussions, but there are some practical issues around some of what Alison Johnstone has raised, which we will try our best to work through. For example, there is a legal difficulty with retrospectively applying legislation to evictions in the pre-Covid period. When the notice period is added to the time that it takes tribunals to consider cases, we have ensured an effective ban on evictions during the Covid period throughout this winter.

I listened very carefully to Alison Johnstone’s colleagues about the tenant hardship fund, and we have recognised that there is a need to help people who have short-term financial difficulties due to Covid. Again, that was a specific request by her colleagues. I was asked to look at the Welsh Government’s scheme; we have done that, and we have come forward with today’s proposal.

I have also undertaken to consider how to make people who would benefit from the current legislative protections more aware of them, because people may not know right now that, if they challenge an eviction notice, they have that protection over the winter.

I cannot say that every single ask that has been made of me is deliverable, practically or financially, but I am absolutely determined—as, I think, we have demonstrated today—to listen to good ideas and, where we can, to respond to that positively, as we have done through the hardship fund. That is the spirit in which I hope we can have our discussions on housing, on homelessness and on every other aspect of the programme.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I wish to pay a sincere tribute to professionals and volunteers who have worked to serve their communities during the pandemic.

It has never been a problem for the First Minister to read out a long to-do list. The problem is that the got-done list is always so much shorter. For the third year in a row, I ask about child mental health. Two years ago, 208 children were waiting for more than a year. Last year, that number trebled, which the First Minister described as “unacceptable”. It was the worst that it had ever been—and that was before the virus hit. It has now doubled again, and there is no new plan in the programme for government. Young people deserve the best in mental health support. Why does the Government have no new recovery plan for child mental health?

The First Minister: We have invested record sums in general mental health and in child and adolescent mental health. We are employing

record numbers of professionals in mental health. We are employing school counsellors across our school estate in order to be more preventative.

In the programme for government last year, we set out a plan of action for reforming how we deliver child and adolescent mental health services in order to rely less on specialist services—making sure that they are there for people who need specialist care but having a much more preventative plan of action and approach, for example, in the national wellbeing service.

Inevitably, there has been disruption from Covid, as so much of our work has suffered. We are getting it back on track. It would have been wrong to announce a new programme today. We want to deliver the commitments that we set out, and we are getting on with doing that. There is additional support for general mental health through distress brief interventions, which make mental health services more accessible. We will continue to take forward those priorities.

Willie Rennie: I say to the First Minister that the numbers have doubled but there is nothing new today in the child mental health arena.

What we have is yet another plan on independence. We were told that that was on pause and that everything was about the pandemic, but—and they are at it again— independence got the loudest applause of the afternoon. That tells you all about their priorities. Lives and livelihoods are still under threat. That deserves our undivided attention.

Childcare should already be on the got-done list. At a time when we should be investing in the future of our young people, the Government has diverted funds elsewhere and has delayed the 1,140 hours provision for up to a year. It is certainly not, as the First Minister described, well on track. There is no strong economic recovery without strong childcare, and that is missing from the statement.

Young people deserve better on mental health and better on childcare. Is the First Minister really satisfied?

The First Minister: Willie Rennie is just wrong on childcare. We are delivering a commitment on—*[Interruption.]* I welcome back Mike Rumbles; I am glad that he has been able briefly to join us.

On childcare, we are delivering something that goes way beyond any other part of the UK. We will deliver the same amount of childcare for three and four-year-olds, and for eligible two-year-olds, as children spend in primary school. That was on track to be delivered in August. Many local authorities are already delivering it.

Most reasonable people will understand that delivery was disrupted because construction could not happen, and because councils had to deflect some of their attention—as the Scottish Government did—towards dealing with the immediate issues around Covid. The policy has been fully funded, and not a single penny of that money has been taken away from local authorities. We will now get on and catch up with that, and deliver on the commitment in full. When we do so—just as I said to Ruth Davidson—I hope that Willie Rennie will stand up in Parliament and congratulate the Government, because delivering on childcare is not something that the Liberal Democrats took the opportunity to do in all the years that they were in coalition with the Conservatives.

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): The question is no longer whether we should establish a national care service but how we should do so. How will the comprehensive review of adult health and social care, in short order, take the first vital steps to a national service that is delivered locally, working to national standards and plans, stripping out profiteering at the extent of care and ensuring that the voices of those who use and work in the service are at its heart?

The First Minister: I thank Angela Constance for her question, and for her leadership on this issue. Not only has she set out a vision for a national care service; she has engaged with the complexities and the detail around that.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport will make a statement later today, after this statement, in which she will set out more details of the review. We want the review to give a swift and critical analysis of the options that are open to us to deliver reform in the care sector, and to look at the practical and detailed issues that require to be considered and resolved in moving to a national care service. Those issues are many and varied; they include staffing, integration with the health service and charging for care. All those issues have to be looked at and considered, but we have an opportunity to get it right and to do so at pace.

I will leave the health secretary to set out the details. There will be a chair of the review, which will be supported by an advisory panel and, crucially, the voices of those who have direct experience of care will be at its centre.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The First Minister said in her statement that she would publish a new inward investment plan by the end of this year. However, this time last year, she made exactly the same promise in the programme for government for 2019-20, and no plan has yet been published. Back in January, the then Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Economy and Fair Work, Derek Mackay, promised that the plan

would be published by this summer, and it has still not appeared. When exactly will the plan appear? How can we have confidence that this time it will actually happen?

The First Minister: I hate to be the one to remind Murdo Fraser that, over the past six months, we have been living through a global pandemic. The minister who will publish the inward investment plan has, over those six months, been leading our work to ensure that we have a Scottish supply chain for the personal protective equipment that our healthcare workers need, and he has my grateful appreciation for his excellent work in that regard. He will publish the inward investment plan, which will take a strategic approach to the markets and sectors that we want to target in order to maximise inward investment.

Inward investment has been a success story for Scotland over the past six or seven years, during which we have outperformed every other part of the United Kingdom apart from London and the south-east. For a representative of a party that is trying to shut Scotland off from all its international markets right now to stand up and lecture this Government on inward investment takes some nerve.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): The First Minister touched on the ways in which the pandemic has affected our treasured health and social care staff, in particular the toll that it will be taking on their mental health. Can she expand on how the funding that the Scottish Government will provide to health boards will support staff?

The First Minister: We—all of us, I am sure, not just me—are deeply grateful to all our healthcare staff for their work, commitment and professionalism over the past few months.

Health boards have put in place a range of wellbeing resources at a local level, and at the national level we have established the national wellbeing hub. Any member of staff can find the hub at www.promis.scot.

The programme for government sets out the commitment to establish a mental health network to enhance existing mental healthcare provision, which will include additional funding to health boards to enhance their capacity to provide psychological interventions to those whose mental health has been severely affected. Further, as I said earlier, we will establish a workforce specialist service to provide confidential assessment and treatment for mental ill health to those who need it.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am genuinely astonished that the First Minister is spending any of her time in the remaining days of this session of Parliament on an independence referendum when the priorities of this Parliament

and the country are focused on the NHS and economic recovery.

Let me focus on economic recovery. The infrastructure investment plan and capital spending review to create the conditions for a fairer and greener economy were due to be published last year. Unfortunately, that did not happen.

We all agree that infrastructure investment is critical to economic recovery, so I ask the First Minister: how much of the capital investment limit of £4.7 billion this year will be spent in-year? Are there opportunities to accelerate that? Why is the capital spending review delayed until later in the year when it should sit alongside and inform the infrastructure investment plan?

The First Minister: We will maximise all the resources at our disposal and accelerate funding where we can, and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance will keep Parliament updated on that.

This is the flaw in Labour's argument. It rightly and understandably wants us to do things always at our own hand, but we are dependent on budgetary decisions being taken at Westminster to know what our funding envelope is. The UK budget was delayed last year, and that had implications for our budget, and we do not yet know when those decisions will be taken by the UK Government this year. That is a statement of fact. If Labour does not want it to be like that, I suspect that it should be arguing, along with us, for this Parliament to have full economic and financial powers. However, we will set out all that when we can see the funding that is available to us.

That is one of the many reasons why I want us, as a country, to stop being always at the mercy of Westminster Governments and, as is the case right now, a Conservative Westminster Government that does not have our interests at heart. I will argue that case proudly and it is one that is gathering support every day. However, I do not think that anybody across the country, even my worst critic, which might be Jackie Baillie or somebody else in this chamber—who knows?—could doubt my commitment to steering this country through the crisis that we face right now, and that will continue to be my priority every single day that we are in this crisis.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I declare an interest as an honorary vice-president at Energy Action Scotland. The First Minister has said that we have to seize this moment to build a greener economy, and I welcome the investment in decarbonising heat and improving energy efficiency. Will she outline how that builds on the energy efficiency and fuel poverty commitments

that were made in last year's programme for government?

The First Minister: Last year, we committed to scaling up that work, and that included an additional £30 million of capital spend. The commitments in this programme mean that, by the end of the next session of Parliament, the total capital spend on decarbonising heat will reach £1.6 billion. That groundbreaking investment will help to remove poor energy efficiency as one of the main drivers of fuel poverty, while providing significant multiyear investment to help us to develop our supply chains and support the skills that are needed there.

It will also secure jobs. My apologies to Alison Johnstone—I should have given her this figure earlier—but our initial estimate is that at least 5,000 jobs will have been directly supported by the end of this programme for investment, with many more expected in the wider supply chain and economy.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Today, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills confirmed that more than 30,000 school pupils have been tested for Covid, in what remains a worrying time for them and their teachers. He also ruled out providing schools with home test kits, which could easily be used to help Scotland's most vulnerable pupils to get back into the classroom quickly, when it is safe for them to do so. Demand is rising, so we must meet that demand. The First Minister said today in her statement that this Government wants testing to be more accessible. Does that not sound like one way to do just that?

The First Minister: We will continue to keep all the decisions around testing under review. The way in which young people are accessing testing is working; it is the right way. I do not yet know the figure for the totality of last week but, between last week and the previous week, there was a 300 per cent increase in the number of young people being tested. Despite that increase, only two more cases tested positive. Young people have access to testing and it is important that we ensure that that continues to be the case. We consider these things on a daily basis because, when demand rises as we go into the winter, we will need to make sure that our capacity rises and that the system retains the required flexibility. We will always consider whether there are different options for testing everybody, particularly young people. They are not always easy tests to do, particularly for children, so if we expect schools to administer the tests, that will also be a feature.

Understandably, there has been anxiety as schools have gone back—for teachers, parents and, no doubt, kids. It is important for people to be vigilant; if their child has any of the symptoms of

Covid, they should get them tested. However, the national clinical director wrote an open letter yesterday to reassure parents that, if their child has symptoms of a cold but not the symptoms of Covid, there is no need to get them tested. I repeat the statistic that we published last week: of the 17,500 young people who were tested in the previous week, 49 tested positive. Although I am not saying to any parent not to be vigilant, that helps to put into context the situation in schools and communities across the country.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): There is clear evidence that, in many areas of clinical need—most startlingly in the treatment of cardiovascular conditions—women do not receive the same quality of treatment as men. Last year's programme for government set out a commitment to deliver a women's health plan, with the women's health group established in February of this year. How will the Scottish Government build on that commitment to tackling women's health inequalities?

The First Minister: This programme for government reaffirms our commitment to tackling women's health inequalities and it confirms that we are continuing work to develop the women's health plan. The work of the women's health group, which is the expert group that oversees the development and implementation of the plan, has already started. It has met twice—in February and August—and has agreed a direction for the plan, including timescales for delivery. It has developed and published a lived experience survey that will inform the next phases of the plan and ensure that women's voices and experiences are central to its development. The women's health plan will focus on ensuring that women have access to specialist menopause services, improved support and speedy diagnosis for endometriosis, and improved access to abortion and contraception services.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): There is a lot in the programme for government that we campaigned for and therefore welcome, so we will work constructively with ministers to ensure that those commitments are delivered rapidly, because the people of Scotland need action, not further reflection.

That is especially true for Scotland's drugs crisis. I heard a commitment to further research by the drug deaths task force, which is important, but nothing specific on residential rehab. Will the First Minister make a commitment to expanding access to residential rehab? Will she meet with the charity Faces and Voices of Recovery UK, which presented the Government with 23 recommendations on action that could be taken now?

The First Minister: I am always happy to meet groups and individuals and to consider the

recommendations that they put forward. Joe FitzPatrick, who leads that work for the Government, would also be happy to meet with the charity, if he has not done so already. We will take forward the recommendations of the drug deaths task force and we will continue to set out the detail of the work that we do there.

I made two specific references today, which are both important. One is the finding that, although it is not the only factor, stigma often prevents people from coming forward for treatment and support, and we need to tackle that. However, there is also a need to invest in research to further understand the causes and drivers of the drug deaths crisis in Scotland. We will take forward those recommendations. As on all matters—but particularly on a matter as serious as this one—we will always be willing to listen to those with front-line lived experience.

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP): I am pleased that the First Minister has reconfirmed that ending homelessness continues to be a national priority. Does she agree that the recent statistics on homelessness in Scotland showed some concerning trends? For instance, in the Stirling area, there is an increase of 127—or 27 per cent—in the number of homeless households. I am aware that, by extending the eviction ban in Scotland, the Scottish Government has helped to prevent people from becoming homeless as a result of the pandemic. What further measures in the programme for government will help to address the challenge of homelessness? What other work is the Government doing to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping?

The First Minister: I find the most recent homelessness statistics a cause for concern. This point does not detract from that, but apart from a short period that overlapped with the Covid crisis, the most recent statistics largely pre-date it. We need to learn from the different approaches that have been taken to ensure that rough sleepers have somewhere to stay during the crisis. I often reflect on the ways in which we made much quicker progress in a time of crisis than we ever have managed to do before. We need to keep that pace of delivery going.

We are going to update the ending homelessness together action plan. We also intend to massively scale up housing first from the initial pathfinder areas in which it has been running. We are currently funding a six-month pilot for homeless people who are living in hotel accommodation and who had previously been sleeping rough. The work is to get them into settled accommodation in the private rented sector. That pilot project is intended to inform the development of an all-Scotland plan on that basis.

There are lots of challenges but also lots of good work being done to ensure that we deal systematically with the causes of rough sleeping and homelessness and end them. That should continue to be a national priority. We want to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place, which is why some of the work that we have done on evictions and the fund that I announced today are also important.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Even before the pandemic struck, the Scottish Government was failing to get hospital waiting times under control. The current crisis has plainly exacerbated the situation. Last week, we learned that 71,000 patients have been waiting more than 12 weeks for hospital treatment. Today, the First Minister referred to various remobilisation initiatives that will occur in the year ahead, but what action is her Government taking right now so that people waiting for vital treatment right now can be seen as soon as it is safe and practicable to do so?

The First Minister: That is what the remobilisation work is all about—ensuring that health boards are bringing services back on stream. In some respects, they are having to do that in a different way; for example, in accident and emergency services, the need for physical distancing changes the way in which those services are delivered.

We have always been clear with health boards, right through the crisis, that they should continue to see people who need urgent treatment. At many points during the crisis, the chief medical officer and others were explicit that people should come forward for treatment. A process is now in place to deal with backlogs and restore procedures in a way that has clinical prioritisation at its heart, so that the people who are most in need of treatment most quickly get priority. It is going to take some time.

In parallel to that, we need to continue the work to build up capacity that was under way before Covid. The national elective centres programme is an important part of that work, as is the expansion of digital access and the near me consultation service. It is not the whole solution, but in some respects it transforms the way in which patients access the health service. That work will be extremely important in the weeks and months ahead.

Of course, that work has to be done as the health service inevitably and inescapably manages to retain capacity should we start to see hospital and intensive care unit admissions for Covid rise again—although I fervently hope that we do not—as we go into the winter.

I am afraid that it is a delicate balancing act. It is not easy or straightforward. The health boards and the health secretary are absolutely focused on it.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Will the programme for government provide for communities such as Inverclyde, which have been hardest hit by Covid-19, in addition to having long-lasting employment, health and social inequalities?

The First Minister: There are lots of aspects of the programme that will be of particular help and assistance to communities such as Inverclyde. The work on retraining and upskilling the workforce will be important across Scotland, but it will be particularly important in those regions and sectors disproportionately hit by the economic downturn.

I also point to the work around placemaking in the programme for government. Having all been confined to our homes and local neighbourhoods during the crisis, we have been powerfully reminded of the importance of the quality of the places where we stay.

The funding that I announced today, backed by the work that we intend to do on 20-minute neighbourhoods and town centre regeneration, is important for many communities across the country, but it will have particular relevance to the communities that Stuart McMillan represents. Of course, all the work on social security provision is also important to ensure that we continue to focus on lifting families out of poverty.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Across Scotland, communities are witnessing local bus routes that were stopped during lockdown now being permanently axed, not least due to a lack of any meaningful conditions on service levels being placed on private bus firms in return for taxpayers' grants. It has been a year since the Transport (Scotland) Bill was passed by the Parliament. Why is there no mention in the programme for government of giving councils the powers and funding that they need and want to set up and run their own local bus services, which are desperately needed if we are to halt the dismantling of bus routes that we have seen over the past decade?

The First Minister: Of course, the bill was passed and we are willing to discuss with councils how we take that forward. As has been the case in many respects, other issues have been preoccupying councils and the Government over the past few months, but I am happy to get the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity to write to Colin Smyth with details of how the work will be taken forward.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I welcome the £60 million

youth guarantee, but will the First Minister outline how community-based groups—including those in my Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituency—that are engaging in youth and community learning activities can be supported to help to deliver the youth guarantee?

The First Minister: As I said earlier, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture will set out more details of the youth guarantee tomorrow. A collective effort on the part of Government, local authorities, employers and community organisations will be needed.

The community learning sector will be very important. That sector has shown a significant level of flexibility, resilience and, indeed, innovation over the pandemic, and it will be central to all the work that we do to guarantee opportunities for young people. We want to ensure that community learning and development plays a role in not only the youth guarantee, but civic and economic recovery overall.

It is worth pointing out that, in addition to the youth guarantee, we are investing £3 million in a youth work and education recovery fund, which will focus on ensuring that young people have the wider support that they need to build a positive future.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The First Minister said in her statement that freedom of speech and expression is fundamental in any democracy. The Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill has been criticised as a threat to freedom of speech by, among others, the Law Society of Scotland, the Scottish Police Federation and several cultural figures. Will the First Minister listen to those criticisms and withdraw and rethink the bill, which so many have spoken out against?

The First Minister: Liam Kerr has been in Parliament for long enough, I hope, to know how the legislative process works. I deliberately said what I did today because I know that concerns have been raised about the bill, and it is important that we listen to those concerns. I answered a question about the bill during First Minister's question time last week. Offences about stirring up hatred are not new in Scots law; they have existed in relation to racial offences for quite some time.

One of Liam Kerr's colleagues rightly raised the issue of disability hate crime. There are very good reasons why we need to ensure that we have laws in this country that are capable of tackling hate crime, because it is pernicious and horrible and we should have zero tolerance for it. However, we have to do that in a way that respects and protects people's legitimate freedom of speech and expression. As with so many important things that we do in society, the issues are not always straightforward. They involve striking balances and

getting into the real detail of how we get them right.

We are at the start of a legislative process. The right thing to do is to listen to concerns and to go through the committee scrutiny process. If we need to lodge amendments to reassure people who have legitimate concerns, we give an undertaking to do so. I mentioned the bill specifically today to give an indication to people that we hear the concerns. We want to navigate a way through the bill that ensures that we do what we want to do in relation to hate crime but that does not leave people thinking that the legitimate right to freedom of speech is being compromised.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Although the pandemic has been difficult for us all in many ways, it has led to unimaginable consequences for some, and there have sadly been increased levels of domestic abuse and gender-based violence. What is the Scottish Government doing to tackle violence against women and girls?

The First Minister: Since the start of the crisis, and particularly since the start of lockdown when we were in effect asking people to stay in their own homes, I and many others have been deeply concerned about the greater risks that people who are victims of domestic abuse are facing—in the main, but not exclusively, they are women and children.

I know that Police Scotland continues to prioritise domestic abuse cases and we are focused, as we have been all along, on ensuring that front-line services can continue to offer support. Back in March, we gave additional funding to Women's Aid and other front-line services, and implementing the equally safe strategy to prevent violence against women and girls remains a priority of the programme.

As I indicated earlier, we will introduce legislation on domestic abuse protection orders. My message to those who are suffering domestic abuse—and it should be the message that comes from us all—is that you are not on your own. There is help out there and you should not hesitate to come forward and get help.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): The First Minister commits her Government to a green jobs focus, which Scottish Labour has long argued for. That includes £60 million to support the industrial and manufacturing sectors to transition to net zero. In view of there not being a circular economy bill in the programme for government, can the First Minister explain how the Scottish Government, working with trade unions, businesses and education providers, will ensure that relevant skills and job opportunities will be justly created in both design and remanufacturing

and how there will be a relevant conditionality in investment and procurement?

The First Minister: All that is built into the approach that we take to all those things.

It is encapsulated in the just transition commission, which of course includes trade union voices. We consult trade unions widely, and rightly, about all manner of things that relate to jobs and fair work, and we will continue to try to make sure that justice is at the heart of every aspect of the transition to net zero. We also put a huge emphasis—and, rightly, an increasing emphasis—on our fair work agenda, making sure that where appropriate there is, as the member referred to, conditionality on Government support, with that support being available only if the right things are done in relation to the workforce. We will continue to make sure that the voice of trade unions is heard loudly and clearly. I meet twice a year with the Scottish Trades Union Congress and member trade unions to make sure that all those issues are absolutely embedded in our approach on an on-going basis.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): The First Minister has made much of the benefits of digital technology, and I whole-heartedly agree. Other devolved nations are investigating smart apps to allow particularly the disabled, elderly and infirm to claim under a deposit return scheme, but the Scottish Government ruled that out. Why?

The First Minister: I am very happy to get the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform to give a detailed answer to that, because I am unfortunately not able to do that right now. Digital is a core part of how we all live our lives. I apologise to Maurice Golden for not knowing the exact details, but if we have decided not to do something, it will not simply be a case of having set our face against it; there will undoubtedly be reasons why we reached that conclusion and, as I said, I will ask the environment secretary to set that out in more detail. Increasingly, across all our programmes, making sure that the ability to access them digitally and as easily as possible is critical. I will make sure that that more detailed response comes as quickly as possible.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will the First Minister confirm that the £275 million investment for town centres and the active travel investment will be passed on to local authorities so that they can deliver on the ambitions that she has for 20-minute neighbourhoods and the transformation that our communities and town centres desperately need, given the impact of Covid, and will she confirm whether the £500 million investment in active travel represents an increase on current spending?

The First Minister: I will respond in writing to Sarah Boyack on the precise detail of the funding over current spending to make sure that the information that I give her is absolutely accurate.

On the question whether the funding will go to local authorities, they are central to that and we will have discussions in the normal course of events with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and with local authorities about the specific allocations. We cannot do active travel and community regeneration without local authorities, so in one way, shape or form the money will be spent in local communities and I am sure that a significant chunk of it will be guided by local authorities. That will all be part of the budgetary discussions that we have with local authorities on an on-going basis.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the Government's commitment to appoint a patient safety commissioner. Social care owners and trade unions have, for many years, asked the Government to introduce national collective bargaining. The only barrier to that appears to be the Government, which has been reluctant to go down that route. There is no need to wait for another review. Will the First Minister agree to bring trade unions and social care owners together to begin implementing sectoral bargaining in that area right now?

The First Minister: I will not give an absolute guarantee on that now, but I will take that idea away and come back with a more considered answer. I strongly advocate collective bargaining. Through our performance framework, we have a target to increase collective bargaining in our economy. The fair work commission has looked particularly at the social care sector. I will discuss this with colleagues and with trade unions and will consider whether we can and should move more quickly on it than the timescale in the review that I set out today.

The Presiding Officer: That ends the statement on the programme for government, which we will debate tomorrow.

16:11

Meeting suspended.

16:13

On resuming—

Care Homes

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a statement by Jeane Freeman on care homes. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I will touch on a number of issues regarding care homes and will say more about the commitment that the First Minister has outlined in the programme for government.

We have discussed and debated the situation in our care homes many times during the months of the Covid pandemic. It is right to do so. From the outset, in the Covid-19 update statements made to Parliament by the First Minister and by me, we set out the plan that we were putting in place to prepare our national health service in the face of evidence that, at that time, suggested significant hospitalisation and demand for intensive care. We set out our intention, among the other work then under way, and at pace, to ask health and social care partnerships to focus on reducing the level of delayed discharge. That reduction has been a long-held ambition of this and previous Governments.

Over the weeks and months since then, we have updated the initial guidance to care homes, strengthened primary care support and increased testing. However, there have been many deaths in our care homes, and it is right that we and Parliament should use accurate data and analysis to look at the decisions that were taken and the actions that followed, so that we can see—with the increased knowledge that we now have—what more could be done. That is not only the rightful purpose of scrutiny; it will aid our planning for the weeks and months ahead.

The loss of a loved one is a weight that stays with every one of us for the rest of our lives. It is a loss that is made heavier if we have not been able to be beside our loved one in their final hours, and one of the deep cruelties of Covid-19 is that, at a time when we would look to friends and family to help shoulder the weight of grief, we have been forced to stay apart. The weight of the loss of so many of our fellow citizens to this brutal virus will never leave me or, I know, many others.

As I set out last month, I have commissioned Public Health Scotland to report on discharges from hospital to care homes and what the Covid-19 status was for those who were discharged at the time of their discharge. That should also

include information on the outcomes experienced by those patients, and that work should be ready to be published by the end of the month.

As I set out in the Parliament in March and April, we set a clear goal of reducing delayed discharges and, as we have considered many times, the guidance made it clear that any such discharges should continue to be subject to clinical risk assessment. The United Kingdom Coronavirus Act 2020 allows local authorities to undertake partial needs assessments by dispensing with particular social care assessment duties, but only where it would not be practical to carry out those duties or where they would cause unnecessary delay in providing community care services to any person.

The powers are designed to allow local authorities to provide urgent care without delay, protecting the lives of those who are most vulnerable while ensuring that safeguards are in place. I gave evidence to the Health and Sport Committee on the legislative consent motion on 24 March, and the regulations came into force on 5 April. Those powers have not been widely used in Scotland. In the monitoring period to 2 July, seven out of 32 local authorities used the powers in the specific circumstances that I have described.

In recent days, we have seen reports of delays in the care home testing carried out through the UK Government's testing portal. As members are aware, there have been issues with the UK's network of three lighthouse labs. We are in daily contact with the Department of Health and Social Care to address those issues and ensure that we can continue to access the capacity that we need at the same time as we continue the work to bring more NHS Scotland processing capacity on stream, to increase resilience and mitigate any issues with the UK's portal. Those recent challenges have seen some test results delayed, but, having looked at that in detail, I am pleased to advise members that those delays have not been as extensive as recent reporting suggests. Even so, delay beyond 48 hours must be minimised, and we are working with our UK colleagues to improve that even more.

I well understand the upset and dismay that have been caused to both residents and families by the restrictions on visiting, and I hope that the steps that have been taken since early July to return visiting, both indoors and outdoors, in a phased way have been helpful. We are now finalising guidance for care homes, to support the return of in-reach health and social care services and the safe reopening of communal areas. Caveats apply here, as members would expect, in that the care home must be free of Covid-19 and be participating fully in the testing programme. However, with that proviso and the necessary health and safety measures in place, those

activities should be able to return, and I hope to publish the relevant guidance shortly. It will, however, remain the case, as we have seen in Aberdeen and in Tayside, that, where we have a higher prevalence of the virus in an area, that may necessitate the restriction of care home visiting in order to protect residents while an outbreak is brought under control.

The pandemic has seen a pace of change in the delivery of many aspects of our healthcare service that was previously unimaginable. It is a pace of change that is necessary for our adult care sector. As the First Minister set out in our programme for government, I have commissioned an independent review to examine how adult social care can be most effectively reformed to deliver a national approach to care and support services. I have made no secret of my sympathy for a national care service, and that will be part of the review's considerations. The scope of the review will include how adult social care is organised, commissioned, regulated and funded.

I am pleased to inform the Parliament that Derek Feeley has accepted my invitation to chair the independent review. Many members will know Derek from his time as our director general for health and social care and the chief executive of NHS Scotland. He will be ably supported by an advisory panel that will draw on expertise from Scotland and beyond: Caroline Gardner, who was until very recently the Auditor General for Scotland; Malcolm Chisholm, a former Minister for Health and Community Care and a former member of the Parliament; Anna Dixon, the chief executive of the Centre for Ageing Better; Göran Henriks, the chief executive of learning and innovation in Jönköping county, in Sweden; Councillor Stuart Currie of East Lothian Council and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; and Ian Welsh, the chief executive of the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland and also a former member of the Parliament. Their task is not an easy one, and I am very grateful to each of them for agreeing to be involved in and to lead this work.

The review will build on the reform of adult social care that was under way, in conjunction with COSLA, before the pandemic. That reform had at its core the views of those receiving social care, and it was previously examined by the Health and Sport Committee.

I believe that, across the Parliament, we have a shared view that we need both to improve outcomes for people who use services and to ensure a good working environment for a key workforce whose criticality has been emphasised in recent months. I have agreed with the independent chair that the review will take a human rights-based approach, with a strong

emphasis on the needs, rights and preferences of people who use services, their carers and their families.

Social care services and supports are enormously varied, covering everything from care homes and care at home to day services, befriending and supported employment. Those services touch the lives of a very wide range of people: disabled people, older people, people with mental health problems and people with drug and alcohol problems. We must consider the needs of all of them equitably, fairly and respectfully. People who are using services and supports should be consistently and routinely informing the process of improvement and should be involved in co-designing services.

Derek Feeley and his colleagues are ready to begin immediately, and they will report in January 2021. That is a very tight timescale, but it will ensure that the Parliament has the options before it straight away at the start of the next session, so that it can take any steps—legislative or otherwise—that are necessary to put in place the reforms that our adult care sector needs.

I know that the care that many people receive is already good and that people who work in care in Scotland are beginning to feel more valued, and certainly more recognised, for the work that they do—but not enough yet. I am determined that we should go further, so that positive experiences are consistently the norm, by design and with intent. My hope is that the outcome of the review will give us a blueprint for the future that can secure consensus across the chamber.

Our adult social care sector is a vital service for very many people, helping them to live as independently as they want and as well as they can. Those who work in the sector are every bit as caring, compassionate and dedicated as those who work in our NHS. The experience of the pandemic shows us that very clearly. It has also shone a light on the pressing work that we need to do to improve services and to support those who need them and those who work in them. The independent review will offer us real solutions and, I suspect, difficult choices, but its work is vital.

Right now, as the review begins its work, there is more for us to do in applying the lessons learned so far from the pandemic in our mobilisation plans, in supporting the sector, in working co-operatively and in providing fast responses to problems and issues that arise. The Parliament has my commitment that we will continue to do just that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on her statement. I intend to allow until around 5 to 5 for questions, after which we will move on to the next

item of business. I make my usual plea for succinct questions and answers.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. I acknowledge the announcement of the establishment of a national care service. Scottish Conservatives await more details of that and will comment further when concrete proposals emerge.

Thanks to various newspaper investigations, we now know even more about the decision to send patients who had tested positive for Covid-19 into our care homes. We have already found out that as many as 37 such patients were transferred to care homes, that having been sanctioned by clinicians—and several health boards are still to report their figures. Just this weekend, it was reported that at least one care home provider took in a person whom the local health board said had tested negative for Covid when in fact the opposite was true.

The First Minister has repeatedly been asked when she first learned that patients who had tested positive for Covid-19 were transferred into our care homes, but she has repeatedly refused to answer. Therefore, I ask the cabinet secretary directly to say when she first found out that that was happening.

Jeane Freeman: I am grateful to Mr Cameron for his question and his comments.

Once the independent review has developed its work plan—including how it will hear evidence and information, and, in particular, how it will hear from those involved in the sector—I intend to ensure that colleagues from across the chamber are made aware of that and of the timescale involved.

I turn to Mr Cameron's question. As the Scottish Government has said more than once, he will know that I have commissioned Public Health Scotland to undertake a piece of work that will consider all discharges. It will determine whether individuals were Covid positive on discharge. It will also determine the point at which they had been tested, so that we will know whether they were infectious at the point of discharge.

As we worked through the information on care homes, we became concerned that some individuals might be in that situation, because they could test positive for Covid even after they had previously tested negative. We also became increasingly concerned about the numbers of cases in care homes, which was when we not only updated our guidance—on more than one occasion—but introduced testing. Of course, testing is one of the elements that are critical to preventing infection from spreading, and other such elements include isolation and proper

infection prevention and control, as was set out in our guidance from 13 March onwards.

As we understood more about the virus and how it transmits—including in those who might be asymptomatic and the fact that, particularly in some elderly people, different symptoms from those that are normally present in the rest of the population can indicate Covid—we also understood that there might be a risk that individuals who had not been tested but who needed to be were going into care homes. It was at that point—I do not have the exact date in front of me, but it will be in my papers—that we introduced testing as a requirement before admission to care homes. However, the critical elements— isolation; infection prevention and control nursing; the clinical decision that a patient was ready for discharge; and the clinical risk assessment about where that person should go—have been there from the very beginning.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Care homes have been at the epicentre of the crisis, but it did not need to be that way. On too many issues, the cabinet secretary and the Government have failed to listen to front-line staff and the families of residents. On personal protective equipment, on testing and on what happened when people were discharged from our hospitals to care homes, the Government was too slow to act.

Scottish Labour welcomes today's commitment to establishing a national care service. I look forward to getting around the table with the cabinet secretary and Opposition parties to discuss that. However, I point out to the cabinet secretary that the advisory panel does not include anyone from the front line, so we need to get that sorted. There is no trade union representation and no one else is representing the voices of workers. That needs to change, because if we had listened to workers at the start of the crisis, we would not have seen the tragedies that we have seen to date.

On visiting, it is really important that residents and their families do not pay the price for this Government's mistakes, with paralysis and fear preventing families from being reunited. I need to hear a commitment about when families can be reunited. Too many people are having to sit with elderly loved ones in car parks in wet conditions; in some cases, I have seen older people having to sit in underground car parks that are covered in pigeon mess. It is not safe, it is not hygienic and it is a betrayal of people's human rights.

Finally, we must have an independent, judge-led public inquiry, because the public have lost a lot of trust and confidence. Will the cabinet secretary indicate when she thinks that that will happen? We all wish her well in her retirement, but the public

need to know that the people who have made key decisions will be around for the inquiry.

Jeane Freeman: Ms Lennon asked a number of questions, which I will try to answer. I thank her for her good wishes and, just for the record, I will say that I am not away yet. I have a lot of work still to do, and a lot of energy to give to it.

I do not accept that we have failed to listen. I talk to trade unions and Scottish Care regularly. It was thanks to some of the discussions with Unison in particular that we managed to address the PPE issue. The issue was raised first by Scottish Care, which advised me that its private supply lines for PPE were not working as well as it needed them to work. We therefore introduced direct support to the social care sector, including to care homes, in relation to supplies of PPE.

However, it was the unions that raised issues about the quality of some of the PPE, and it was thanks to them that we could then address those issues. We reached agreement with COSLA and all the unions involved on 2 April about the right of care home workers to determine for themselves whether, for example, they believed that it was professionally important that they wear a mask.

Therefore, I do not accept that we have not listened to staff. We continue to listen. I continue to meet and discuss things with staff, and the trade union voice is involved in the recovery group on mobilisation that I chair.

The advisory panel will undoubtedly reach out and hear from all the unions involved. Members heard the First Minister say that she fully expects that the advisory panel will want to hear from every Opposition party in this chamber, as well as from other voices, including families, relatives and so on.

Indoor visiting is already possible. I accept, and I genuinely understand, the difficulties around visiting, but our clinical and professional advisory group advises me about the right steps to take in order to stage a step-by-step return to more normal living for people in our care homes. I know that people's care homes are their homes, but I also know that we need to protect them and we need to have time in between each step to ensure that we have not caused unnecessary harm in those situations.

We now have more outdoor visiting. As the weather changes, we need to increase indoor visiting and, importantly, communal activity, and to ensure the return of in-reach care and health services. I hope to be able to make an announcement on that shortly.

We have had this discussion before about a public inquiry. The First Minister has been clear that we consider that having a public inquiry on the

entire handling of the pandemic is the right thing to do; that level of scrutiny is important. When we think that it is right for that to begin, we will come back to the chamber with the details of the arrangements.

However, one of the things that I will do tonight is attend a resilience meeting at 5 o'clock to discuss the increase in the number of cases that the First Minister announced. The pandemic is still here, and all the focus and energy must be on that as much as it is on anything else right now.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I would warmly welcome the commencement of that public inquiry as soon as possible. I have previously raised concerns that congratulating health and care partnerships for achieving a delayed discharge target at this time might create a culture in which targets inadvertently affect actions and outcomes.

I welcome the announcement of the independent review and the commitment to consider establishing a national care service—the Greens whole-heartedly support that—but there have been significant outbreaks in our care homes during the pandemic, and the shocking number of deaths reveals the toll that it has taken. However, we do not yet understand the long-term effects. Large numbers of residents might require more complex care as a result of Covid infection. Can the cabinet secretary therefore advise what steps are being taken to prepare for a potential surge in the number of people experiencing more chronic health problems in our care homes?

Jeane Freeman: That is an important question. Our clinical and professional advisory group is working on what more we need to do to introduce increased rehabilitation services and support for dementia in care homes, and how we can most effectively deliver that. My colleague Ms Haughey, who is sitting beside me, is leading on our work on dementia overall but with a particular focus on what more we might need to do in care homes and in relation to people who receive care at home, who may have been isolated from their families because of the lockdown restrictions. We are giving careful thought to that. Once we have a clear plan about what additional work needs to be done, I will ensure that the member is made aware of that.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I add my voice to the calls for the immediate commencement of a public inquiry.

It is troubling to learn that, in the testing surge that went with the return to school, care homes were forced to play second fiddle to 17,000 children who had the sniffles and who were probably fine. Care homes had to operate blind for several days while they waited for delayed test

results and kits to come back. Unquestionably, the human tragedy of the pandemic is in our care homes, so what assurance can the cabinet secretary give that, should there be another spike in demand for testing, care homes will be protected and that their results and test kits will be turned around in short order?

Jeane Freeman: That is part of the work that I set out in the statement. We have daily contact with the UK Department of Health and Social Care. The delays were caused in the UK Lighthouse Labs Network, which is made up of three laboratories across the UK and which experienced that surge. Actually, the Glasgow lighthouse lab is further advanced on the number of tests that it can process and the speed with which it does that, but it is part of that UK-wide network, so it has to play its role in handling that work overall.

We continue to work with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that we can access the number of tests that we need in Scotland and that we control the mobile testing units, the regional testing centres and the walk-through testing centres that are being introduced—the first one opened in St Andrews on Monday. We want to ensure that we can control the level of slots so that the centres do not close down unnecessarily. We are also trying to increase the pace of work on the three regional hubs that we have always planned to introduce from October and to bring those forward where we can. Today, I agreed additional expenditure on equipment for that, and for our NHS and for partner nodes, so that we build more resilience sooner in our NHS capacity.

However, I do not believe that our care homes played second fiddle. It is a difficult balance. The labs process the tests as they come in and do not make decisions based on where a test came from or whether it involves an old or young person. That is not how the process works. We do not want to discourage parents from having their child tested; we want to help them to understand the symptoms of Covid as opposed to the sort of common or garden-variety bug that children inevitably get when schools open up again, and especially after such a long time. That is why the national clinical director sent out a letter to help with that, which I think that all parents have now received from their schools.

In the week up to 20 August, the number of care home staff who were tested was 36,986, so the figure did not dip. My understanding is that the numbers that will be published this week will show that there has been a dip, but it is very small. Therefore, it is not fair to characterise the situation as care home tests coming in very late. I have looked at some of the detailed reporting extremely

carefully, and I can say—with no disrespect to the journalists concerned, who worked with the information that they were given—that it has not been entirely accurate. I am happy to put the accurate picture on the record for those journalists or, indeed, for anyone who has a concern.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: For understandable reasons, I have let the front benchers have longer questions and longer answers, but 10 members want to ask questions in the remaining 15 minutes, so I will be very firm. I want questions.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Has any comparison been done between infection control practices in privately run care homes and those in local authority-run care homes to ensure that best practice is being shared across the board?

Jeane Freeman: In the course of its job, the Care Inspectorate has been collecting a range of data across a number of areas. An early indication that it has brought back is on different sizes of care homes and different layouts. However, at this stage, it is too early to be definitive about infection prevention and control measures, size and layout of care homes, and which part of the sector they are in. What is clear, though, is that many of those care homes that have gone through the entire pandemic without any Covid cases so far have been small, single-standing care homes. They are to be commended on the work that they have so successfully done.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Before Covid-19 took hold in Scotland and had the devastating impact that we have witnessed on the most vulnerable in our care homes, the evidence was there from across Europe that, if the virus got into a care home, it could have horrendous consequences for residents, with an R number of greater than 10. Surely it was not outwith the wit of the Scottish Government to have recognised that and to have acted on that information to ensure that the most vulnerable in our society were protected. The cabinet secretary has now recognised that better decisions could and should have been made.

Jeane Freeman: What I have recognised is that, if I knew then what I know now, different decisions would have been made, but I did not know that then—indeed, neither did the Parliament when it heard statements from me about delayed discharge, nor did the committee concerned when it accepted the additional powers for local authorities. Nobody queried any of that; nobody challenged it or questioned it. All of us, including Mr Whittle, have been on a bit of a learning journey throughout the pandemic.

I will not accept that, somehow, the Scottish Government wilfully ignored compelling evidence and chose to do something different. Absolutely nothing could be further from the case. Hindsight is a marvellous thing, as is being in opposition, but I remind Mr Whittle that the challenges that the Scottish Government faced are exactly the same as those that now confront every Government across the four nations of the United Kingdom. We are learning together and working together; being able to do that across this chamber would be a bit of a step forward.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): My brother was in Highgate care home, which was the first care home to have Covid-19. Sadly, he died, although not from Covid-19. I thank the cabinet secretary for her work and the commitment that she made in her statement.

Will the cabinet secretary report back to Parliament when the recommendations from the review have been published? Will that review set out the next steps for how we can make lasting improvements in the quality of care that is provided in our care homes for all our loved ones?

Jeane Freeman: I thank Mr Lyle for that and, for the record—I have done this in person—I offer him my condolences on the loss of a much-loved brother.

I will report back to Parliament. I will make sure that members know what the work plan is for the review and how those involved will go about their work and how they will reach out and hear opinions and views from everyone who has an interest in the matter. When the recommendations of the review have been published, I will come back to Parliament to give the Government's initial response to those.

In the meantime, we will continue to work with Scottish Care, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, our trade union partners and others to identify improvements that we can make now in our work with the care sector—in relation to care at home and care homes—to ensure that we are learning the lessons and applying them, particularly as we plan for a potential increase in the number of cases as we enter autumn and winter, which I hope does not happen.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I recognise the need to increase bed capacity and reduce delayed discharge, but that does not mean sending Covid-positive patients into care homes. Will the cabinet secretary confirm when she knew that Covid-positive patients were being sent into care homes? Does she accept that that act helped to contribute to 2,000 of our fellow citizens losing their lives in a care home setting?

Jeane Freeman: I say to Mr Sarwar that I have already answered that question. On whether I

accept that those individuals who may have gone from hospital into residential care were Covid positive and the impact that that had, I have commissioned Public Health Scotland to undertake detailed work on the data so that it is validated and we have that analysis. That will be at the end of the month, and I am sure that we will come back and look at that in detail. That will tell me and the Parliament whether Covid-infected patients who were still infectious transferred into care homes and what the impact was in those care homes. We will then know that, and we will know it on the basis of validated data from across all of our health service in Scotland.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I understand Scottish Government caution about the resumption of care home visiting, but I also keenly feel family members' concern about the impact of loneliness and isolation on their loved ones' health. What criteria will individual care homes have to meet to allow them to increase the number of people who can visit a resident?

Jeane Freeman: There are two critical criteria for a care home to be able to introduce any kind of visiting. The first is that they need to be Covid free for 28 days, and the second is that they need to be fully participating in the care home worker testing programme—not all are at this point, although the number that are is increasing.

Thereafter, care homes need to have produced a plan, which the local director of public health or his or her nominee signs off, for proper infection prevention and control. That includes ensuring that there are adequate supplies of PPE—of course, we have a role in helping with that—and that the staffing rota is of a sufficient size to ensure that staff are there to assist residents and visitors. The new safety huddle tool, which members will recall has been published, will greatly assist care homes with being able to work out exactly what their staffing rota needs to be in those instances.

Those are the primary areas of concern. The director of public health is also involved—the reason why it is the director of public health is that they understand the prevalence of the virus in their local area—and from time to time, as they did in Aberdeen and Tayside, they will restrict visiting beyond what is possible elsewhere in the country in order to provide additional protection while an outbreak is being managed and controlled.

Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Con): The cabinet secretary talked about the vital importance, when tests for Covid are taken, of getting results quickly. She said that delay beyond 48 hours must be minimised and that she is working with her UK colleagues to improve that. What steps, precisely, is she taking to ensure that such delays are minimised? How is she working with her UK colleagues to improve the situation?

Jeane Freeman: It is important to say that the total turnaround time remains under 24 hours for 95 per cent of our NHS-processed tests. The problem that we have encountered with the lighthouse lab is precisely the problem of it being part of a three-lab UK network. When there is a surge in one area, all three labs have to respond, and at this point not all of them are at the same level of processing capacity. The Glasgow one is ahead.

The work that we undertake involves, on a daily basis, my senior officials talking with their counterparts in the Department of Health and Social Care, anticipating what the demand is likely to be from one day to the next, and discussing how they can flex the processing capacity to deal with that. As I said, from Monday, direct control is being introduced for us here in Scotland over the availability of testing slots and sampling slots in the regional testing centres, mobile testing units and walk-through centres.

We had already planned to increase our NHS capacity. It was always part of the plan to introduce three regional hubs to the existing NHS labs. The first of those was to come on stream from October, but we are working to see whether we can bring that forward, and we are standing up many of the academic nodes that we contracted. We are increasing the capacity that we have at our own hands through the NHS and those other measures, which will include discussions that are now under way with two of the private labs in Scotland.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary inform us whether the UK Government has advised of its intention to undertake a similar independent review of the adult care sector in England, and whether it has indicated whether it is commissioning any analysis of hospital discharges to care homes?

Jeane Freeman: On the latter part of that question, I have written to all my colleagues—Matt Hancock; Vaughan Gething, the health minister in Wales; and Robin Swann, the health minister in Northern Ireland—advising them of the work that I have commissioned from Public Health Scotland on discharges from hospital and asking them whether they wish to do similar. I have not yet had a response from any of them.

I am not aware that any of the Governments in the UK intends to follow what we are doing with the independent review of adult social care, but if they are, we will be very happy to co-operate with them on that.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): During this crisis, we have seen older people discharged untested, discharged Covid positive, pressured into “Do not resuscitate” notices, not admitted into hospital for

care and not assessed before going into care homes. What has been the response from the cabinet secretary for older people during the crisis? Absolutely nothing. Today, during this important statement, she spends her time in the tea room, blethering to her pals. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let me hear the question, please. *[Interruption.]* Dr Allan, I want to hear the question.

Neil Findlay: What is the point of having a cabinet secretary for older people when, during the biggest crisis affecting older people in decades, she is posted missing?

Jeane Freeman: I am not posted missing, and neither is Ms McKelvie. If Neil Findlay understood the way that Government works—I appreciate that it is not something that he has experienced—he would know that Ms McKelvie and I, and other Cabinet colleagues, are constantly in touch with each other, hearing what we are doing and asking how we can contribute. Ms McKelvie has contributed a great deal to our understanding and thinking, particularly from the perspective of older people, and she will undoubtedly do the same in the independent review.

If that is the sum total of the questions that Mr Findlay can ask when we are debating something as important as care homes, the next time he tries to pretend that he cares deeply about this issue, I am afraid that his credibility will be pretty weak.

Neil Findlay: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I sincerely—*[Interruption.]* Excuse me, Mr Findlay. Do not speak over me. I hope that it is a point of order. Let us hear what it is.

Neil Findlay: The cabinet secretary might know that my mum is in a care home, and I will see her on Friday for the first time in six months. I take great offence at that answer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I feel sympathy for your personal circumstances, Mr Findlay, but that is not a point of order.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the routine testing of asymptomatic care home workers and the recent figure of more than 36,000 that the cabinet secretary shared today. Has the Government been able to assess how effective that measure has been in stopping the spread of the virus? I understand that it is early days, but if that has not been done, are there plans to do it?

Jeane Freeman: That is a very important point. There are figures—I do not have them to hand, but I would be very happy to ensure that Ms McAlpine gets them—that show that, as we test care home

workers, the number of positive tests from any care home among care workers or residents is declining hugely, but the balance is from care home workers. I know that many of them appreciate the fact that there is now that testing, because they care very much about protecting the residents whom they look after.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): While we await the conclusions of the care review, can the cabinet secretary commit to ending insecure care work, increasing pay for staff and abolishing the registration fees that low-paid staff currently have to pay to be able to work in the care sector?

Jeane Freeman: Ms Boyack knows full well that care is delivered by a private, public and independent mix. Each of those sectors has its own terms and conditions. In my opinion, too few of those services negotiate those terms and conditions properly with trade union representation. It is not in my power to interfere directly in that, but it is in my capacity to try to ensure that the fair living wage is paid and to put in place resource to try to ensure that that happens. That is what I have done.

I fully expect the independent review, as it looks at how adult social care should be designed with the individual in mind, how that can best be delivered, how it can best be regulated to ensure consistency of quality and standards, and how it should be funded, to have quite a lot to say about the terms and conditions that should be awarded to those who work in the sector, because the work that they do is so valued.

In the meantime, I will continue to have discussions with COSLA and Scottish Care about the national contract and the commissioning measures that they can put in place in order to try to deliver better across the whole sector on the fair work principles which, as Ms Boyack knows, the Government has signed up to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank members for their co-operation. All members got their questions in, and that is what we always want to happen.

There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Logan Review (Technology Sector)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald): The next item of business is a statement by Kate Forbes on the Logan review in the technology sector. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

16:58

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): Coronavirus is, first and foremost, a crisis of public health, but it has also emerged as the defining economic challenge of our time. Its impact is already devastating, and that will continue to unfold over the coming weeks and months.

The Scottish Government tackled the immediate crisis head on. We moved swiftly to inject £2.3 billion into the economy to preserve businesses, protect jobs and provide new opportunities for reskilling. Today's publication of the programme for government marks the beginning of a new phase of Government action in which we look beyond crisis management to Scotland's economic future.

Over the past few months, we have seen businesses, through necessity, embrace new technologies at pace and at a scale that would normally have taken years. Members will be as proud as I am that so many businesses chose to pivot their operations to serve our national health service. They have innovated to save jobs and lives.

We are seeing a blurring of the distinction between tech and the traditional. The everyday economy is striving to maintain productive capacity, just as our most inventive tech minds seek to ignite innovation in sectors as diverse as finance, healthcare and tourism.

The lesson is clear: against the backdrop of the pandemic, there will be acceleration in the global trend towards innovation-led economies. Scotland has nothing to fear from that future—few nations do innovation and ingenuity as well as we do.

However, that means that our recovery cannot be built purely on restoration of the status quo. What we require is economic renewal. That means moving with vigour towards a high-tech, low-carbon economy that creates high-value jobs and harnesses the power of technology as a force for social and economic good.

To realise that vision, we need to catalyse our most innovative emerging sectors, and to ensure

that they maximise both their individual potential and their capacity to drive growth and job creation across the whole economy. That is why, in July, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture announced a new £38 million package to support early-stage high-growth businesses.

It is also why, earlier in the summer, I invited Mark Logan to conduct a review of Scotland's tech ecosystem. As members in the chamber will know, Mr Logan brings a wealth of experience that has been accumulated through 30 years of building Scottish start-ups that perform on the global stage. That culminated in the success of Skyscanner, which remains to this day one of the most significant European tech unicorns ever created. He is widely respected across industry as an investor and adviser, and is passionate about creating an ecosystem that provides a new generation of tech talent with the opportunity to replicate his success. I put on record my sincere thanks to him for his time and his dedication to the review, which was published last week.

Seldom have we seen a report attract such universal acclaim, with key figures from across business, technology and academia endorsing it as being potentially transformational—and with good reason. It is a work of intellect and ambition that makes 34 detailed recommendations that lay down challenges to Government, universities and industry across the key themes of talent, infrastructure and funding.

Mr Logan defines a clear and simple purpose for the ecosystem: it is to produce a consistent

"stream of technology start-ups that reach sustained profitability, including a significant proportion that do so at scale".

He dismisses complacency with a sober analysis of Scotland's current performance. Yes—we have had some high-profile successes, but that must not obscure the fact that too few of our best start-ups and university spin-outs succeed in the long term. That is costing us in growth, jobs and tax revenues for reinvestment in a better Scotland.

The report goes on to explain the differences between "post-tipping point" ecosystems, such as London and silicon valley—which achieve a critical mass of investable start-ups, capital and talent—and high-potential "pre-tipping point" tech hubs, such as Scotland. The review's objective is to identify the actions that are necessary to nudge Scotland over that tipping point.

In the programme for government, we have committed to multiyear, multimillion-pound investment to implement the recommendation to establish a national network of tech scalars. Such facilities are the report's centrepiece, and would transform the quality and intensity of support that is available to Scotland's start-ups. In addition to

networking, meet-ups and cross-pollination of ideas, they would deliver formal world-class founder education, which would potentially be secured on a national licence from the best providers in silicon valley. Those are powerful commitments that will put the wind of silicon valley commercial technique in the sails of Scottish ingenuity.

Over the next five years, we will also invest in the creation of an ecosystem fund. The fund responds to multiple recommendations, and will be used to make strategic investments in the organisations and activities that create the best possible environment for our start-ups to succeed. Examples include learning from the Finnish model of investing in key tech conferences to attract talent and external capital, programmes to increase the volume of new start-ups emerging from universities, and extracurricular activity in schools to ignite pupil interest and tackle gender imbalance.

We also accept Mr Logan's view that, in the context of the pandemic, we need to do more to help people to get the digital skills that are necessary for them to enter high-value employment in the technology industry. To that end, we are actively considering how immediate action could be taken through the recently announced training transition fund.

The review sets out proposals for a series of radical interventions across the education system, as it relates to teaching of computing science and related disciplines. However, a hallmark of the review's quality is its refusal to engage in oversimplifications.

Mr Logan acknowledges that the challenges can be met only through investment of significant time, energy and resource. He places a mutual obligation on Government, educators and industry to work together to deliver progress.

Although we might differ on points on implementation of the recommendations, we do not shirk from the overall challenge. To paraphrase Mr Logan, the Government is prepared to do its part in bringing to life the inherent magic of software development. I am pleased to confirm that the Deputy First Minister is fully engaged with the report, and has already held discussions with Mr Logan about next steps.

In such a short statement, it is possible to offer only a snapshot of what is a very detailed and inventive analysis. There are more recommendations on matters as diverse as improving start-up infrastructure in universities, collaboration with investors, and more effectively harnessing the strategic value of the Scottish diaspora.

That is why, in line with Mr Logan's advice, we will establish a formal partnership with the tech industry in order to drive progress on the recommendations for which a sustained implementation programme will be required, in order to achieve the necessary outcomes. We are working with Mr Logan to develop that model as a matter of urgency, and will make further announcements in due course. Let there be no doubt, however, that the Government will do what it takes to ignite Scotland's rise as a first-class start-up nation.

It is my hope that members have been as refreshed as I am by the excitement and optimism that have been provoked by the review. I share that excitement. We have an opportunity to advance a model of economic development by which we not only back singular programmes for incremental progress, but by which we make more systematic interventions that are co-designed by and co-delivered with industry, investors and academia.

I have had responsibility for tech from the very beginning of my ministerial career. I have often said that I consider it to be one of the most exciting portfolios in Government. I am consistently inspired, not just by the community's creativity and imagination, but by its desire to use those gifts for the good of our country.

What we have lacked is what Mr Logan has now given us: a compelling blueprint with which we can channel that collective energy and spirit. I look forward to getting started.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, cabinet secretary.

The cabinet secretary will take questions on issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow about 20 minutes for that, after which we will move on to the next item of business. Members who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak button now.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement, and for advance sight of it. I agree with her about the value of the excellent report by Mark Logan. It contains some very good ideas about how to sustain and grow a vital sector in which Scotland already has a strong track record.

In particular, I welcome the recommendations on how to better attract investment in new start-up companies. That has been a challenge for as long as I can remember our having economic debates in the Parliament, which is quite a long time. The question how we better support and nurture our home-grown talent has always been a feature.

On education, according to the latest statistics, the number of computing science students in our

high schools fell between 2017 and 2018, from 4,476 to 4,099. More worryingly, however, over a much longer period—the 10 years from 2008 to 2018—the number of computing science teachers fell by nearly 25 per cent, from 766 to 595. What practical steps are being taken to reverse that concerning trend in our schools?

Kate Forbes: In the spirit in which they were asked, I thank the member for both questions.

On the value of the report, Murdo Fraser talked about the need to attract investment. A fascinating element of the report is the comment that it is not necessarily the availability of investment that is at fault—there is public and private investment out there—but the availability of a steady stream of investable propositions, and the ability to take start-ups through the various levels of growth, so that they emerge as successful large companies. That is what we will seek to do with the tech scalars that we will invest in.

Murdo Fraser is right to comment that education is a core element of the review. In the past few years, we—like many Governments around the world—have taken steps to ensure that computing studies are part and parcel of the curriculum. Part of the challenge is to ensure that there are sufficient computing science teachers, given that the pace of change in the tech industry is extremely quick and there are a lot of attractive career options for those who have done computing science at university.

Through our STEM—science, technology, mathematics and engineering—strategy, we have taken steps to boost the number of people who go into STEM teaching, including computing, in the first place. The obvious example is the £20,000 bursary that is offered to those career changers who want to train to teach those subjects.

At its core, the report highlights the need to inspire pupils to continue with computing science and to inspire teachers to recognise the exciting job opportunities for their pupils. Its recommendations for how we enthuse and inspire people in order to attract more youngsters and teachers will be part of the agenda that we take forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Rhoda Grant, to be followed by Kenneth Gibson.

It seems that we do not have any sound from Rhoda Grant. We will take Kenneth Gibson next, and come back to Rhoda Grant when we can.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. The Logan review makes it clear that Scotland's high-tech start-ups must meet the standards of global best practice in order to be competitive. It is clear that the cabinet secretary

does not want Scotland's role to be primarily one of nurturing new high-tech companies while anticipating that many of them will, in time, likely relocate elsewhere, as has happened so often in the past. How does she plan to develop technology clusters that will grow and be sustainable in Scotland? What support, both practical and financial, will be made available to enable that to happen?

Kate Forbes: I agree with Kenneth Gibson's analysis that we do not want simply to nurture high-tech companies that then leave and relocate. Covid-19 has shown us that business, and tech businesses in particular, can operate successfully and continue to grow remotely. I hope that the implementation of the report's recommendations to enable start-ups to flourish and grow will mean that businesses stay in Scotland.

I will make two points in direct answer to the question. First, the report is not overly prescriptive with regard to the development of clusters. Instead, it seeks to provide the support and mechanisms that will enable the industry to grow more generally and enable sub-sectors to develop. Secondly, the ecosystem fund that I announced today will be a central point for that support, which will enable us to make strategic investments in organisations and activities that will create the best possible environment to allow our start-ups to succeed.

I hope that putting in place the right environment and education will, in parallel with the tech scalars, mean that we have highly successful companies at a much faster start-up rate.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): Earlier today, the First Minister said that the Logan review would be implemented in full. Recommendation 18 of the review is for a reduction in intercity rail travel costs. I ask the cabinet secretary: when, by how much, who will fund it and what will the total cost be?

Kate Forbes: As I said in my statement, we have accepted Mark Logan's analysis and the need to implement the recommendations. With regard to the substance of those recommendations, our point is that we want to get to the same outcome.

On intercity travel, Mark Logan makes the point that we have two cities, one of which—if I can say so without offending the other—has become very well known for its start-up culture and has produced a lot of impressive tech businesses, and one of which needs a little bit more assistance. The point is to ensure that we do not focus only on one city in Scotland. Instead, through the tech scalars—we have announced five locations today, which include Inverness and Glasgow along with other cities—we will ensure that the opportunities

are spread throughout Scotland, rather than concentrated in one wonderful city.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Scotland has a world-beating reputation for leading in computing science and technology. Does the cabinet secretary agree that collaboration between schools and further education is a major contributor to that?

Kate Forbes: Yes, and that is highlighted in this independent report. That goes to the question that Murdo Fraser asked, because inspiring teaching is key to engaging children and young people in the first place. That is why, as I said at the outset, it is important that the Deputy First Minister has already been in follow-up discussions with Mr Logan.

We will respond to the detail of the recommendations in due course; I received a copy of the report only last week, when it was published. We have already refreshed the curriculum to introduce the fundamentals of computing and cyberskills from the earliest years onwards, and we are doing what we can to attract more computing teachers in. However, a lot of the best work going on right now is in the extracurricular space, where schools and the tech industry are working very closely together to inspire young people.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the report and the cabinet secretary's statement. For many years, employers have told me that it is difficult to get information and communications technology graduates. I have often wondered why we do not take action on that, so this is refreshing and I am excited about the report.

The Child Poverty Action Group recently produced a report that included the finding that low-income families are twice as likely to say that they lack all the resources needed to support learning at home during Covid. And it is not just at home that there is a digital divide. The cabinet secretary talked about igniting the interest of schools and pupils, as well as tackling gender imbalance, but the digital divide is also an income imbalance, because people on low income can be unable to access ICT and the internet. What are we going to do about that? Would it not be a good start to instruct education authorities to audit every school in the country, including teachers, so that we know which schools have got appropriate ICT and which have not?

Kate Forbes: Alex Rowley is spot on in talking about the digital divide, which is why it was very appropriate that, earlier today, when she set out the programme for government, the First Minister also announced the connecting Scotland programme, which is focused on reaching 50,000

people who are currently digitally excluded with the hardware that they need—the laptops, iPads or whatever—and the digital skills to make use of it. The challenge that we have seen throughout the pandemic is that so much has moved online that it has exacerbated digital exclusion.

The report must go hand in hand with the work that Aileen Campbell and I are doing around digital exclusion. Mr Rowley started his question by talking about the difficulties in recruiting tech grads. That is a point. If we are to expand the pool of available talent, we should be working with young people, whatever their background, to ensure that they have the skills to go on and have a relatively high-value job in the industry.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Technology has immense potential to help us to tackle the climate emergency, so I was a little surprised that the report includes only two throwaway references to the subject, one of which is completely meaningless while the other is used as cover for a request for aviation growth. Is that the inevitable consequence of commissioning a report from someone who made their name from finding clever new ways to flog cheap airline tickets?

Kate Forbes: I agree with Patrick Harvie that high-tech growth is a very effective means of delivering on our low carbon aspirations. I take his point that that never happens accidentally; it has to be intentional from the outset. Something as basic as people working from home and accessing work, markets or customers without having to travel and increase transport emissions may seem like a trivial example, but it is indicative of the potential of using tech to meet our low carbon aspirations. We have to use all the levers and resources at our disposal to meet our net zero target. If we do it right, I see hi tech as a means of improving our productivity and reducing our carbon emissions.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, welcome the report. What the cabinet secretary said about the gender imbalance in tech education is true, but the imbalance goes further than that. The report states:

“In industry as a whole, women found 20% of our businesses but receive 1% of total investment capital”.

It also states that the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise

“should consider creating a specific vehicle to make seed investments in technology start-ups founded by women, to contribute to rebalancing this aberration.”

Will the Scottish Government accept and implement that recommendation?

Kate Forbes: As Rhoda Grant says, one of the recommendations in the report is to look at how we ensure a reduction in the gender gap, not only

in terms of women going into the workforce and starting a business but in their being able to attract investment. That has also been one of the Scottish Government's priorities. We have long worked to tackle, at a much earlier age, the gender gap in participation in STEM subjects so that participation flows through beyond school. The short answer to Rhoda Grant's question is that, yes, we will see how we can work with that recommendation to reduce the gender gap.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): As people develop digital businesses, slow internet speeds are hampering opportunities for innovation and transformation, but the promise to deliver superfast broadband by the end of 2021 in the north of Scotland will not be met—we are now looking at 2023. How will the Scottish Government make sure that rural and island communities such as those in my constituency are fully included in the blueprint that will be taken forward?

Kate Forbes: I have visited very exciting tech businesses—some of the most exciting businesses that I have seen—in Beatrice Wishart's constituency and, slightly further south, in Orkney. Because they are able to operate on a global scale yet are based on some of our islands, they are an advert for the potential of using technology to reduce depopulation.

Having announced it a few days ago, today we re-emphasised the voucher scheme to help those who do not have superfast broadband to get it. I recommend that Beatrice Wishart and her constituents look to that scheme. Of course, our objective is to deliver superfast broadband to every household in Scotland.

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I welcome the suggestion, on page 39 of the report, of "self-organised tech" meet-up points giving

"free meeting space and resources".

That is clearly part of an across-Scotland approach to creating hubs for entrepreneurs. Can the cabinet secretary advise how many jobs might be created directly from the creation of hubs across Scotland? I am thinking particularly of those that might come out of the back end of the funnel that the Logan report refers to, which are permanent, international-standard jobs that we can keep for generations.

Kate Forbes: The potential for job creation is enormous. We aim to support between 300 and 500 companies through the tech scalers programme, providing world-class training and mentoring for entrepreneurs in the hope that their businesses go on to grow, develop and employ more people. The initial aspiration would be for approximately 50 jobs, knowing that that is a very

immediate start and that the number can only grow.

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I, too, welcome the report, which is a good commercial guide for the Government to take forward. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that leaving the European Union might afford us greater opportunities to attract the best in global tech talent, given that the four major exporters of tech graduates—Russia, China, the USA and India—are all outwith the EU? Will she be looking to negotiate national licences with other countries—as the report recommends—to give our entrepreneurs access to the training materials and resources that are currently used in places such as silicon valley? How quickly will she set to work on that?

Kate Forbes: The thing that would make the biggest difference in attracting international talent would be ensuring that people could access visas in the first place. As the First Minister said earlier, if this was the programme for government of an independent country, we would start by having a more positive approach to immigrants and to attracting the skills and talent that we need to build a successful tech industry and grow the economy.

On the second part of Michelle Ballantyne's question, my ambition is to get to work on the recommendations as quickly as possible, knowing that it is not just up to the Government to implement them and that we have to work collaboratively with industry and academia to make progress and reap the benefits of what the report has to offer.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): What plans does the Scottish Government have to support those who have an interest in pursuing a new career in technology and the growing digital sector in Scotland, including software development? Will she consider a more balanced distribution of the tech scaler locations, so that the south-west of Scotland is included?

Kate Forbes: On the second point, as a Highland representative, I am always keen to ensure that there is support and investment outside the main urban centres—that is one of my priorities.

To support those who want to change their careers—the situation is acute right now for those who have been affected by the pandemic—we have announced the transition training fund, which will help to re-skill those who have been impacted by Covid-19 and help them to move into paid work in high-growth areas such as technology.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): Recommendation 16 of the review highlights that the introduction of a Scottish tech visa would be a highly desirable mechanism for attracting

international talent to Scotland. Will the Scottish Government make such a proposal to the UK Government? Does the cabinet secretary agree that, with the powers of independence, a tech visa could be a pathway to Scottish and European citizenship for talent in other parts of the UK seeking an alternative to the bleak isolationism of Brexit?

Kate Forbes: As is demonstrated in other countries, the tech visa has the potential to transform the talent pool that is available and ensure that we can grow. I will certainly make that case to the UK Government, although probably without any great optimism that it will lead to change, given that we have long stated that the current UK Government's immigration proposals are wrong for Scotland and threaten to cause serious and lasting harm to the tech industry and several other important sectors. It is not just me making that point—academic and business representatives make that point, too. Our demographic and economic needs are not the same as those of the rest of the UK, and a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate.

We will consider how we can use elements of that recommendation to ensure that we are attracting talent. However, without the immigration levers, it is a lot more difficult.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the statement.

Committee Announcement

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a committee announcement. I am pleased to call Bob Doris, the convener of the Social Security Committee, to make an announcement on an inquiry into the role of Scottish social security in the recovery from Covid-19.

17:29

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I am pleased to announce that, today, the Social Security Committee has launched an inquiry into how Scottish social security might contribute to our social and economic recovery from Covid-19. We want to look at what can be done within the current constraints. We know that the Scottish Government is able to top up reserved benefits and create new benefits in devolved areas. We welcome the actions that it had already taken before Covid-19 to increase carers allowance and to create a young carers grant.

My committee now wants to consider how Scottish social security should respond to the pandemic to best support people who are either in or out of work. We have acknowledged that the majority of social security provision and the main benefits for those on low incomes are still reserved to Westminster, which is a constraint on what can be done in the devolved context. Another inevitable constraint is the Scottish Government's very limited borrowing powers, and I know that my colleagues on the Finance and Constitution Committee continue to raise that issue.

We have all heard about the more radical proposals for social security changes, such as a universal basic income or a citizens income. Those proposals will continue to be discussed by our committee, but the aim of the inquiry is to focus on less radical changes that could be quick wins. Our remit is therefore to consider how Scottish social security, as part of the broader context of all United Kingdom social security, should contribute to the social and economic recovery from Covid-19 through support to those in, out of or seeking work, with a focus on deliverable change from 2021 onwards.

We want to hear from as many people as possible. As part of our work, we will, of course, look to speak to the Department for Work and Pensions and the UK Government's Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Just last week, I wrote to Ms Coffey to express the committee's disappointment and frustration that our invitation had, to date, been ignored. Today, the committee received a response to that letter. It focused on

committee engagement with the UK Government at official level, as opposed to ministerial attendance at our committee. There is more that I would like to say about that, but I will speak to my committee first. I will leave it at that for now.

Engagement is, of course, key, which is why I have made details of our inquiry available to the Parliament this afternoon. I ask every member to make their constituents aware of the committee's inquiry and to encourage them to submit their views. We will be listening.

Presiding Officer, thank you for the opportunity to make the Parliament aware of the Social Security Committee's inquiry.

Agriculture Bill

17:32

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of consideration is legislative consent motion S5M-22591, on the Agriculture Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation. I call Graeme Dey to move the motion on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism, Fergus Ewing.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the provisions related to food security, organic products, animal identification and traceability, fertilisers and the red meat levy in the Agriculture Bill, introduced into the House of Commons on 16 January 2020, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Graeme Dey*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:32

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I call Graeme Dey, on behalf of the bureau, to move motion S5M-22594, on committee membership, and motion S5M-22597, on the suspension and variation of standing orders.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Kenneth Gibson be appointed to replace Gail Ross as a member of the Education and Skills Committee;

Gillian Martin be appointed to replace Angela Constance as a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee;

Annabelle Ewing be appointed to replace Alasdair Allan as a member of the Justice Committee;

Keith Brown be appointed to replace Kenneth Gibson as a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee; and

Gail Ross be appointed to replace Annabelle Ewing as a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that, as appropriate, for meetings of committees or sub-committees established by the Parliament, for the duration of the public response to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, this being the period up to and including 9 October 2020, and such further period or periods as are determined by the Presiding Officer from time to time following consultation with the Bureau and notified to the Parliament in the Business Bulletin:

Rule 12.3.2, which was suspended and replaced by means of motion S5M-21507, be further varied so as now to provide as follows—

“2. A committee shall meet—

(a) in Scotland at such place as it may decide, with the approval of the Parliamentary Bureau and the Conveners Group (all members meeting collectively at such place, or in part remotely by video conference hosted on such platform as may be provided by the Parliamentary corporation) or

(b) wholly remotely, by video conference hosted on such platform as may be provided by the Parliamentary corporation.

2A. A decision under Rule 12.3.2 shall, in the event of any disagreement between the Parliamentary Bureau and the Conveners Group, be referred to the Parliamentary corporation for a determination. The Parliamentary Bureau may require the Conveners Group to make a decision under Rule 12.3.2 within a specified period. If the Conveners Group does not make a decision within that period, the decision on the approval shall be made by the Parliamentary Bureau.”—[*Graeme Dey*]

Decision Time

17:33

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that legislative consent motion S5M-22591, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the Agriculture Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the provisions related to food security, organic products, animal identification and traceability, fertilisers and the red meat levy in the Agriculture Bill, introduced into the House of Commons on 16 January 2020, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on the two Parliamentary Bureau motions. As no member objects, the question is, that motions S5M-22594 and S5M-22597, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Kenneth Gibson be appointed to replace Gail Ross as a member of the Education and Skills Committee;

Gillian Martin be appointed to replace Angela Constance as a member of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee;

Annabelle Ewing be appointed to replace Alasdair Allan as a member of the Justice Committee;

Keith Brown be appointed to replace Kenneth Gibson as a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee; and

Gail Ross be appointed to replace Annabelle Ewing as a member of the Local Government and Communities Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that, as appropriate, for meetings of committees or sub-committees established by the Parliament, for the duration of the public response to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, this being the period up to and including 9 October 2020, and such further period or periods as are determined by the Presiding Officer from time to time following consultation with the Bureau and notified to the Parliament in the Business Bulletin:

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“2. A committee shall meet—

(a) in Scotland at such place as it may decide, with the approval of the Parliamentary Bureau and the Conveners Group (all members meeting collectively at such place, or in part remotely by video conference hosted on such platform as may be provided by the Parliamentary corporation) or

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2A. A decision under Rule 12.3.2 shall, in the event of any

disagreement between the Parliamentary Bureau and the Conveners Group, be referred to the Parliamentary corporation for a determination. The Parliamentary Bureau may require the Conveners Group to make a decision under Rule 12.3.2 within a specified period. If the Conveners Group does not make a decision within that period, the decision on the approval shall be made by the Parliamentary Bureau.”

Meeting closed at 17:33.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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