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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 12:20]

Point of Order

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There is a point of order from Mike Rumbles.

Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD): Presiding Officer, I seek your guidance on our procedures.

As you know, the First Minister announced at midnight last night that she was imposing restrictions on people who reside in the local government areas of East Renfrewshire, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire. She said that

“You should not host people from other households in your home and you should not visit someone else’s home, no matter where it is.”

As far as I understand it, no regulations have been lodged with the Scottish Parliament about imposing those restrictions on the population. Again, as I understand it, those restrictions are not restrictions at all, but purely advice to people in those local authority areas. However, there is a great deal of confusion, because the media are reporting that those restrictions have indeed been imposed.

I seek your guidance on the procedures as to whether the Government has now laid before the Parliament the regulations to impose those restrictions, because I want to know that the proper procedures have been followed according to—[*Interruption*].

Would members stop barracking, please?

The Presiding Officer: Could we have some order, please? Let us hear the point of order.

Mike Rumbles: I want to know that the proper procedures have been followed according to the legislation that was passed unanimously by the Parliament in March, which gave the Scottish Government unprecedented powers. I want to be sure, as an individual member of the Scottish Parliament, that those powers are being exercised in accordance with our procedures. I am embarrassed to say that I genuinely do not know the answer, because of the confusion that has been caused.

Are the powers being imposed on the population through regulation—if that is the case, that is quite proper and correct—or are the powers not being imposed on the population? People should be told that, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: First Minister, I will respond to the point of order, if you do not mind. I am sure that you will shortly address the point. You may speak now if you wish.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): When I announced the revised guidance for the people in Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire last night, I specifically said that at this stage it is in the form of guidance but, as we have done in other situations, we will translate that into regulation if we consider it necessary. If we decide to do that, then the proper procedures of the Parliament will be followed.

Right now, we are seeking to make sure that the public are under no doubt about what we are asking and advising people to do, and I will come to that later on. I would have thought that all members of the Parliament, if we are interested in suppressing the infectious virus, have a duty not to sow confusion but to give clear advice to people across the country.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, First Minister.

I thank Mr Rumbles for giving me advance notice of his point of order. This is the first available opportunity to raise the issue. I am aware of Mr Rumbles’s on-going interest in the matter.

First, I observe that the term “restrictions” is used to cover guidance, statutory guidance and regulations and that all of those are matters for the Government. I advise Mr Rumbles to put any questions on the matter to the Government directly.

From a parliamentary perspective, I observe that if such restrictions were a matter of regulations, those would have to be laid before the Parliament and the Parliament would have an opportunity to pass its view on them.

I thank Mr Rumbles for his point of order and the First Minister for her clarification. I observe that it is also important from a parliamentary perspective for important announcements to be made to the Parliament. In this case, the Government informed me directly before 5 o’clock yesterday, notifying me that it would be very difficult to do make the announcement to the Parliament because of the timing. The Government offered members from the affected region a chance to discuss the restrictions last night at 5 o’clock, which I think was very helpful.

First Minister's Question Time

12:24

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We move to First Minister's questions. The First Minister will begin with a short statement updating us on the Covid situation.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will give a brief update. An additional 156 cases of Covid were confirmed yesterday; that represents 1 per cent of people who were newly tested yesterday, and the total number of cases is now 20,788. A total of 86 of the new cases are in Greater Glasgow and Clyde, 26 in Lanarkshire, 16 are in Lothian and six are in Ayrshire and Arran. The remaining 22 are distributed across six other health board areas. Some 258 patients are in hospital, which is six fewer than yesterday, and five people are in intensive care, which is one fewer than yesterday.

I am sorry to say that, in the past 24 hours, one death of a patient who had tested positive was registered. The number of deaths under that measurement is now 2,495. In addition, National Records of Scotland has just published its weekly update, which includes deaths of people in whom Covid has been confirmed through a test and cases in which Covid is a suspected or contributory cause of death. That latest update covers the week to Sunday 30 August. It shows that the total number of registered deaths with either a confirmed or presumed link to Covid is now 4,228. Six of those were registered in the previous week, which is the same number as the week before. Two were in care homes, which is two fewer than in the previous week. Once again, my condolences go to everyone who has lost a loved one.

In the interest of public and parliamentary information, I will briefly mention two other matters. Last night we announced that Greece has been added to the list of countries that are subject to quarantine restrictions. Test and protect has found in recent days that a number of new Covid cases can be connected to individuals returning from that country. The new restrictions apply from 4 o'clock tomorrow morning. Anyone who arrives in Scotland from Greece after that time must self-isolate for 14 days. Anyone who has returned from Greece in the past few days should be particularly careful about social interactions and follow all the FACTS advice particularly carefully.

Given the uncertainties that are inherent in a global pandemic, I also want to repeat my advice for people to be very cautious about non-essential foreign travel right now. There can be no guarantee that the rules on quarantine will not

change while you are away and affect you on your return.

Secondly, let me briefly remind people who are living in Glasgow City, East Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire of the new guidance in place. The level of Covid is particularly high and rising in those areas. Given the toll that we know Covid can take, doing nothing was not an option.

The data that we now get from test and protect allows us to be much more targeted in the measures that we take. We know that, unlike in the pub-based cluster in Aberdeen a few weeks ago, the data so far suggest that transmission in the west of Scotland is happening not exclusively, but mainly, in people's homes.

The guidance is now, first, that if you live in Glasgow, East Renfrewshire or West Dunbartonshire, you should not host people from other households in your home, and you should not visit someone else's home, no matter where that is. There are exceptions for emergencies and providing care or shopping to vulnerable people, and for extended households. Further guidance and a Q and A can be found at www.gov.scot.

Secondly, if any member of your household is identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive, we will now ask the whole household to isolate for 14 days. Local authorities are stepping up their support arrangements.

Lastly, visits to care homes in those three areas are now restricted to outdoors only, and hospital visiting will return to essential visits only.

Those restrictions will be in place for two weeks, and will be reviewed in one week. They have not been put in place lightly. They are necessary and, we believe, proportionate, and we hope that they will allow the spread to be contained at an early stage, without the need for further measures later.

The measures apply only in those three council areas now, but I think that they should be a wake-up call for all of us. If we let it, the virus will spread rapidly. The good news is that, if we stick to some basic rules and continue to make some sacrifices, we can stop it. To be blunt, however, that only works if we all do those things, so please make sure that you are aware of what the rules are, that you stick to them, and that you follow the FACTS rules: face coverings; avoid crowded places; clean hands and hard surfaces; keep 2m distancing; and self-isolate and book a test if you have symptoms. Doing all that is more important now than it has been at any stage of the pandemic so far.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, First Minister. I remind members that we are sticking to the format in which all supplementaries to the First Minister will be asked at the end of all the questions, which today is after question 7.

Referendum Bill

1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con): Yesterday, the First Minister announced plans for a referendum bill. Why is that more urgent than an education bill?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Government has a well-known, well-established and well under way programme of improvements and reform in education. We have taken additional steps to make sure that pupils catch up with the education that they lost during the Covid period. We have given additional funding to local authorities for that, and we are providing additional funding specifically to recruit additional teachers. Education, and improving education, remain the priority for this Government.

However, on a basic matter of democracy, I believe that it is for the people of Scotland to choose their own future. I will argue that case in a democratic election. People will be able to decide in how they vote. If they endorse my view that there should be a referendum on independence, they will then have the right to choose Scotland's future.

Fundamentally, I believe in democracy. We now know that Ruth Davidson does not.

Ruth Davidson: The First Minister does not believe in democracy when she does not like its answer.

This year, Scottish school pupils missed an entire term of classroom teaching. We know that that loss of time will have fallen hardest on pupils from the most disadvantaged backgrounds—the very pupils whose communities have been left devastated by the pandemic. We know that thousands of Scottish pupils will need to self-isolate during the coming months, and will lose more crucial classroom time.

In the face of the pandemic, the Government had no choice but to close Scotland's schools, but it does have a choice about mitigating the effects of that classroom shutdown on those who suffered most from it. The Scottish Conservatives have already called for extra tuition for the most disadvantaged. Will the First Minister guarantee that the additional money that she has confirmed is available will go directly to the schools and headteachers who need it most?

The First Minister: The money's purpose is precisely to allow local authorities, teachers and schools to decide on the different ways that they think are appropriate in order to help students to catch up. Money is available specifically to recruit extra teachers to help with that catching up and to improve resilience, as we continue to go through the Covid pandemic.

The attainment fund puts money directly with headteachers, and we have confirmed attainment funding for schools for the next period. We have, during the past few years, invested hundreds of millions of pounds of funding in tackling the attainment gap, and it has gone directly to teachers. We will continue to make sure that there is investment, and we will continue to support teachers, schools, young people, and parents—not just to catch up on the education that has unfortunately been lost during the Covid pandemic, but to make sure that effort on the objective of closing the attainment gap continues to be the priority.

Ruth Davidson: This week, it was revealed that the Scottish Qualifications Authority has planned for schools to cover less ground in the curriculum in key subjects, including English and maths. Instead of building our pupils back up, the Government seems to be content to accept second best. I do not think that less teaching, less learning and less knowledge this year for young people who lost out last year are acceptable, and I doubt that many parents across Scotland will, either.

Parents expect the Government to have the ambition to deliver the same standards of teaching as in any normal school year—and nothing less. Will the First Minister ask the SQA to think again?

The First Minister: The SQA will do the work that it is required to do. We have established the independent review in order to make sure that we learn all the lessons about what was put in place because we did not have exams this year. It is right that we allow that work to be done. The SQA will look closely at the curriculum, and will listen carefully to the views that are being expressed.

Such debates are on-going across the United Kingdom right now. Especially given the mistakes that were made—I take responsibility for the mistakes that were made by the SQA with this year's results—it is important to take time to ensure that we get it right, while continuing to support young people through the on-going virus situation that has not ended. We will continue to take those decisions carefully.

To come back to the core challenge that we all face at the moment, I say that we have, thankfully, seen Scottish young people returning to schools earlier than most other young people across the UK because of our different term dates. Our current objective is to make sure that they can stay at school full time, and that there is no further disruption to their education. That is why all the advice that we are giving and all the difficult decisions that we are making in order to suppress the virus remain so important. We have to keep absolutely focused on all that.

Ruth Davidson: The SQA will do what “is required”. Is that acceptable to the First Minister, when she knows that the SQA is planning to cover less ground this year, and is planning to tell our parents and children that the children will be taught less and will learn less? I am sorry, but I am not sure that that is good enough.

I know that the First Minister does not like to be asked questions about her record, but she deserves to be challenged on this matter. It was she who said that education would be her number 1 priority—not us. It was she who said that a flagship education bill was needed to fix Scottish education—not us. It was she who said that closing the attainment gap was what she wanted to be judged by, but her record simply does not stand the test.

There are warnings already ringing out about this school year. Parents, pupils and teachers have all sounded an alarm about the SQA’s plans. Should not that be her focus?

The First Minister: All those things are my daily focuses. Not only am I perfectly willing and happy to have questions asked of me about my record, my policies and my plans, but I am happy to allow the Scottish people to judge them in an election. Ruth Davidson, however, wants to continue to be a politician, but without the consent of a single person in this country. She is heading to an unelected chamber, but has the brass neck to lecture the rest of us about scrutiny and accountability. No ermine robe in the world will cover up that hypocrisy.

On education, we decided not to take the time to pass legislation, but instead to get on and do all the things that would have been in the bill, but without the need for legislation. We are investing record sums in closing the attainment gap, we are supporting young people through this difficult period, and we will work with the SQA. Unlike other Governments, we will not blame bodies such as the SQA; we will take responsibility, and we will work with the authority to ensure that young people are supported in catching up with their education. That crucial work to close the attainment gap and to raise standards for all continues. We will be accountable for that before the Scottish people in just a few months.

Discharge of Patients into Care Homes

2. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I remind members of my entry in the register of members’ interests, especially my trade union membership.

We now know that, in the early days of the pandemic, not only were untested patients discharged into care homes, but patients who had tested positive for Covid-19 were sent into care

homes. The Scottish Government can continue to wait for the data from Public Health Scotland, but those are undisputed facts, even if they had to be uncovered by freedom of information requests and journalistic digging.

The review that was announced yesterday into the future of social care is welcome, and a national care service is something for which Scottish Labour has been calling for a decade. However, we cannot go forward without looking back at what went wrong in care homes during this pandemic.

This morning, I spoke to Alan Wightman, a member of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group. He told me that his mother was in a care home in Fife. He has no complaints about the care that she got in the home but, sadly, she died from Covid-19 on 6 May. She had just turned 80.

Alan is angry. He says that the Government “seeded the virus into care homes”

without considering the consequences. He told me that he does not want compensation; he just wants to prevent other families from having to suffer. He told me that, as well as a human rights-based full public inquiry, we need an urgent review and, in his words, “we need it fast.”

For Alan’s sake and for the sake of all those other grieving families, will the First Minister instigate an urgent independent review of what happened? Scotland’s bereaved families deserve answers, they deserve justice, and they should not have to wait.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, my condolences are with everyone who is in Alan’s position, and they specifically go to him for the loss that he and his family have suffered. As I know everybody does, I deeply regret every single loss of life in this pandemic overall and, particularly because of the vulnerability of the people involved, the loss of lives in care homes.

My job right now is to continue to take decisions with my colleagues to steer the country as safely as possible through the remainder of this pandemic, and none of us knows how long that will take. I have a duty to the country to ensure that our undivided focus is on that task, which is what I intend to do.

We learn lessons as we go and take a range of advice about the steps that we require to put in place, which is why we have changed our position on a range of things, from the guidance in place through to testing and care home visits, as we learn more about the virus and the experience that people have had. We will continue to do that.

Although I am not complacent, and every single death is one too many, we have seen the situation in care homes improve over a number of weeks,

with a reduction in cases and—thankfully—a vast reduction in the number of older people losing their lives, which says that the arrangements that have been put in place around care homes are effective. There will be a full public inquiry into all aspects of the matter, to which care homes will be absolutely essential, and we will continue to take steps to learn as we go.

It is important that we do not lose focus on continuing to take the best decisions that we can. I know that there is a sense—a real desire—on everybody's part to think that we are through this crisis. We are not through it; we are about to go into winter and we must remain focused on doing all the things that are required to keep the country as safe as possible.

Richard Leonard: It is precisely because we are going into winter that we need transparency around the lessons that we need to learn from that first wave and the awful death toll that took place in Scotland's care homes.

I move again to yesterday's announcement. I said that Scottish Labour has long called for a national care service, so to see the First Minister come around to our way of thinking—not before time—is welcome. A commitment to a social care review is different from a commitment to wholesale reform. My concern is that the First Minister does not seem to know what a national care service should look like. She should not need an independent review to tell her the basic principles on which such a service should be built.

We know that private providers, which have higher rates of staff vacancies and turnover, currently run three quarters of Scotland's care homes. HC-One, the largest provider, receives substantial amounts of public money but is owned by holding companies that are registered in offshore tax havens such as the Channel Islands and the Cayman Islands. We believe that a national care service must remove the profit motive from the delivery of care. That is not a technical matter but a political and moral question. Why cannot the First Minister bring herself to agree?

The First Minister: I do agree and think that I have done so before. Before I come to that point, I will complete the point about transparency around care homes, because I agree with that point, too. It is the reason why we take certain steps and why, for example, we have asked Public Health Scotland by the end of this month to produce validated statistics on patients who were tested prior to discharge into care homes, which include the outcome and the date of that test, so that we know exactly what happened and are able to ensure that we learn the appropriate and proper lessons. As we focus on the decisions that lie ahead of us, we learn as we go and will ensure—

unlike any other part of the United Kingdom so far—that validated reports allow Parliament to properly scrutinise the matter, which is important.

On the issue of a national care service, I agree with the principles that Richard Leonard has enunciated. However—I say this as a statement of fact; it is not intended as a pejorative or a political point—there is a difference between a call for something in opposition and the delivery of it in government. One has to work out not just the vision that one seeks to achieve but the detail of how one gets from here to there, which is why it is really important that we do that properly and systematically, and that we understand all the practical issues around the employment of staff, structural integration, consistency of standards, funding and charging for care homes and how that has to be funded.

My job—the Scottish Government's job—is not just to say what we want to have happen but to put in place the plans that can deliver it. That is the serious work that we are committed to undertaking, helped of course by the independent review that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport announced yesterday. That is the responsibility of Government, which I take seriously every day, and on which I will be judged at the election in a few months' time, as I said to Ruth Davidson.

Richard Leonard: Of course, the concern is that experience tells us that, when the Scottish National Party Government resorts to reviews, it often means kicking things into the long grass. There are steps that could be taken now that would show that the Government is serious about improving social care. Will the First Minister give a commitment today to appoint trade union representatives and representatives of care users to the review panel that was announced yesterday, so that the voices of those who deliver care, and those who receive it, are at the centre of the review? Will the First Minister establish collective bargaining in the care sector, as recommended by her own fair work convention? Finally, will she act to ensure that the extraordinary staff who deliver social care are given the status that they deserve, the security at work that they need, and the pay and conditions that they have long merited?

The First Minister: On the composition of the independent review, we will listen to suggestions, and if there is a feeling that we want to add people to it, we will consider that. Trade unions and the voice of the trade unions are vital to everything that we do, and I think that most people who look at how we do our business would see that as being the case.

On the point about the voice of care users, Ian Welsh—who, in the dark and distant past, was a

Labour MSP—from the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland is on the review representing care users. Malcolm Chisholm, the former Labour Minister for Health and Community Care is also a member of the review. We have cast the net widely to get people who have experience of the issues that we are dealing with, from across the political spectrum. I hope that that is welcomed.

Richard Leonard has absolutely illustrated the point that I am making about the difference between calling for something in opposition, and delivering it in government. He asks us to make sure that the dedicated people who work in the care sector—and they are dedicated people who have my eternal gratitude, particularly after the past few months—have the pay, conditions and status. There is a practical problem with my giving that guarantee right now, as we do not directly employ a single one of those people. Therefore, we have to look at how we reform the system to allow all that to be delivered. It is not enough for me as First Minister just to wish something into reality—I have to take steps to bring it into reality, and that is what I am committed to doing.

We want to move quickly, which is why we have asked the independent review to give us a report by January, although I am not sure whether Richard Leonard will still be standing in his place by then—we will wait and see. By January, we will have the first report of the independent review that will allow us to take actions in the short term, and also continue the work in the longer term. It is a big opportunity for us all, and I give Richard Leonard a lot of credit for arguing the case for it. Let us pull together and make sure that we seize the opportunity to turn the goal into reality. None of us does a service to that goal if we simply try to gloss over the real complexities of achieving it. It is really important that we get it right, and I hope that Richard Leonard will engage with the independent review in the constructive way in which I am sure he intends to.

Coronavirus (Local Measures)

3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The Scottish Greens have consistently supported a precautionary approach with the aim of eliminating coronavirus. Although we all regret the need for the introduction of extra measures in Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire, we know that it is necessary if we are going to stop local outbreaks as rapidly as we can.

The First Minister has recognised that many people find it hard to see why rules that apply to homes do not apply to other places where more people from more households are mixing, and communicating that message will be a bigger challenge as new students arrive in Glasgow in the coming weeks for the start of term. Included

among them will be a substantial number of international students. How will the Scottish Government support clear communication about the measures at a local level, what steps will be taken to ensure that young people arriving in Glasgow understand the new restrictions, and what role will testing play in ensuring that the start of term will not increase the risk to communities or university staff?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Many of those questions are addressed and answered, as Patrick Harvie will be aware, in the updated guidance for further and higher education that was published yesterday by the Deputy First Minister.

In terms of international students, the key and most effective measure is to ensure that quarantine responsibilities and obligations are being adhered to. In the guidance, we have made clear our expectation that education institutions will ensure that their students understand and comply with the restrictions.

International students might come from countries where the public health advice is not exactly the same as it is here. It is a core part of the guidance to ensure that universities and colleges are doing everything that they need to, whether that is providing information in induction packs or providing on-going information, so that students know the advice that is in place here, in Scotland, and comply with it.

As with a whole range of issues, we continue to keep testing under review and take on-going clinical advice on it. The balance of judgment that we have reached on students coming from countries that are deemed to pose the highest risk is that quarantine is the most effective measure. If testing is seen to be an alternative to that, that could inadvertently increase the risk through a student arriving, getting a negative test and not quarantining although they might test positive later in the incubation period. Quarantine is what we have said is the most important measure in that regard.

More widely, we want to ensure that a student—like any member of the population—who has Covid symptoms goes quickly for testing and has good access to testing. As I have said before on the new walk-in testing centres that we will establish over the next few weeks, a key and principal priority for their location is where there are student populations. Indeed, it is no accident or coincidence that the first of the new walk-in centres is located in St Andrews.

We will continue to take an overview of all the issues. I am confident that the universities sector understands the importance of its responsibilities and will take the steps that it needs to take to keep students safe and ensure that the student

population does not pose a risk to the rest of the country.

Patrick Harvie: I appreciate that detailed answer. We all understand that there are complexities around using testing as effectively as we need to. However, the First Minister will know that there are university staff who share some of the same concerns that were felt by school staff ahead of schools reopening, and they want to have clarity about how the issues will be addressed.

We also need to be especially aware of the impact that lockdown has had and that the new restrictions will have on our most vulnerable citizens. We need unity and collective spirit across society if we are to recover from the crisis, and that cannot be achieved when vital support services are being lost.

In Glasgow, citizens advice bureaux, Glasgow and Clyde Rape Crisis, Glasgow Women's Aid, the Lodging House Mission and Drumchapel Money Advice Centre, among others, have been placed under threat. In just the past hour, they have been given a short-term lifeline, but they still face long-term uncertainty.

Does the First Minister accept that those are essential services, that they already struggle to meet demand and that demand is only likely to grow over the coming months? Does she agree that the Scottish Government must share with councils the responsibility of ensuring that those vital services in Glasgow and elsewhere are saved for the long term?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree. Not only do I think that those services are essential, but, as I used to work as a lawyer in Drumchapel Money Advice Centre, as Govan Law Centre is in my constituency and as Castlemilk Law and Money Advice Centre provides services in parts of my constituency, I see the importance of those services every day. Patrick Harvie is right: the demand for and reliance on services will only grow and is certainly not likely to decline.

I very much welcome Glasgow City Council's announcement this morning of a £4 million transition fund, which gives welcome relief to some of the services that were concerned about proposals over the past few days. It gives an opportunity for Glasgow City Council to work with services and the Government to work with local authorities to consider the best arrangements for long-term support. This morning's announcement not only is welcome in a practical sense but demonstrates that Glasgow City Council's administration is listening and attuned to concerns.

We all want to see those services protected, and we all fully understand—I know that Patrick Harvie, in particular, understands—the constraints

on the Scottish Government's budget and, by extension, the constraints on local authority budgets, but there is a strong sense of the importance of those services. I certainly want them to continue and go from strength to strength.

Test and Protect

4. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I, too, share the First Minister's concern about the recent outbreaks. Infection rates in the west of Scotland are now higher than in most of England or in countries such as Greece and Portugal, for which we have just imposed quarantine measures.

I am worried that we do not seem to be on top of it. First, we locked down Aberdeen, with city-wide measures. Now, we are restricting a whole region of almost 1 million people. What are we not getting right? Test and protect was supposed to drive the virus out before it spread. Why has that not happened in Aberdeen or Glasgow? Is it really up to the job?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, it is. I would encourage Willie Rennie to learn a little bit more about how test and protect operates in order to understand the importance of such systems not just in Scotland, not just across the United Kingdom, but in every country.

I think that Scotland has probably one of the best systems anywhere, because it is built from the bottom up, on our well-established health protection workforce. The way in which it works is not new, and we have scaled it up significantly.

If we had not used test and protect, we would not have been able to contain the outbreak in Aberdeen or to contain as effectively as was the case the outbreak in the 2 Sisters food processing plant in Coupar Angus. It is because of test and protect that those outbreaks have not seeded more widespread community transmission.

I have said right from the start—and I am not the only one—that test and protect is not the first line of defence and cannot do everything on its own. Test and protect is there when an outbreak starts, to make sure that it does not spread more widely and to give us crucial intelligence and data, so that we know where to target additional actions. We have taken certain actions in Glasgow that we did not take in Aberdeen because the problem with which we are dealing right now is not identical in nature to the problem in Aberdeen.

The first line of defence is all of us. Not only is Scotland not unique, but we are in no way out of sync with what is happening right across Europe, where transmission is rising. The numbers that I have announced today show a positivity rate of around 1 per cent, which is lower than the rate that will be found in many other countries right now, and it is well below the 5 per cent threshold that

the World Health Organization says is the sign of an outbreak being under control.

All of us have to play our part in keeping it under control. When we do not stick to the rules, outbreaks and clusters will happen, and then test and protect's job is to try to contain them. It is doing that job very well.

I target my final sentence at us all, myself included. We all have to do our job maybe just a bit better, because we are all perhaps thinking that it is over and not being as stringent, but this is the moment for us all to tighten up how we abide by all those really important rules.

Willie Rennie: I am sorry if the First Minister does not like my asking such questions, but it is important that Opposition members challenge the Government on its performance, and I am deeply worried that we are not on top of the virus. If we have to restrict the activities of almost a million people, I have a duty to ask what the Government is doing. The First Minister should accept that.

It was reported that some of the infections may have come from holidaymakers who returned home with the virus. Last week, I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Justice why the quarantine spot checks had lost almost 700 people. He did not know the answer. Do we have the outbreak in the west of Scotland because those quarantine spot checks did not work? If not, why do we have the outbreak?

The First Minister: I do not mind anybody asking me questions. I have probably answered more questions on Covid than any other leader anywhere in the world. I have no objection to that. However, there is a duty on all of us—not just in government, but in opposition as well—to make sure that we understand how all these things are working, so that we give the proper advice to people across Scotland.

Across the UK, the restrictions that are now in place in the west of Scotland have been in place for some weeks in the north-west of England, in places such as Manchester. Many parts of Europe have restrictions that are even more stringent. It is—and this absolutely is counterintuitive—because we are on top of this that we are acting preventatively, through early intervention, to try to stop these outbreaks running out of control, and it is test and protect that is giving us the information and data that allow us to target outbreaks as effectively as we can.

On quarantine, we have put in place regulations for countries where we think that there is a particular risk, and those arrangements are in place across the UK. We know from test and protect that a number of cases have come in from Greece, which is why we have acted earlier than other parts of the UK in placing that country on the

quarantine list. Public Health Scotland then does the job that it has been tasked with, doing sample checks to ensure compliance.

Those systems are working, but we will always keep their operation and efficacy under review. I come back to the fundamental point that it is down to every single one of us to abide by all the rules. That applies whether someone is coming back from a country overseas, having people in their house or going out and about. People must ensure that they are following all the rules. The Government has the lead responsibility here, but the Government cannot do this on its own; we all have to do the right things, and the good news is that, if we all do the right things, we can keep the virus under control.

Although the numbers that we—in common with many countries—are seeing right now are causing concern again, I come back to the point that, given the vastly increased number of tests that we are doing, we are still at a positivity rate of around 1 per cent. That should allow us, while being vigilant and not complacent, to keep this in perspective.

Covid-19 (Face Coverings)

5. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To ask the First Minister, in light of the approach of colder weather, reports of an increase in the Covid-19 transmission rate and concerns regarding some people not wearing face coverings in shops and public transport, how many fines have been issued for failing to comply with the face covering rules since they became mandatory and enforceable by the police. (S5F-04336)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Enforcement of the coronavirus regulations is a matter for the chief constable of Police Scotland. Police Scotland has indicated that, to date, the vast majority of people are complying with the regulations, as we would expect. In the approach that Police Scotland has taken, enforcement has always been a last resort; engagement, explanation and encouragement to comply are the first priorities and enforcement action is taken when those fail.

The latest data available on Police Scotland's website shows that 20 fixed-penalty notices were issued between 10 July, after face covering regulations came into force, and 25 August. The published figures are not broken down to show the reasons for issuing the fixed-penalty notices; it is, of course, Police Scotland data, the presentation and format of which is an operational matter for the chief constable.

Christine Grahame: I emphasise that I am not blaming the police. However, with Covid creep all too evident, bus drivers, store managers, shop

assistants and the public often feel helpless about and exasperated by the flouting of the rules on using face coverings by what is, in my view, a growing minority.

Is the Scottish Government considering upping the ante by requiring individuals to provide evidence of exemption—if asked, and discreetly; I am not suggesting general practitioners' notes, by any means—and providing for stiffer fines? Both approaches would deter non-compliance, assist the police and provide added protection for the travelling and shopping public, thereby releasing shop managers, shop assistants and bus drivers from the pressure that is sometimes put on them to do something.

The First Minister: The police must continue to act with discretion, as they have been doing. On Christine Grahame's question about amending the enforcement regime, we will keep that under review in a general sense. We have changed areas of enforcement on previous occasions and we will always consider doing that if we think that it is necessary. Levels of fixed-penalty fines for non-compliance are something that we can consider.

We have to continue to respond sensitively to people who have health reasons for not wearing face coverings—I know that Christine Grahame agrees with that.

We can and will have enforcement regimes in place, but the fundamental point is that we all have a duty to do the right things for the right reasons and not simply because the law says that we have to do them. Given that we have been living with Covid for six months now, I think that it is harder for all of us—and I include myself in that. These things are a real pain to have to comply with, and perhaps some of us, at times, do not take as much care as we should take.

We all have to remind ourselves of why these things are being advised and make sure that we comply at all stages. The vast majority of people are complying on face coverings, but I would urge anybody who is not complying without a good reason to really think about it, because wearing a face covering protects other people and other people wearing a face covering protects you. It is one of the best expressions of the collective solidarity that will get us through the crisis.

Lockdown (Severe Mental Distress)

6. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that police call-outs for people experiencing severe mental distress have increased by up to 25 per cent during the lockdown. (S5F-04341)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Police Scotland officers are very often the first to respond

to urgent situations involving people with mental health issues, and as such they have an important role in providing support as part of a multi-agency approach. That includes their role in the distress brief intervention programme, which takes referrals from emergency responders, including the police, to support individuals in distress. During the Covid pandemic, the Scottish Government has provided more than £1 million to expand the DBI programme nationally.

We have also provided an additional £2.1 million to enable the NHS 24 mental health hub to expand to a 24/7 service. As well as providing immediate help and advice, the hub can now refer individuals in emotional distress but who do not need emergency clinical intervention to the distress brief intervention programme for further support.

Brian Whittle: Third sector organisations are our main interface with the most vulnerable in society, especially during the current crisis. Those organisations are telling me that they are struggling with the severe lack of resource. There are reports of a rising suicide rate, there is a rising death rate among those suffering from addiction—of up to a third during lockdown—and a rising issue with adult and child poor mental health. It is little wonder that our front-line police are having to pick up the pieces.

The concern is—and I understand this—that there is a fixation on the effects of Covid-19 to the detriment of those in our society who mostly go unseen. Will the First Minister's Government look again with urgency at an offer of support to our third sector, and does she recognise that the crisis should give us the opportunity to look again at how we fund our third sector?

The First Minister: I will always keep under review how we fund the third sector, particularly during this crisis. As we do on so many other issues, we have an opportunity to consider how we do things generally and whether we can make more fundamental improvements. I will make this point again, because for me and the Government it is inescapable: our budget is largely finite and we stretch it as far as we can, but there are limits to that.

In relation to mental health funding, it is important that we give people places to go to for help and support that do not involve them going to emergency services, or to which they can be referred when they do contact emergency services, which is why the DBI programme and scaling up the NHS 24 service are so important.

In relation to additional investment during the crisis in support of children and young people—this is relevant to the third sector—we have invested for a helpline to be delivered by The Spark counselling service, we have given extra

funding to Young Scot to develop enhanced digital content for young people and we have given funding to the National Autistic Society to give more help to people with autism. We have supported third sector organisations in a range of ways, and I agree with Brian Whittle that we have a duty to make sure that we continue to look carefully at that to ensure that where further support is required, we are able to provide it, where possible.

Test and Protect System

7. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that the test and protect system is functioning effectively. (S5F-04344)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Test and protect is working well and doing what we need it to do: identifying positive cases early, tracing contacts so that they get the right public health advice and providing us with the detailed data to guide our response more broadly. Fluctuations in demand for testing have always been likely, and indeed, probable. Following the increase in demand for testing that we saw after schools went back, we brought additional contingency capacity online, including additional mobile testing units, and work is on-going to further increase laboratory capacity in Scotland. We will continue to make sure that the capacity to test people and the capacity to process those tests increases and has contingencies built in.

In addition, as I said yesterday, we will soon launch the proximity tracing app, protect Scotland, which will complement the proven and well-established person-to-person contact tracing that test and protect is based on.

Jackie Baillie: Care workers in my constituency and across Scotland are reporting delays in receiving the results from Covid-19 tests. In some cases, the delays are for five or six days, which means that staff do not know whether it is safe for them to be at their work. The First Minister knows that pressure on testing will build over winter, so there is a need to increase capacity, particularly when there is the risk of increased transmission and local restrictions in areas such as mine, in West Dunbartonshire.

Can the First Minister advise when capacity will be increased and when the 22 local testing centres will be rolled out? I welcome the siting of the mobile army testing unit in West Dunbartonshire, because of the new restrictions in the area, but can the First Minister commit to providing permanent local testing facilities so that my constituents do not have to travel huge distances to places such as Dunoon or Edinburgh to get tested?

The First Minister: The mobile capacity is important, because of its mobile nature. Even in Jackie Baillie's constituency, it allows us to take capacity to particular areas that are much closer to people. It is important not only that we have fixed capacity in strategic locations around the country, but that we keep that mobile capacity, so that we can be more flexible in terms of the response. Of course, the army mobile testing units—I express my gratitude to the army, as I did yesterday—are now being run by the Scottish Ambulance Service.

We have a short turnaround time for testing. Over the past two weeks, there have been pressures on that because of the increase in demand not only in Scotland, but across the United Kingdom. We work closely with the UK Government, which can be seen in the provision of tests by the care home portal and the throughput via the lighthouse laboratory, which is administered by the UK Government. We work constructively to ensure that Scotland's capacity within that system is properly safeguarded. In addition, we are building national health service laboratory capacity and looking at ways in which we can use NHS resources to do tests in order to ensure that the capacity in the UK-wide system is going where it is most needed.

Testing demand and the delivery of tests will always fluctuate to some extent, given the nature of what we are dealing with. However, with regard to the so-called pillar 2 testing, the figures for 26 August—which, although they are a few days old, I will use because they allow us to give the most up-to-date comparison with other parts of the UK—show that, proportionally, more than double the amount of testing was done in Scotland than was done in England, although that was partly because of our schools going back. We need to ensure that there is an in-built flexibility and contingency to this, and that is what we are committed to doing.

Covid-19 Restrictions (West of Scotland)

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): As we have heard this afternoon, the recent spike in cases in Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire has led to measures being put in place to reduce the risk of a rapid rise in Covid-19 cases. Clarity of messaging is very important, and two themes have been raised with me over the past 12 hours or so. Can the First Minister confirm whether tradespeople can continue to operate in people's houses and whether informal childcare such as a gran looking after a grandchild after school can continue to take place?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Those are the important practical questions that people always have in these situations. There is a detailed question-and-answer page on the

Scottish Government website that addresses both those points.

Yes, people can still have tradesmen going into their houses to carry out essential repairs or installations or to make deliveries, but we are saying that they should take particular care to follow all the rules around hygiene and the correct wearing of face coverings while any of that is happening. Formal and informal childcare arrangements can also continue but, again, extra care should be taken with informal childcare arrangements that involve an adult or child from another household entering someone else's home.

We are trying to be proportionate and to minimise restrictions as much as possible but, on the basis of the clinical advice, to ensure that the restrictions are targeted as effectively as possible, in order to get to the heart of where we think the risk of transmission is coming from. That is what we have tried to do in the west of Scotland.

Exam Diet 2021

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what discussions are taking place between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Qualifications Authority about the timing of the 2021 exam diet.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We continue to discuss those issues on an on-going basis. We are not the only Government across the United Kingdom that is having to deal with them. I hope that normality returns to the education system and to our exam system next year, but we are in a highly uncertain situation and it is important that we respond to that. We will also want to take account of the review of the situation this year that has been commissioned; we will ensure that that informs any decisions that we take.

Glasgow Advice Centres (Funding)

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): There has been a lot of pain, hurt and anger in Glasgow over the past week about the proposal to cut—or, in some cases, completely withdraw—funding from lifeline last-resort and crisis services, such as citizens advice bureaux, law centres, Glasgow Women's Aid and Glasgow and Clyde Rape Crisis. I welcome the £4 million resilience fund that was announced today, but it should not have taken a campaign in the city over the past week from people who are already distressed by the virus to save those vital services.

We are in the middle of a pandemic. Thousands of our citizens have lost their lives and hundreds of thousands of them risk losing their jobs. Our economy has collapsed and our services are not coping. How did anyone think that cutting those

services now was the answer? As a fellow Glasgow MSP and someone who cares passionately about those issues, will the First Minister condemn that proposal and decision from Glasgow City Council? As First Minister, will she ensure that those services are adequately funded now and into the long term? Collectively, we should be fighting to strengthen, not decimate, those support services.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I have a huge amount of sympathy for the sentiment behind that question. As a Glasgow MSP, Anas Sarwar will have spent a lot of time looking into the issue very closely—as I have in the past week, for my constituency interests—so he knows that the fund that had been allocated was massively oversubscribed. As is the case for Governments and councils, tough decisions have to be made. A set of proposals has been put forward that, as I understand it, does not go for political consideration by the council until tomorrow. Rightly, the council has responded to understandable concerns about the impact of the proposals on the advice sector. Today, Jennifer Layden, the councillor who is responsible for that area of administration, has made a very welcome announcement. These are difficult times. Because our budget is largely finite while our decisions are still effectively governed by decisions that have been taken elsewhere, those difficult decisions cannot be escaped. However, the decision that was announced by Glasgow City Council this morning is a recognition of the importance of those services and a welcome signal that the council is listening carefully and trying to make the right decisions, given the current situation that we face.

Ravenscraig Covid-19 Testing Centre

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): My office received a concerning report from a constituent, who had attended a scheduled Covid-19 test at Ravenscraig regional sports centre. They arrived to find the site closed; the gates were padlocked, and there was no signage or information for those who were affected. Is the First Minister aware of that problem? What improvements can we expect, now that the Scottish Ambulance Service is assuming responsibility for test sites such as Ravenscraig in my constituency?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The mobile testing system has been working well. Having it run now by the Scottish Ambulance Service gives us greater flexibility and allows us to make sure that we are building the required resilience into that. I have not been aware of particular issues at Ravenscraig. Obviously, I would be very happy and keen to look into and understand further the issue that Clare Adamson has raised today, so if she can write with more

detail of the situation that she described, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport or I will look into it and get back to her as soon as possible.

Obesity

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Prior to Covid-19, Scotland was losing the battle against obesity, with two in three people being overweight or obese. Clearly, the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated an already serious problem, with directors of public health calling for action to tackle issues such as poor diet and lack of exercise. What measures will the Government put in place to ensure that adequate support and help is afforded to those who need it most?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): All of us must ensure that we do everything that we can to address the serious issues of obesity and healthy weight. I commend yesterday's programme for government to Alexander Stewart. If he reads that, he will see the range of work that the Government will take forward to do that.

From memory, I think that, in setting out the programme for government, I specifically mentioned the £500 million of investment in active travel over the next few years. That investment will encourage people to use active ways of getting around that help to give them exercise, which is a key part of tackling obesity and unhealthy weight.

We had to put on hold legislation on unhealthy promotions, but we want to get that back on track as quickly as possible. In a range of ways, we are seeking to support health boards and local organisations to promote the kind of behaviour that we want people to take up and which will allow all of us to get on top of what is a big issue. We have always known about the issue but, given the experience of Covid, we have been reminded of how important it is to people's overall health.

School Exam Grades (Appeals)

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of the calls that have been made by the SQA: Where's Our Say? campaign group, which has raised concerns from a significant number of young people who still feel that their grades are not fair and that the issue is far from resolved. The group makes two calls. The first is that individuals, not schools, should be able to submit appeals when there is evidence of performance that was not part of teacher assessment. The second is that individuals should be permitted to submit an appeal when estimated grades were lower than those that were submitted via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

Earlier in the session, the First Minister claimed that she takes responsibility for the mistakes that have been made on exam grades. It is two days until university places will be fixed, so will she make good on that claim and give young people the direct right of appeal that they were promised?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Qualifications Authority has given appeal options in the context of the position that we reached on teacher judgments being used for this year's results. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills will be happy to write to Daniel Johnson with more detail on the SQA's reasons for coming to that decision.

I know that this has been a difficult period for all young people, but we have already given a commitment that we will fund more university places, so that young people do not lose out as a result of the issues that have been encountered this year.

Hunterston B Power Station

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Hunterston B power station, in my constituency, will cease energy production in early 2022. Although defueling will mean that there will be no immediate job losses, investment in local green, clean energy is now the priority, not least through delivery of the commitments that were made through the Ayrshire growth deal. Realisation of plans to revert the neighbouring Hunterston Port and Resource Centre, with its deepwater port, to include logistics energy research is vital and must be progressed if we are to sustain and then grow North Ayrshire's economy. Will the Scottish Government work in partnership with the United Kingdom Government and North Ayrshire Council to deliver the economic transition of the area, as part of its green new deal?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We absolutely will. The decommissioning of Hunterston B power station raises challenges, but it also raises opportunities in relation to our energy mix and community and economic regeneration. It is important that we work collaboratively to seize those opportunities. There is a real relevance here to the just transition approach that we are taking. The Ayrshire growth deal, which Kenny Gibson mentioned, has a key part to play in that regard. We look forward to working with all partners to ensure that decommissioning is done properly and in a way that has employment and the interests of local communities very much at its heart.

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Yesterday's programme for government mentioned the Hate Crime and Public Order

(Scotland) Bill, but it failed to mention the bill's costs. Submissions by the police suggest that the bill's costs have been grossly underestimated and that several policing costs have not even been accounted for. Does the First Minister recognise the police's concerns? Given that many other concerns have already been highlighted about the bill, will she now consider rethinking it?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I think that Liam Kerr asked that question yesterday—forgive me if I am misremembering—so I will probably just repeat the answer that I gave then. We are at the start of the legislative process. I know that concerns have been raised about the bill. I have given a commitment that we are listening carefully and that, if we require to lodge amendments, we will do so. Issues relating to the bill's financial implications will be fully considered and taken account of as part of the legislative process. That is the right and proper way to do things in Parliament.

I make no apology for thinking that it is really important that, as a society, we do more to tackle hate crime. The pernicious impact of hate crime on groups that are often already disadvantaged is unacceptable; none of us should be prepared to tolerate or live with that.

On the other hand, freedom of speech and expression is absolutely fundamental and, as legislators, it is our responsibility to strike the right balance. These things are not easy, but we are elected to come to this place to do that difficult work. That is what the legislative process is for, and I encourage Liam Kerr to engage with it in detail—as I am sure that he will—rather than simply throwing headlines across the chamber. Let us get down to the detail of doing the hard work to get to the right outcome, which I think that most people across the country want to see.

Mesh Implant Removal

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): The new Scottish mesh removal service has been established with a budget of £37,000 per patient. That is almost double what it would cost if women were to make the choice to travel to the United States for removal surgery carried out by pioneering surgeon Dr Veronikis.

Women in Scotland will not return for removal surgery to doctors who recommended that they receive the implants in the first place. That trust is broken, and they do not believe that those doctors have the knowledge or training to carry out full, safe mesh removals. Therefore, in the interests of patient safety and wellbeing and, indeed, of value for money, will the First Minister agree that, if the women so choose, they can be treated by Dr Veronikis, with the national health service covering the cost of their visit for this specialist procedure?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will make two or three quick points in response to that. As Neil Findlay knows, I have spoken directly to many of the women who are affected by mesh implants, so I absolutely understand the trust breakdown issue. I do not say this glibly or underestimate how difficult it is, but I also think that there is responsibility on the part of Government to try to rebuild that trust. That is part of the impetus of the work that we are trying to do, and it is right that we seek to do that, working with women.

We will consider options—the best options for any woman. On whether we will support women to go to other countries, we need to consider not only the procedures but aftercare and ensure that there is an integrated approach to the care of women. That has, perhaps, been one of the things that has not been sufficiently prioritised in the past.

I will not go into great detail, but as those who are close to the issue probably know more than most members do, we have worked very hard to try to get good arrangements with Dr Veronikis, but for one reason or another, those have not come to pass in the way that we thought that they might. However, we continue to be open minded and we have continued to try to persuade—facilitate is probably a better word; we have tried to facilitate Dr Veronikis coming to Scotland in a proper way that allows proper care for women.

We will continue to try to do the right things in a whole range of ways and to consider any outcome that any woman asks us to consider. The health secretary will continue to give the issue the utmost priority.

Childcare (Extension)

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Yesterday, Opposition parties claimed that the extension of free childcare to 1,140 hours was not being delivered. Can the First Minister tell us how many of Scotland's 32 local authorities are delivering 1,140 hours, despite the impact of Covid?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Eleven councils are currently delivering 1,140 hours in full: Angus, Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee City, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Scottish Borders, Shetland, South Ayrshire and Stirling.

Eighteen councils are delivering 1,140 hours in some or most nurseries, and some of them are substantially delivering them. For example, 84 per cent of nurseries in Perth and Kinross are delivering them in full; the number is 80 per cent in Renfrewshire and 85 per cent in Edinburgh.

There are only three councils in the whole country that are not delivering any of the 1,140 hours provision, although, to be fair to them, they all have plans in place to progress it. The three councils not delivering any right now are Labour-led North Lanarkshire, Labour-led West Lothian and Tory-led Aberdeenshire. I hope to see progress in those three councils as we deliver that flagship commitment in full. *[Nicola Sturgeon has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]*

Student Paramedics (Bursaries)

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): Yesterday, the First Minister expressed her gratitude to the emergency services for the work that they have done during the Covid crisis, and I join her in that gratitude. She will be aware of the Pay Student Paramedics campaign. Will she agree to establish a bursary scheme for student paramedics that is similar to the scheme that is available to student nurses?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am aware of the campaign, which some of my constituents have contacted me about. In the interests of time, I will not cover all the details, but we provide support for student paramedics in a range of ways. We intend to look at the call for a bursary. We are about to review the arrangements for allied health professionals in general and we will include the issue in that review. I am sure that members from all parties, as well as student paramedics, will make a strong case for the arrangements that they think are appropriate.

Pre-operation Shielding (Islands Patients)

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The First Minister will be aware that requirements for patients to shield ahead of medical operations preclude the use of public transport. She will also be aware that patients from Orkney and Shetland who need specialist treatment in hospitals on the Scottish mainland have to take a ferry or plane to get there. Therefore, the current two-week quarantine period prior to an operation effectively prevents isles patients from getting the treatment that they need.

I understand that revised guidance that would greatly reduce that quarantine period has been developed, bringing it in line with what is in place elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Will the First Minister ensure that that guidance is urgently implemented, so that patients in my constituency have the same access to treatment as those in other parts of Scotland?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am aware of the issue, and I know that it has had the health secretary's attention. We are finalising the guidance to make sure that appropriate

arrangements are put in place that do not make it more difficult for patients from the islands to get the treatment that they need. I will ask the health secretary to correspond with the member about the timescale for and detail of that guidance, which we hope to publish fairly soon. We will keep the member updated.

The Presiding Officer: With apologies to members, we have to conclude First Minister's questions at that point. Parliament will resume at 2.30 with a statement on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

13:31

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Good afternoon, everyone. The first item of business this afternoon is a statement by John Swinney on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill—a revolution in children’s rights. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): I am delighted to confirm that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced in the Parliament yesterday, has today been published and will begin its parliamentary passage.

This is one of the most significant pieces of legislation to be considered by the Parliament in the 20 years since devolution. It is a bill of the highest constitutional and legal significance that must also transform the lives of our children. If it is approved by the Parliament, the bill will mean that Scotland is the first country in the United Kingdom to directly incorporate children’s rights into domestic law. I thank the children and young people and the children’s rights defenders who campaigned for the bill and made it possible.

The Scottish Government is committed to fully realising the human rights of all people in Scotland. We are committed to building a Scotland where respect for human rights anchors our society and the institutions that govern and deliver public services for the people of Scotland. The bill represents a significant step on the road to fully realising that future for Scotland—a future based on tolerance, equality, shared values and respect for the worth and human dignity of all our people.

The dual impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union underline the importance of building human rights into the fabric of society. Nowhere is that more important than in relation to children and young people, whose futures depend on the action that is taken by all public authorities to implement their rights in practice. Children’s rights matter now more than ever.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the global gold standard for children’s rights. By incorporating those rights directly into the law in Scotland, the bill will revolutionise how

we protect, respect and fulfil children’s rights. It will ensure that children and young people are involved in the decisions that affect their lives and communities. Where breaches of children’s rights occur, the bill will mean that, for the first time, children and young people can use the courts to enforce those rights.

The bill takes a maximalist approach and will deliver the highest protection for children’s rights that is possible within the boundaries set by the Scotland Act 1998. The rights and obligations in the UNCRC and the first and second optional protocols are incorporated fully and directly, using the language of the convention itself, to the maximum extent of the Scottish Parliament’s powers.

It is of fundamental importance that all children and young people can access and enforce their rights. The bill will therefore apply to all children and young people under the age of 18, in line with the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The definition of “public authorities” in the bill has been drawn intentionally wide. The duty in the bill will apply to public authorities to the fullest extent possible within the powers of the Parliament. That includes the devolved functions of core public bodies, such as local authorities, health boards and the police, and the devolved functions of public bodies that have mixed devolved and reserved functions. The bill makes it clear that the duty applies to the Scottish ministers and the courts. The duty in the bill will also apply to private bodies when they exercise functions of a public nature.

Although the duty cannot apply so as to modify the law on reserved matters, it may apply in some circumstances to reserved functions when that would not modify the law on reserved matters. That will require that careful consideration must be given to the circumstances of children and young people in practice.

Human rights can be fully realised in Scotland only if all institutions of the state take action to respect, protect and fulfil the rights that belong to every member of Scottish society. That includes this Parliament. The Scottish Government recognises that the Parliament itself requires to give further consideration to how the requirements of the bill should be applied to its functions, and we look forward to working with members on that question during the bill’s passage.

The duty on public authorities in the bill follows the model of the Human Rights Act 1998, requiring that public authorities must not act incompatibly with the rights and obligations incorporated by the bill. The duty in the Human Rights Act 1998 is well

understood and the approach will provide as stable a framework as possible.

Children have their human rights, as set out in the European convention on human rights, protected by the Human Rights Act 1998. The bill will ensure that children and young people will also have legal protection for their children's rights. My ambition has been to ensure that the bill puts in place the highest possible level of protection for children's rights. My preferred approach would be to require all legislation, past and future, to be compatible with children's rights, with the courts having the power to "strike down" incompatible legislation. That reflects a founding principle of the Scottish Parliament—that the institution exists to serve every member of Scottish society. The power to pass legislation that breaches human rights is not one that the Parliament should have, nor do I think that it is a power that members wish to have. However, provision requiring future legislation to be compatible with the UNCRC would alter the competence of the Parliament and is not, therefore, something that can currently be delivered by an act of the Scottish Parliament.

In line with the maximalist approach, it is my intention that a court should be able to strike down legislation when that is possible. The bill will therefore provide for different remedies in relation to legislation that predates and postdates the commencement of the bill. The bill will enable the courts to strike down incompatible legislation that predates commencement of the bill, and the courts will be able to declare legislation that postdates commencement of the bill incompatible. The bill will also ensure that damages can be awarded by the courts by way of just satisfaction.

The benefit of that approach is that, as far as is possible within the powers of the Scottish Parliament, breaches of children's rights in historic legislation will not endure. In relation to future legislation, a finding by the courts that legislation is incompatible will bring transparency to breaches of children's rights. Other measures in the bill will put in place a very strong framework to ensure the compatibility of legislation with children's rights in practice.

The bill requires the Scottish ministers to publish child rights and wellbeing impact assessments and to make statements of compatibility for Government primary and secondary legislation. That will bring greater transparency and accountability for children's rights into the legislative process. Ministers will also be required to undertake child rights and wellbeing impact assessments in relation to strategic decision making. The bill will require ministers to publish a children's rights scheme on an annual basis, setting out what arrangements they have made or propose to fulfil the UNCRC compatibility duty.

Ministers will also be required to report on the progress made and plans ahead for children's rights.

The children's rights scheme and reporting requirements will aid transparency and scrutiny of how the Scottish ministers will fulfil their obligations under the bill to ensure that children's rights are considered proactively and fully implemented in practice. Building on the progress that has been made under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, public authorities that are listed in the bill will continue to be required to report every three years.

Children and young people face additional barriers to realising their rights and accessing justice, and the bill introduces specific measures in recognition of that fact. Those include ensuring that claims are not time barred during childhood and giving the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland the power to raise claims in the public interest.

In order to bring further transparency and accountability for breaches of children's rights, the bill will require the Scottish ministers to report to the Scottish Parliament within six months following a court's decision to strike down legislation or declare legislation incompatible. The bill will also include remedial powers, similar to those that exist in relation to the European convention on human rights, to enable ministers to take steps quickly to amend legislation that is found to be incompatible or potentially incompatible.

The bill builds on a strong track record across public authorities of implementing children's rights in Scotland. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that public bodies are supported to fully implement the bill and will work in partnership with them on a £2 million implementation programme over three years. The bill will mean that children, young people and their families will experience public authorities consistently acting to uphold the rights of all children in Scotland. It will ensure that there is a proactive culture of everyday accountability for children's rights across public services in Scotland.

The Scottish Government wants a Scotland where policy, law and decision making take account of children's rights. We want a Scotland where all children have a voice and are empowered not just to know and understand their rights but also to assert and defend those rights and the rights of others. Fully realising the fundamental human rights of children and young people is essential to building the more prosperous, equal future that the Scottish Government wants for everyone in Scotland and especially for our children. Today, we embark on a parliamentary journey to fully realise the rights of

all children and young people in Scotland. This is a landmark day in securing the rights and the future of Scotland's children.

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

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

Conservative members will fully support measures that protect and enhance the rights of children and young people that are set out in domestic legislation and international conventions. I commend the efforts of members and others outwith Parliament who have been faithful to their promise to bring the matter to Parliament.

We will work with the Scottish Government on the bill, and we will scrutinise and improve it where we can, and will ensure that the consultation is wide and respectful. There is no doubt that myriad technical and legal questions will arise from the bill—not least on how it will work alongside the UK Human Rights Act 1998, which transposes the European convention on human rights into UK law.

My question for the cabinet secretary is largely technical. What assessment has the Government made, in advance of publication of the bill, of any interactions, interplay or potential conflicts between the rights that are set out in the bill and those that are in any other relevant UK legislation and in the European and United Nations conventions? What assessment has been made of areas where there are divisions between devolved and reserved matters, and of potential conflicts between those areas and the complex hierarchy and interactions between the multiple conventions and pieces of legislation? What firm mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that any conflicts that arise will be dealt with fairly, so that any future bills that are passed by the Scottish Parliament do not spend endless months in the courts, which would serve no one?

John Swinney: I whole-heartedly agree with Jamie Greene that there will be “myriad technical ... questions”. I have wrestled with many of them in the course of the past couple of years, as we have prepared the bill.

The bill has been designed to try to avoid all the challenges that Mr Greene has set out; I stress the word “designed”. Parliament will have to scrutinise aspects of that to ensure that we have got the design architecture correct.

Mr Greene will know that by virtue of the Scotland Act 1998, this Parliament's legislation must be compatible with the terms of the Human

Rights Act 1998 and the European convention on human rights. That is a requirement of the Scotland Act that we cannot breach. We are required to act in a certain way, and the bill is designed to be compatible with that requirement.

There will, of course, be a range of issues in relation to which we cannot fully incorporate the provisions of the UNCRC because of reserved powers. There are a number of technical examples of that which, of course, we will happily explore with Parliament as we proceed with scrutiny of the legislation. However, we have designed a bill with the intention of enhancing protection of the rights of children and young people in our society, in a fashion that is compatible with the legal framework within which we must operate.

I will make a final point. Mr Greene talked about the role of the courts. I suspect that that will be an issue of some controversy, because members will be anxious to avoid legislation being challenged in the courts. However, in all honesty, one of the powerful elements of the bill is that it creates the opportunity for children, if there is the view that their rights are being infringed, to challenge legislation in the courts. That is an essential part of the approach that we are taking in the bill.

Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of his statement.

As a long-standing supporter of incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, I welcome the announcement that the First Minister made yesterday, and the statement and commitment that the cabinet secretary has given today.

The bill has widespread support not just in Parliament, but in civic society, and delivering its aims will require a full understanding of children's rights as well as appropriate funding. The £2 million funding package sounds low for achieving the full aims of incorporation. How will the Scottish Government ensure that bodies that will be more impacted by delivering the bill, such as local authorities and integration joint boards, will be appropriately funded to deliver all the aims of the bill?

John Swinney: First, I acknowledge the long-standing contribution that Mary Fee has made to the debate on incorporation, and the consistent support that she has given for that approach being taken. During consideration of the bill, I am sure that she will bring that significant expertise to bear in the scrutiny process, and I welcome that.

I have set out the funding approaches that we will take in relation to the implementation programme. However, the point that I make to Mary Fee—it was a critical point in my statement—is that the bill must enable the creation

of a proactive culture of everyday accountability for children's rights. Therefore, I do not consider it to be an issue or question that is to be solved by allocation of money to public authorities. It is about making sure that the culture of public authorities operates appropriately to protect children's rights. That is more about the outlook and perspective of organisations than it is about the amount of money that is spent. Although many of them do a very good and accomplished task in that respect, we need to focus on the creation of that everyday culture. I hope that that will be a product of the passage of the bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to open questions. I would like to get them all in, so please be aware of the length of questions and answers.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary expand on how, in practice, the bill will help children to realise and enforce their rights? For instance, what support will be available to ensure that all children, no matter their background, resources or the resources of their parents, are able to do that?

John Swinney: The bill will fulfil the objectives that Ruth Maguire asks about in two respects—first, by creating the opportunity for young people to challenge legislation about which they are concerned and, secondly, by empowering the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland to make such interventions. That combination of the individual and the advocacy role of the commissioner is an important balance.

The other point to make—which, I suspect, I will come back to frequently in the course of my answers—is about the culture that I talked about in my answer to Mary Fee: the importance of changing the way in which public authorities act, in order to ensure that they operate with full cognisance of their obligation to fulfil children's rights.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): I warmly welcome today's announcement that the Government intends to incorporate the UNCRC into Scots law, which has been my party's long-held policy. I thank all those who have campaigned to that end for many years.

For this important bill to have maximum impact, for the 54 articles of the convention to make a real difference and for the rights to feel real, it is key that all those who work and interact with our young people understand the rights and know what they are. Those people include parents, carers, health professionals, social workers, and even sports coaches and many more. How will the Scottish Government ensure that learning takes place so that the bill can have the maximum impact that we all desire?

John Swinney: I welcome Alison Johnstone's support, and I acknowledge the Scottish Green Party's long-standing commitment on the issue. I am glad that we have got to the point at which we can engage in discussion and pass the legislation.

The key is to ensure that respect for, and the pursuit of, children's rights are integral parts of how all organisations operate and every action that they take. That will be at the heart of the Scottish Government's approach to raising awareness. We will require approaches to be taken that reflect the necessity of all organisations to act compatibly with the terms of the UNCRC. That is what I mean by creating an everyday culture of respecting children's rights in public bodies.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): One of the lesser-known provisions of the UNCRC relates to the prevention of accidents. Article 19 guarantees the right to protection from injury, and article 24 outlines the right to access information, education and support in the prevention of accidents. As the convener of the cross-party group on accident prevention and safety awareness, I point out that that aspect of policy is often overlooked, despite accidents disproportionately impacting on children from our most deprived areas. With that social justice issue in mind, how will the Scottish Government protect and promote such rights, so that accident prevention is put higher on the political agenda?

John Swinney: I acknowledge Clare Adamson's long-standing interest in the subject. The bill should not be considered in isolation from the wider agenda that is best summed up by the concept of getting it right for every child. That policy outlook and perspective has been taken forward by this Government, but it originated in the Government that predated this Administration.

There has been a long-standing policy commitment in Scotland to enhance and improve the life experience of children in our society. There are many areas in which clear progress has been demonstrated. We have had a challenging period during Covid, which has made the challenge for some of our young people even more acute. It is important that the work that Clare Adamson has highlighted is reflected in the wider perspective of ensuring that we actively and supportively improve the safety and the quality of life of children in our society.

Alison Harris (Central Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary mentioned children challenging breaches of their rights in court. How does he envisage children paying for court action? The legal aid system is already fundamentally challenged. If I were a child, how would I take my challenge to court? Would I have to rely on my parents?

John Swinney: A variety of approaches could be taken, not least the one that I gave in my earlier answer, which relates to the Children and Young People's Commissioner's advocacy role on behalf of children. That is one of the routes that could be taken. Legal aid provisions are also available in that respect, so that can be added into the bargain.

Fundamentally, we are acknowledging in the bill the importance of children being able to challenge legislation when they believe that their rights are being compromised. That proposition opens up a new area of influence for children to exercise their voice and to be empowered in our society. The Government fundamentally welcomes that.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I, too, fully welcome the announcement of the bill. Can the cabinet secretary set out how the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law will complement the current children's human rights frameworks that are used by the Scottish Government, such as the routine publishing of children's rights and wellbeing impact assessments?

John Swinney: The fundamental additional element that will emerge from the passage of this bill will be the requirement on public authorities not to act incompatibly with children's rights. That is the strongest degree of obligation that we could put on public bodies as a consequence of the legislation. There are other approaches that are not as acute as the compatibility duty that we have chosen, which is designed to signal the importance that the Government attaches to ensuring that public bodies operate in a fashion that fully respects the rights of children at all times.

The decision to establish the broadest possible scope, taking into account the perspective of the organisations that will be affected, means that this legislative requirement will have the greatest effect on public policy in Scotland.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that if the bill is to mean anything to children and young people it has to reach ordinary children and young people who do not have a connection to the political class? That class might even apply to the children's commissioner himself. For example, will a young person who might be in need of mental health services, or other necessary support to secure their wellbeing, be able to understand how the bill can enhance their life?

John Swinney: There are two particular perspectives that I can give in response to Pauline McNeill's question. One relates to the work that is undertaken in our education system—I know about it from my personal experience as both a minister and a father—whereby the understanding

of the rights of children is now a central part of our curricular approach in Scotland. I often hear about certain issues when I get home at night. That is one perspective.

There is also the fact that we can engage young people through organisations with which they have a relationship. For example, Young Scot, which I do not think falls into the classification of being part of the political system, has a very strong and clear relationship with young people—it has extraordinary reach. Once young people are enabled to understand and exercise their rights, the challenges that Pauline McNeill highlighted can be overcome. However, we have to acknowledge the importance of equipping young people with knowledge and understanding of their rights, which is a central provision of the bill.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I warmly congratulate the Government on lodging this bill, which is something that I have campaigned for for the past 20 years.

Several members have alluded to the fact that the legislation will only be as strong as the access to justice that it offers to children through the courts, but that is about more than just striking down bad legislation. The cabinet secretary has identified one route, through the children's commissioner's office, to litigate test cases in the public interest. However, that is an exceptionally narrow bottleneck. Children's rights are violated every day, so what additional provisions will this Government consider to ensure that any child—at any time—has the right to legal redress through the courts when their individual rights are violated?

John Swinney: There are a couple of different dimensions to that question. One relates to the point that I have made to members on a number of occasions, which is about the outlook of public bodies and their actions to protect and properly address the rights of children. That relates to the operational priorities of different organisations, and that is the easiest way by which the rights of young people are protected, because they do not need to go to court if they have a good and positive experience of being supported by public services.

The other dimension is about ensuring that there is a route by which young people can exercise that challenge if they believe that their rights have been infringed. The example that I cited of the Children and Young People's Commissioner is one mechanism that is available through the bill.

We are engaged in a parliamentary process on the bill, and I will remain open to discussing these questions with members. I acknowledge Mr Cole-Hamilton's long-standing interest in the subject.

We can, during the course of proceedings, discuss what other routes or approaches might be taken.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's clarification that all devolved bodies, in addition to the Scottish Government and the courts, will be bound by the obligation in the bill to respect children's rights. On how that will work in practice, will the declarations on the compatibility approach of the Human Rights Act 1998 be followed under the bill?

John Swinney: The Government's preferred policy would be to require all legislation—past and future—to be compatible with the UNCRC and for the courts to be required to strike down incompatible legislation.

I explained in my statement that there is a challenge regarding future legislation, and the bill provides for two different remedies in respect of any legislation that is found to be incompatible. For any primary legislation that predates the bill, the strike-down provision will exist for the courts. In any future legislation, the Government will be required to make a compatibility assessment of any new primary or secondary legislation to ensure that it is compatible with children's rights.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have decided to allow the last two questions. It will be helpful if members are succinct.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary set out any additional rights and protections that disabled children will receive in line with article 23?

John Swinney: Article 23 gives young people the opportunity to ensure that their own particular interests and perspectives can be fully respected. One criticism of the UNCRC is that it is not precise in all its language. I think that that is a good thing, because it leaves scope for Parliament and the courts to take a maximalist approach in how they protect the rights of children and young people, particularly the children and young people with disabilities whom Mr Balfour referred to.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is crucial that this Parliament takes an outward-looking and international approach to human rights through UNCRC incorporation, particularly at a time when the UK Government is diminishing its international standing by leaving the EU and by even threatening to withdraw from the European convention on human rights?

John Swinney: One of the great strides forward that have been taken during my lifetime has been the enormous progress that has been made on human rights. Much of that has emanated from the thinking that has come from the European convention on human rights and its significant

influence on the Human Rights Act 1998 in the United Kingdom.

I hope that the incorporation of the convention into Scots law will be viewed as a signal by this Government and this Parliament of our determination to take a human rights-based approach to all of our policies, our outlook and our interventions. It sets out who we are and what we aspire to do in society, and it respects our values, which are enshrined on the mace of the Parliament that sits in front of us and the Presiding Officer, and which reflect the country that we want to be.

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

I remind members that social distancing measures are in place across the chamber and the campus. Members should take care to observe those measures, particularly when entering and exiting the chamber.

Programme for Government 2020-21

15:04

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is a debate without motion on the Scottish Government's programme for government 2020-21. I call Fiona Hyslop to speak to and move the motion—for up to eight minutes, please, cabinet secretary.

15:04

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): Covid-19 has changed almost everything. Lockdown has had an impact on our public services, economy and people; it has changed the way we work and socialise; and it has questioned what we once knew as normal. We have seen a public health crisis become a global economic crisis, growth has reduced and there have been many job losses, with the expectation, sadly, of more to come. KPMG is forecasting that Scotland's economic growth is expected to contract by 9.1 per cent in 2020 and that of the United Kingdom is expected to contract by 10.3 per cent. Lockdown has highlighted the inequalities in our society; those with the least before the crisis have often been the worst affected.

Yesterday, the First Minister set out our programme for government. I will focus on the first major theme: a national mission to create new jobs, good jobs and green jobs, with a particular focus on our young people, supporting retraining and investing in our green new deal as part of our green recovery. Delivering on the mission will require a collective effort to tackle the fundamental inequalities in our society, ensuring that we use this moment to create the fairer, greener and wealthier country that we all want to see. We will work with businesses large and small, unions and the third sector to achieve this mission. We will put equality and human rights at the heart of our approach and do all that we can to ensure that everyone in Scotland receives the support they need, taking action to tackle the systemic injustices in our society. We will not allow youth unemployment and the scarring effect that it would have on a generation to be the legacy of this pandemic.

I am pleased to confirm that today we will publish the initial implementation report on the youth guarantee produced by Sandy Begbie, who I invited to lead that work given his experience in developing the Edinburgh guarantee. The plan will see every young person guaranteed an opportunity in education, a job or training. I thank

Sandy Begbie for his work to develop the proposal in such a short period of time. He has engaged widely and set out ambitious recommendations, for which I am grateful, and I look forward to working with him to implement them.

We will begin by moving quickly to invest the £60 million in a way that recognises the importance of local flexibility and the critical role of colleges in delivering meaningful opportunities for young people. That will mean providing £30 million to local authorities to deliver flexible local responses through local partnerships, which can help keep people in work and support young people and local employers; £10 million to create additional opportunities in colleges; £10 million to support pre-apprenticeship activity with Skills Development Scotland and colleges; and £10 million to build on the successful developing the young workforce infrastructure.

Although I have welcomed the investment in the UK-wide kickstart scheme, I was disappointed to note that it has launched today without any formal notification and a lack of meaningful consultation in Scotland. We are, however, committed to working with the UK Government to ensure that our offers are aligned and deliver for young people, which is what they and businesses rightly expect of us. I will write to the secretary of state again today to seek a meeting to ensure that that happens.

The scale of the challenge is significant, but I know that many employers share our commitment to young people. Sandy Begbie has secured early support from a range of high-profile employers, including Scottish Power, Standard Life Aberdeen and Scottish Water. The public sector also needs to play its role, so the Scottish Government will also support the guarantee. There must be a collective, national endeavour. The Government cannot do this alone. We need employers across the public, private and third sectors who can do so to play their part and work with us to create more opportunities, recognising the valuable contribution that our young people can make to growing our economy.

In addition, we will commit to a £25 million national transition training fund, supporting up to 10,000 people facing redundancy and unemployment in the sectors and regions most exposed to the current economic downturn, and a £2.35 million increase to the parental employability support fund, supporting parents most at risk of poverty, including disabled and young parents. We will also extend fair start Scotland for a further two years to March 2023.

We are putting in place ways to improve fair work practices, to tackle the discrimination and unfair practices against women and ethnic migrants. We will develop a new centre for

workplace transformation, helping businesses and organisations embrace new business models, drive workplace innovation and become more inclusive.

With local government, we will progress our ambitions for 20-minute neighbourhoods—we will create places with thriving local economies and support small and medium-sized enterprises and places where people can meet their daily needs within a 20-minute walk. We will also support the work local challenge, developing more shared local working hubs for private, public and third sectors and enabling more flexible and remote working.

The pandemic has underlined the economic importance of increasing Scotland's digital confidence. We have already almost tripled our investment in the digital boost programme for the remainder of 2020-21, supporting Scotland's SMEs to improve their digital capability and productivity.

We accept the key recommendations in the Logan review of Scotland's tech ecosystem and have already announced that we will establish a national network of world-class start-up incubators together with an ecosystem fund. We will also create a formal partnership with industry to develop an implementation plan for the remaining recommendations.

This year, we are committing an additional £23 million to tackle digital exclusion, which will provide a device, free internet connection and training to bring 50,000 people online by the end of 2021.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I have a surfeit of choices. I think that Murdo Fraser was first.

Murdo Fraser: On the question of the digital divide, do we have a new completion date yet for the reaching 100 per cent—R100—programme to roll out superfast broadband to every household in Scotland?

Fiona Hyslop: The commitment is there. Paul Wheelhouse will make an announcement very soon, which I think will be of interest to the member.

It is an important issue. We can be a world-class destination for inward investment for companies that know that their workforce can work remotely anywhere in the most beautiful country in the world. What an offer that is!

Iain Gray: I want to ask about the Logan review, which included powerful recommendations on

school education and computer science. However, it did not address the biggest problem in that sector of our schools: a complete absence of people willing to teach computer science. How can that issue be addressed?

Fiona Hyslop: The Deputy First Minister and I have spoken to Mark Logan, who is engaging on the issue. The DFM might want to remark on the issue in his closing speech.

The member has identified a key issue. Many people can earn much more in computing outside of teaching. As he will know, teachers must have a passion to teach young people and children, but what better way to help your country recover from the pandemic than for people from industry to engage on the matter? That engagement will be critical.

The member highlights a real challenge, which is about how we can work together to ensure that we have the capacity for and the numbers of talented people we need to take up that tech challenge.

We have already committed more than £800 million to support economic recovery and restart, including a £230 million package for new capital projects, more than £470 million for the transport and culture sectors and £100 million to help people into work. We also welcomed the UK Government's job retention scheme, and will continue to argue for its extension.

Our green new deal provides businesses with the confidence to invest in people and will help us transition to a net-zero economy. Our £100 million green jobs fund will support job creation by helping businesses, particularly SMEs, to develop and expand the production of green products and services, by ensuring that businesses and supply chains can benefit from public and private investment in the transition to a low-carbon future.

We will invest £1.6 billion over the next session of Parliament to decarbonise our buildings. We have established a £62 million energy transition fund to accelerate the transition to net zero in the energy sector. We will invest £150 million in forestry.

By 2025, our national infrastructure mission will deliver annual infrastructure investment that is £1.5 billion higher than that in 2019-20. We will also be launching the Scottish National Investment Bank.

We are promoting Scotland to the world, with a new inward investment plan with the potential to generate 100,000 high-value jobs over the next decade.

In closing my remarks, I reiterate that the programme for government has economic renewal and the creation of new, good, green jobs at its

very core. Progress will be possible only through collaboration between Government, industry and the third sector. We will need collective determination if we are to succeed, but I am confident that Scotland is up to the challenge.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to the cabinet secretary for asking her to move a motion that does not exist, and to members for the confusion. I clarify that this is, in fact, a debate without motion.

15:15

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It has become something of a cliché to say that we are living in difficult times, but it is no less true, for all that. Here is the background to the programme for government that was delivered yesterday: we have an unprecedented health challenge that is rapidly transforming into a significant economic challenge that is probably greater than any one of us has encountered in our lifetime.

If we are to avoid a deep recession and high unemployment, we need an unrelenting focus on the economy. As the cabinet secretary has pointed out, the indicators are already cause for concern. So far, there has been a larger fall in economic output in Scotland than the UK average, and we already have a higher rate of unemployment. In that respect, the First Minister's focus on the economy yesterday was welcome.

All of government needs to be focused on securing jobs, supporting existing businesses and creating a climate in which new businesses can be set up and can flourish. That matters not least because only with a thriving economy will we have the money to fund our public services. Nor should we forget that, in the next financial year, we will be starting with a £600 million deficit in our public finances due to overestimation of tax revenues three years ago.

Despite the programme for government's welcome rhetoric about the need to grow the economy, which we have heard yesterday and in the debate so far, its substantive proposals do not amount to much of a comprehensive plan. We see a piecemeal range of initiatives—some new and others simply reannounced—without any clear common thread.

As I mentioned yesterday, we saw an inward investment plan being announced despite its having been in last year's programme for government but not delivered. For the fourth year in a row, in this year's programme we see reference to the Scottish National Investment Bank. Other initiatives, including on active travel, an energy transition fund and low-emission zones, have already been set out on at least one previous occasion. Frankly, little in the programme is new.

I welcome what the cabinet secretary said about the opportunities to build our digital infrastructure. She is absolutely right: one of the things that we have learned from the Covid-19 lockdown is that there are opportunities for people to work from home. However, in order to do that we will need much greater focus on building the digital economy. I again point out that the R100—reaching 100 per cent—programme has been delayed and has not met its original target date. I look forward with great interest to hearing what Mr Wheelhouse has to say about that. If we cannot get that right, we will never be able to seize the opportunities to which the cabinet secretary referred.

If we want to see a comprehensive plan to improve Scotland's economy, we will have to look elsewhere. On Monday, the Scottish Conservatives published our own "Power up Scotland" jobs plan, which includes detailed recommendations on what might be done to improve the Scottish economy. Our proposals include emergency measures to be delivered within the next 12 months—the introduction of new Scottish job security councils, a hardship support fund for businesses, a town centre rescue plan, community right-to-buy schemes, a Scotland-first procurement strategy and new rural growth deals.

In the longer term, we will consider how to boost Scotland's exports both to the wider UK and overseas. We have plans to reform Scottish Enterprise, to improve skills provision with a new Scottish education guarantee to the age of 18, to boost research, and to create a massive acceleration in building infrastructure.

On those proposals, we would want to work with the UK Government. It was significant that, in the First Minister's statement yesterday, there was no mention of the unprecedented £6.5 billion in Barnett consequential that has been given to the Scottish Government to help it to deal with the Covid-19 situation.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): In his remarks so far, I have not heard Mr Fraser talk about Ferguson Marine shipyard, which is building ships that will benefit our communities in the future. Does he support that shipyard?

Murdo Fraser: I do not think that the Scottish Government's track record on Ferguson's shipyard is one that Mr McMillan should be trumpeting in the chamber, given the costs and overruns and given, also, that we now know that the design work for the ships to which he refers is being done not in Scotland but in Romania. Therefore, if I may say so, I do not think that raising that subject is his strongest suit.

I go back to the £6.5 billion-worth of Barnett consequentials. As yet, we do not know how much of that money has been spent or where it has all gone. Of course, that money is in addition to the direct support—

Fiona Hyslop: The Scottish Government has made a point of keeping every member informed about the £2.3 billion that it was awarded in consequentials and all the grants that came from that, including the unique pivotal enterprise resilience fund—Murdo Fraser has written to me about it on behalf of individual constituents—and the creative, tourism and hospitality enterprises hardship fund, which is unique to Scotland. The member should not come to Parliament and say that he does not know where the money has been spent, when we have made a specific point of informing Parliament at every step of the way, on the business front.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the cabinet secretary for that intervention, which was very interesting, because I asked a parliamentary question of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance on that and received an answer just last week telling me that we will have to wait until the end of this month before we find out where all the money went. Perhaps Fiona Hyslop needs to consult her cabinet colleague before she makes interventions such as that one.

The UK Government's job retention scheme—one of the most generous in the world, without which our economy would be a poorer place—was mentioned. According to the Scottish Fiscal Commission's report, which was published—

Members *rose*.

Murdo Fraser: I have already taken two interventions. I really need to make some progress.

According to the Scottish Fiscal Commission's report, total UK Government spending in Scotland in response to Covid-19 now tops a staggering £16 billion. Inevitably, the First Minister's response to that is to claim that it is not enough money. She has called for the Scottish Government to do more, despite the record investment and unprecedented efforts that have been made by the UK Government to support the Scottish economy.

Those calls for additional support are ironic, in the context of publication of "Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland 2019-20"—the annual GERS figures—which set out Scotland's income and expenditure. They are, of course, figures that the First Minister was happy to laud back in 2012 as

"making the case for independence".

The Scottish National Party does not seem quite so keen on the figures when they tell a different

story, because they tell us that for the last financial year there was a £15 billion deficit in Scotland's public finances—and that is before the great bulk of Covid-19 expenditure has been taken into account.

Members *rose*—

Murdo Fraser: I really need to make some progress. I have taken two interventions already and am running out of time.

That puts Scotland's budget deficit in excess of 8 per cent, which compares with that of the UK of just 2.5 per cent. To go down the route of independence, which the SNP wants, would create unprecedented challenges for our economy and public services. It speaks volumes that the lines in the First Minister's programme for government speech that got SNP members most excited were those in which she talked about preparation of an independence referendum bill. It is hard to imagine a more spectacular example of an act of self-harm than going down that route at a time when the Scottish economy is contracting and people are losing their jobs.

I was taken by the Scottish Government's response to the GERS figures and its position on fiscal transfers, which now seems to be that fiscal transfers are a sign of failure, that they are locking in inequalities and that they are preventing local economies from growing. Frankly, I say that that is an extraordinary position for the Scottish Government to take. Eighty five per cent of the fiscal gap that is disclosed in the GERS figures is represented not by lower tax receipts in Scotland, but by higher spending. On average, Scotland is spending 12 per cent per capita more on public services than the UK average—so even a Scottish economy that was performing as well as the UK would have a fiscal deficit over £12 billion in a single year.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I will take an intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fraser has to close very soon.

Murdo Fraser: Am I allowed to take the intervention, Deputy Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: What a decision to have to make. [*Laughter*]. Okay then.

Kate Forbes: It is a very simple question about the Scottish Government being unable to borrow. If it cannot borrow, whose is the deficit?

Murdo Fraser: I am sure that the finance secretary is clever enough to know that the deficit is notional. The gap between the amount of money that is raised in taxes in Scotland and the amount of money that is spent—the deficit—would

become hard-wired, should we go down the route of independence, which the finance secretary wants.

The point about fiscal transfers is bizarre; fiscal transfers are a policy feature in every developed country, and stronger regions and nations help those that have greater spending needs. They exist within the European Union, but the SNP does not complain about that. They exist within Scotland—fiscal transfers are the basis of our funding settlements for local authorities and health boards, based on measures of deprivation and local needs. If fiscal transfers are a sign of economic failure, after 13 years in government the SNP Administration is condemned from its own mouth.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please come to a close.

Murdo Fraser: This week has been a tale of two competing visions for the future of Scotland. The Scottish Government presented a piecemeal programme from an Administration that is out of ideas, and is running out of time. In contrast, the Scottish Conservatives had an alternative. It is to work with the UK Government and not against it, and not continually to seek constitutional grievance. Instead, we set out positive ideas about how to grow the economy.

The programme for government should have been marked “Must do better”. This week, we have shown a better way.

15:25

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): This is the last programme for government in this session of Parliament, but it is by far the most important. In the next seven months we have the opportunity to set the agenda not just for the course of the pandemic, but for the next decade—for the next generation.

We are living through dark times. Too many of us have lost loved ones to Covid-19 in the past six months, and all around us a massive economic and unemployment crisis is unfolding. Workers fear for their jobs. Families fear for their incomes.

I have often expressed my frustration at the Scottish Government and Parliament for not always fulfilling their potential—for falling short when the people of Scotland need us to step up. I have felt it a number of times over the past six months: for example, when ministers evaded scrutiny over care homes and testing, when the Scottish National Party and the Tories teamed up to block controls on rent rises, and when the Deputy First Minister spent a week in hiding after the Scottish Qualifications Authority results fiasco.

However, today I am hopeful for the Parliament’s future and for Scotland’s future, because we have shifted the debate. The programme for government reflects that change. A national care service, which Scottish Labour has spent 10 years campaigning for, is finally being talked about by the Scottish Government. I welcome, too, the Government’s acceptance of the need for a tenants hardship fund, the case for which we have been pressing for months.

I also welcome the First Minister’s professed insistence that we cannot

“simply go back to how things were”.

However, despite how much she insists on that, we need actions—not just words. It is based on the test of actions that the programme for government will be judged. Yes—the programme acknowledges that times have changed. Yes—it acknowledges the growing realisation in Scotland that we cannot go back to the same old failed “normal”, but it does not acknowledge that the Government left us unprepared for the public health crisis, the education crisis and the spiralling economic crisis, too.

Instead of facing up to those failings and ensuring that Scotland learns the lessons, the Government seeks to put a sticking plaster on the failings. Rather than starting now to build a national care service, the Government wants to set up another review and another working group—but one that will not even include the voices of the workforce or of the people who receive care.

We want to see the gaps in the programme being closed. Today I appeal to MSPs across Parliament, but I also appeal to everybody outside Parliament who knows how serious the public health and economic crisis that we are facing is and knows that the worst is yet to come.

For the many young workers whom I have listened to over Zoom calls since lockdown began—who are out of work and struggling to make ends meet after having lost their jobs, who are now in fear of losing their homes, their independence and their self-esteem, and who are desperate to work in any kind of work, but are unable to find even temporary jobs—the young person’s guarantee is part of the solution. We welcome the concept, and we await the detail with great interest, because we have been clear that it must be built on the quality platform of payment of a real living wage.

That scheme must be better than the kick-start scheme that is envisaged by the Tory Government. We want to see good quality jobs with decent pay and good training places for our young people. We want the Government to use its financial leverage to ensure that there are more

opportunities for disabled young people, and that there are better pay and conditions for all.

We have asked before and I ask again today: can we have a commitment to give over-24s some kind of job guarantee? As the cabinet secretary knows, and as we have spoken of before, there has been a huge increase in the number of women who are unemployed. The groups that fare worst at times of high unemployment are, once again, faring worst, so we need intervention to give a jobs guarantee for all.

In recent weeks, I have listened to working people, including the bright and enterprising fringe festival venue managers whom I met last Friday in Edinburgh. They are facing the grim prospect of furloughed staff becoming redundant staff. This year's summer festival? It is gone—and next year's is uncertain.

Over the summer, I have listened on web calls to key workers who are glad, at last, to have had some recognition, and who are pleased, at last, that someone has been listening to them, but they are still underpaid and undervalued, and are still having to fight every inch of the way.

In her 2017 programme for government speech, the First Minister finished by saying that she wanted Scotland to be

“the best place in which to be cared for in times of sickness, need or vulnerability; and the best place in which to grow old.”—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2017; c 25.]

Those were the First Minister's words. If 2020 has been the test, the Scottish Government has failed it. What has happened in our residential care homes is the scandal of this pandemic, precisely because the sick, the needy and the vulnerable who are growing old in Scotland have been let down more than any other part of the population.

Last week, the Scottish Trades Union Congress said that the Government's

“number one priority must be to create good jobs through an increased role for the public sector and making support for business conditional on fair work, local supply chains and a green recovery.”

I agree. The STUC spoke of a national care service, a publicly owned energy company, a publicly owned construction and infrastructure company, investment in buses, a local-government-led public works programme, council house building, and a no-evictions policy for the remainder of the current parliamentary session. It spoke of an end to outsourcing of public services. That is the kind of radical agenda that this country needs.

I remain hopeful, not thanks to Governments or even to Parliaments, but because of the people of Scotland, who are driving this agenda, today. I say

to them that there is an alternative and they can create it.

A proposal for controls on rent rises was blocked by Tory and Scottish National Party members of Parliament, but it was kept alive by the tenacity of tenants and their unions. A green new deal for Scotland—

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This is the second time within a few days that I have heard that calumny voiced in Parliament. There was no vote on anything to do with that bill, and the lie that it was stopped by the SNP and Conservative politicians—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Dornan, that is not a word that I like to be used in the chamber. I think that you should apologise for using it, because it is not one that we find acceptable.

James Dornan: I apologise for my use of the word “lie”, but the lack of accuracy such as in the comments in the past few days really has to stop.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not strictly a point of order, as you know very well, Mr Dornan. I will give Mr Leonard some extra time to respond to your comment, if he so wishes.

Richard Leonard: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will address that point. Pauline McNeill's member's bill on fair rents was blocked in committee by a combination of SNP and Tory votes. That is what happened; that is what I am referring to and that is the block that I am describing.

James Dornan: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is no point of order to be made on this. If members disagree with what is said in the chamber, they should take it up outside. If they wish to complain about that, they can write to the Presiding Officer.

Richard Leonard: We, and the people of Scotland, are looking for controls on rent rises. They are also looking for a green new deal for Scotland, based on proposals for actions and not on vapid projections on which the SNP Government has shown, time and again, that it has no intention of delivering. We are looking for a national care service that is anchored in the principles of people before profit, national consistency but local delivery and good work.

It is the workers, the campaigners, the tenants and the school students who will shape our future—who are shaping our future—but it is our duty to realise it.

15:34

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Much has been said about the unprecedented times that we live in and the monumental scale of the task before the Government, but some things never change. In pretty much every programme for government that I have ever seen, I have found some measures—both large and small—to support and some that I have not supported.

A consolidation of hate crime law in Scotland, through the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill, is 10 years overdue. The bill must result in a coherent approach across all forms of prejudice. I know that criticisms have been made, but, as far as I can see, nobody who has been voicing concern has called for the abolition of the existing stirring-up-hatred offence or has explained why other forms of hate crime should be treated less seriously. They will have to account for that contradiction themselves, but the bill that we eventually pass must achieve consistency, and the Greens will support that.

As for the infrastructure investment plan, the Government always tries to highlight the sustainable bits, such as active travel, but in reality that pales into insignificance when compared with the road-building programme, which will make pollution and congestion worse. Perhaps it is not quite a big enough road-building programme for Douglas Ross's tastes, but it is still pretty substantial and unsustainable.

There are also some concerns about what is not in the programme. I have been contacted by constituents who remain deeply disappointed—and who even feel betrayed—because the long-overdue commitment to the reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 will not be delivered in this session, as all five political parties promised at the last election. They are left with the uneasy concern that that is less the result of Covid and more the result of the SNP's failure to tackle transphobia within its own ranks.

There is always a bit of a tension in programme for government debates between being open to good ideas from all sides and taking small steps in every direction. We obviously welcome the youth guarantee as a principle. It was included in our 2016 manifesto, and it was needed long before the pandemic and the new threat to young people's life chances. The PFG and, indeed, the document that was published today, "Young Person Guarantee: No-one Left Behind", state that the youth guarantee will ensure young people study, apprenticeship, a job or work experience, or volunteering. We all see the value of volunteering, but it is fundamentally different from a job. We will be deeply concerned if the youth guarantee results—perhaps unintentionally—in pressure on

young people to do unpaid work as an alternative to those other choices.

The Scottish Greens have made the case for what we have called a green new deal for many years—since the last economic crisis, over a decade ago, in fact—and we have done a lot of work to develop those proposals in the past year or two. I am pleased that other parties are following suit and are using that language. However, it is not enough to use the language; it needs to come with a recognition that the old economic system was broken and a determination to transform it rather than reboot it.

Too often, the Scottish Government pursues the option of channelling money to private companies instead of rebuilding the public sector. Energy, land and forestry are examples of that. Where opportunities exist to do both—for example, by supporting a company such as Alexander Dennis to construct the new green buses that a network of publicly owned bus companies would need—they are not being taken. At the very least, such a green bus fleet for the COP—the conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Glasgow—would be a good start.

The £100 million green jobs fund looks like a good headline, but I do not think that it amounts to a commitment for £100 million in every year's budget. Given that it will be stretched out over five years or so and is to be paid to employers as business development grants, there is a risk that we will not maximise the opportunity to secure quality green jobs. At least half of that fund is being delivered via the enterprise agencies. On the face of it, the fund sounds bold, but its budget is small compared with other areas of investment and there does not appear to be a guarantee of the new jobs that it will create or the pay and conditions associated with them.

The commitment to scale up energy efficiency programmes from £112 million to £398 million by 2025-26 is, of course, welcome. Again, that is a step in the direction of what we have argued for. However, the funding clearly needs to be increased far sooner, as the First Minister appeared to confirm by agreeing with Alison Johnstone when she made the case just a few months ago for an immediate increase.

The Government could also have committed to changing building standards. That is currently scheduled for 2024, which means that we will continue to see thousands of homes built every year until then that will need to be retrofitted. We should not be building gas-guzzling homes now, and the introduction of that measure would have ensured that we would start to build homes to the needed standard. As far as I can see, there is nothing in the programme on addressing energy efficiency in private tenancies either, and it is hard

to see how the energy performance certificate standard will be met by 2030 without that.

That point brings me to wider issues related to housing. The Scottish Government has shown a long-standing resistance to the principle of rent controls, which, even though it is SNP policy, has not yet been implemented. Rent pressure zones are clearly an inadequate measure. Whether we say that Pauline McNeill's bill was formally blocked or choose a different way of describing what happened, the Scottish Government could have picked up the proposal, if it thought that there was no time for it as a member's bill, and put it in its own programme for government, but it has not done that.

The Government delivered financial support for landlords ahead of support for tenants. There is no doubt that some landlords do their best to support tenants in difficult times, perhaps through the use of a mortgage holiday—

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): Will Mr Harvie give way?

Patrick Harvie: Briefly.

Kevin Stewart: Mr Harvie has stated that landlords received help before tenants. I point out that the Government has added to the discretionary housing payment budgets of all local authorities to help tenants and that it has added to that in its programme with the tenant hardship loan fund. I also point out to Mr Harvie and to Parliament that the Scottish Government and Parliament do not control housing benefit, or any other benefit of that kind, and that it would be much better if we had control—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. It is an intervention, not a speech. Mr Harvie will make up his time.

Patrick Harvie: I had hoped that there could be a little flexibility.

It is clear that the Government recognises that the absence of a tenant hardship fund was a mistake, and the landlord hardship fund came before it. Most significantly, we must remember that exploitation still exists in the private rented sector, which is not regulated to the same standard as the social rented sector. *The Ferret* published the Government's own figures, according to which most of the landlord hardship fund is claimed in respect of empty properties and therefore plays no role at all in housing policy.

The tenants fund is a small step in the right direction. We recently highlighted to the First Minister that the Welsh Government had introduced it, and I am glad that she listened. However, that was only one of several measures for which we argued, and major questions remain

about how it will be delivered. The Welsh fund is paid directly to landlords—not tenants. Should any landlord who has already claimed the landlord hardship fund manage to access this fund as well, the tenant would then owe the debt, which would feel like a real slap in the face for tenants who are suffering at the moment.

The Scottish Greens welcome the fact that we will see a bill on the referendum for independence before the end of this parliamentary session, which will include proposals for timing. Support for independence is growing, and it sometimes seems as though the only thing that could stop it would be the sight of a semi-competent UK Government. The prospect of that has never felt so remote, so we might yet see Scotland take the step—in which I believe—to become an independent country and a full member of the international community. To keep building that case, we need to inspire people with the vision of what a radical and creative country can do in the face of economic challenges, a public health crisis, and a climate and ecological emergency. We need to act now, with that radical and creative spirit, if we expect people to believe in the potential of the country that an independent Scotland can become.

15:43

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): It gives me pleasure to open for the Liberal Democrats in response to the programme for government that was laid out yesterday. As Murdo Fraser said, it is a programme for unprecedented times that will close the parliamentary session and define the Government's policy response to the worst emergency through which any of us has ever lived. There is no denying the gravity of the challenges that we now face.

Although we welcome several aspects of the programme, it represents the sum total of the Government's answer to the times in which we live and sums up the entirety of its 13 years in office: there is more power than it knows what to do with and a pathological paralysis against its use to achieve anything substantial. As Willie Rennie put it yesterday, the Government's to-do list is always far longer than its got-done list.

New York Governor Mario Cuomo famously said that politicians campaign in poetry but govern in prose. From the statement yesterday, and from the contributions that we have already heard today, it is clear that this Administration campaigns in slogans and governs in soundbites. A number of those soundbites are hard to disagree with, but so, too, are motherhood and apple pie.

The Liberal Democrats support the First Minister's call for an extension to the UK job retention scheme, but we also recognise that it is

only thanks to the broad shoulders of the UK economy that such a scheme exists in the first place. *[Interruption.]* The First Minister argues that an independent Scotland would have followed France and Germany in automatically extending the furlough scheme for 12 months, as if the borrowing impediments of a fledgling nation with no central bank and no control over its own currency were of little concern. Talk is cheap.

In addition to restating our shared desire to see the furlough scheme extended, the Liberal Democrats encourage the First Minister to work constructively with Westminster to address the needs of those who, when it comes to the support schemes, have slipped through the cracks. I am talking about those in my constituency and in the constituencies of other members, of whom we have seen countless examples, who have been unable to access support payments. We know that there are millions of others, many of them contractors or creative freelancers, who were left high and dry when they were ordered to stop work in March. There was nothing in the statement for company directors or the entrepreneurs on whose backs we will seek to build our economic recovery; nor was there additional support for Scottish businesses, many of which are now on the brink of going under or on the verge of making many thousands of Scottish workers redundant.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Not at this time. I need to make some progress.

The Liberal Democrats want to hear assurances from the Scottish Government about what would happen in the event of more local lockdowns, because those businesses will be worried by the news of rising numbers of cases and what that means for them and their employees.

In Aberdeen, it took two weeks for the Scottish Government to get money to businesses, and the reach of that support was derisory. Despite my party asking for it time and again, the lack of planning put many businesses in that region, and the livelihoods of their staff, under threat. We now have nearly a million Scottish—

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will give way.

Kevin Stewart: The Government reacted very quickly indeed to support businesses in Aberdeen, as many members called for the Government to do. It is fair to say that Mr Cole-Hamilton's colleague from the north-east of Scotland was not so vocal, because he was in Italy rather than in the north-east of Scotland.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will not dignify that comment with a response, but I will take the intervention from Gillian Martin.

Gillian Martin: If Mr Cole-Hamilton thinks that support for businesses from the Scottish Government has been lacking, will he support our calls for borrowing powers, so that we can make substantial investment in businesses in Scotland?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: There are many parts of the Scottish Government coffers that could be used to extend support to businesses right now, but the Scottish Government chooses not to do so. We now have nearly a million Scottish people on the edge of another lockdown in the west of Scotland and we should be gearing up right now to support businesses there.

We need to support Scottish companies by helping them to adapt to the new and hostile landscape. To that end, my party welcomes the Government's commitment to better broadband. Reliable high-speed and high-capacity internet will allow businesses to expand their online presence, but we need to do more to support them on the high streets as well, so that they can withstand their international competitors. That is why, on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I have proposed measures such as my cafe culture amendment to the second coronavirus bill. The aim of that amendment was to help local cafes and restaurants to operate safely and be viable in this age of social distancing, because we know the impact that it is having on their margins.

The Liberal Democrats would have liked to see far more for education in yesterday's statement. The impact of the pandemic on lifelong learning cannot be overstated. Lockdown has widened the educational attainment gap, created a massive need for retraining in our workforce and decimated the number of international students who are seeking to learn in our universities, which is causing massive economic uncertainty. *[Interruption.]* I do not have time to take an intervention; I have taken two already.

Scotland hosts some of the most prestigious educational institutions in the English-speaking world, yet, despite repeated asking by my leader, Willie Rennie, this Government seems incapable of putting, or unwilling to put, testing provision in place to ensure that the international students who arrive this term do so safely.

Yesterday's statement also represented a mixed bag for children. The expansion of funded childcare remains on hold and, with it, one of the most important levers for addressing child poverty. Funded childcare is the difference between a working family making a living and their keeping it. For every month that goes by without the expansion, many working families will struggle to

keep their children out of poverty and thereby make real one of the most important children's rights, to which all children should be entitled.

I congratulate the Government on children's rights. Liberal Democrats have long called for the full incorporation into Scots law of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and we applaud its inclusion in the programme. However, I remind the Deputy First Minister that it will mean nothing without a route for children to access redress through the courts for the violations of rights that they face every day and it will mean nothing as long as we have an age of criminal responsibility that is lower than that of China and Russia. We cannot lead the world on human rights from the back of the pack.

I turn to mental health and note, again, that the mental health crisis in this country was raging long before anybody had heard of Covid-19. The privations of lockdown or self-isolation and community anxiety will add kerosene to the bonfire of mental ill health in Scotland, yet it is still but a footnote to this Government's priorities.

The programme for government speech is the nearest thing in the parliamentary calendar to a state of the nation address. It offers the First Minister her principal opportunity to lay out her vision for the policy agenda of the coming year. The programme that she defined yesterday will occupy this Parliament until it rises for the last time in April. By any measure, it was pedestrian in its ambition.

The measure of any Government's agenda is how it is reported in the press. Today, newspapers from all sides have identified the new independence referendum bill as the marquee piece of legislation for this parliamentary term, which is as predictable as it is depressing. Only 14 per cent of our citizens believe that the Government should prioritise a referendum, yet the First Minister's Government will waste precious parliamentary time on it.

Furthermore, it gives the lie to the assertion by the First Minister that the coronavirus emergency was so all-consuming that the Parliament could not make time to legislate on or deliver policy in areas that were crying out for attention. Climate change targets, childcare expansion, waiting times, reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004, mental health and the threadbare state of our police force are all matters of social policy that presented a problem for the SNP, so it used the emergency to defer action on them.

The First Minister has failed the test set by John F Kennedy in 1962 to stretch the ambitions of Government and do those things—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Please conclude.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: —as he said,

“not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Instead, the First Minister chose to postpone those challenges and to take our nation into another skirmish on the constitution. For my party, that is unforgivable.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I hate to intervene when you are in full flow and flourish, but please pay attention to the chair.

We move to the open debate. There is no spare time, so interventions must be absorbed into members' speaking time. I hope that that does not deter interventions, but that is for members to decide.

15:53

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): At the start of lockdown, for the first time in a long time, I thought a lot about my earlier working life, when I worked in residential care and when I started my social work training, spending invaluable time in the psychogeriatric ward at St John's hospital completing care needs assessments, making discharge plans and arranging care placements. Those were the early days of care in the community and the so-called mixed economy of care that was meant to herald a world of choice and preference for service users of all ages.

Much has changed since those days, but much has not. Some of the frustrations of my earlier working life with bureaucracy, financial needs assessments—also known as means testing—and a lack of services that meant that we sometimes had to try to fit square pegs into round holes led me, ironically, to a career in institutions as a prison-based social worker and then a mental health officer at the state hospital in Carstairs.

The pandemic is the biggest public health crisis in our lifetime. As we look to rebuild lives and communities, we have the biggest opportunity of our lifetime, I believe, to rewrite the rules and to put right the things that have never been right. There are many opportunities to do just that with yesterday's programme for government—not least with that firm statement of intent regarding the establishment of a national care service.

It is fair to say that a national care service is not a new idea—far from it—but it is an idea whose time has come. It is time not just to ask but to answer how we invest in care for our most

vulnerable, yet cherished, citizens. It is time to put it beyond the shadow of a doubt that, as a nation, we really do value care work and care workers.

With yesterday's announcement, the question is no longer whether, but how, we should establish a national care service. The immediate start of the comprehensive but short review of adult health and social care, to report back in January, will kick-start an intense and detailed debate about choices and about the next steps that we can take.

Members of at least three political parties in the Parliament support a national care service. The challenge for us all now is not just to say,

"Do you hear the people sing?",

but to master the detail and help to develop a plan that will deliver. Behind my calls for a national service that is delivered in homes and communities, strips out the obscenity of profiteering at the expense of care, and gives choice and dignity—behind each of those touchstone issues—I know that there is a world of commissioning services, care home contracts, regulation and inspection, multi-disciplinary teams and workforces, and services that range through care at home, day care, and residential and nursing care.

I say to Alex Cole-Hamilton that that is not the stuff of soundbites. We need to forensically follow the money, so that we can know exactly what public money is extracted from the care sector to support private interests. We will need to understand the complexity and the ethics of financial models of care, to track the profits that are used to continuously repay for buildings that are continuously resold, and to be prepared to dig deep into the performance of all providers, across the public, private and third sectors.

Yes, proportionately more private sector adult care homes have had a Covid outbreak. They are larger, and they certainly generate more relatives' complaints to the Care Inspectorate about a family member's health and wellbeing. However, our ambition should never be limited to emulating a less problematic set of statistics. We will also have to have the courage and honesty to take the plank out of our own eye.

There are many aspects to adult health and social care. Over the summer months, I issued a call for evidence, focusing on adult care homes, and I very much want to continue to listen to and learn from the lived experience of residents, relatives and staff.

One of the most exciting aspects of a national care service is that it does not exist in isolation in the programme for government. If we get it right, we will build on a skilled workforce, and we will create valued jobs for people of all ages—an

important contribution to the youth guarantee and the national mission for jobs. We can develop services and opportunities that bring together people from across the generations. We can join the dots with warm, cosy and affordable homes, harness the digital revolution, and invest in the exciting concept of 20-minute communities and community-based health services, to build up communities of interest and place.

The pandemic reiterated the need for a radical rethink. We cannot, and we must not, bypass this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

15:59

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I commend the speech that we just heard. It is important that we acknowledge wise words when we hear them in debates. I thank Ms Constance.

Opposition parties have a role in debates and their members often take words that Government ministers have used and throw them straight back at the Government. It is a common tactic that we all have in our toolkits of attack when it is our turn to shine a light on the inactions and failures of a sitting Government. Since I took over the education brief, I have used that tactic on more than one occasion, to hold a mirror to the First Minister and remind her that, as she puts it, education is—I would say "used to be"—her number 1 priority. She repeated that mantra today during First Minister's question time.

In normal discourse and debate, a throwaway comment or tweet has limited effectiveness. The only true way in which a Government can refute an accusation is by pointing at its track record as definitive proof that the accusation is misguided. Nicola Sturgeon famously said that we should judge her by her record on education. We judge Governments by their past actions, not their promises for the future.

In all the 40-odd minutes of yesterday's statement on the programme for government—that annual event when the Government lays before us its plans, its bills and its priorities—none of the major underlying serious issues that face our nurseries, schools, colleges and universities were addressed. The statement admitted no failure or defeat, presented no plan and took no opportunity to show that education truly lies at the heart of this Government after 13 long years.

It pains me to remind the Government of its track record, but I will start with the early years. The flagship promise on early learning and childcare failed to be delivered. Parents are churning out cash to top up funded hours that were promised but did not universally materialise. There are nurseries with capacity, but councils with no money. Despite a vote in the Parliament in

the months leading up to Covid, long before the infrastructure challenges arose, the Government was warned clearly that the plans were at risk. Through a freedom of information request, I received correspondence to the Government from angry, bewildered and desperate parents, which runs into hundreds of pages. What does the programme for government offer those parents?

What about schools? The programme for government does not acknowledge or address any of the issues that parents have been raising with us. There is a chronic shortage of teachers, which has an effect on subject choices. Class sizes are going up, despite promises to reduce them, and multilevel teaching is becoming the norm in many schools. Our international rankings in core subjects such as maths and science are at record lows. A flagship education bill, which was promised in the manifesto, has been ditched. The much-needed review of the curriculum is delayed. What confidence did yesterday's programme for government statement give parents that education is the Government's number 1 priority?

What about colleges? They are entirely funded by the public purse and have limited means to generate income, and they are crying out for support, despite their vital role in our economic growth. They are run by a minister who questions the size of their deficit and says, "I can't give them any more money unless I can borrow more money." A Government that has shredded tens of millions of pounds in written-off loans, legal fees, project overruns and bad investments still makes credible claims to have run out of money for Scotland's important colleges.

Fiona Hyslop: It is important to have the context. In my constituency, we inherited a private finance initiative college that had to be bailed out. It was the first of a number of PFI issues that we had to rectify. When we came into Government, parents and employers were telling us that young people did not have the skills that they needed; they do not say that now, because we have a robust education and college system.

Jamie Greene: Let us come back to that in a couple of weeks' time when colleges are laying off staff, cutting courses and cutting places that would get young people trained and skilled. You can come back to the chamber then and explain why the underfunded college sector has had to make those decisions as a result of you and your Government—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before you go any further, Mr Greene, members are all slipping into that bad habit of using the "you" word again. Please remember that the only "you" here is me.

Jamie Greene: Indeed. My point has been made.

What about the universities sector, which is some £200 million—and potentially much more—in deficit? We were told this morning by a member of the Government that we are naive to accept claims from Universities Scotland that the sector is underfunded, but when was the last time that an SNP back bencher sat down with a university in their constituency or region and asked why and by how much it is underfunded? Who are we to believe? Do we believe the minister and his agencies or do we believe the universities themselves? These are political decisions. They are policy decisions.

That is the result of repeated programmes for government that are full of media-friendly headlines but backed up with very little substance. It is never until the wrath of parents or young people generate weeks of wall-to-wall media coverage that the Government actually sits up and listens.

However, there is much good going on in Scottish education and much to praise, not least the efforts—[*Interruption.*]—not least the efforts, Mr Swinney, of the hard-working council staff, teachers, school staff, lecturers and parents. They are positive in spite of the difficulties that the Scottish Government causes them, not because of them.

Even with all that—you might want to listen to this—the First Minister has the brass neck to stand up in the chamber in the midst of a global pandemic and say that she, her Government and civil servants have time to draft a referendum bill on Scottish independence; a referendum bill, but not one on education, not the good food bill, not the gender recognition reform bill or the crofting bill, because faced with difficult decisions, this Government ditches them. Rather than moving Scotland forward, the First Minister is determined to take us back to the divisions of the past—more division, more diversion, more turbulence and more uncertainty. That is not what Scotland needs right now. Everything you need to know is summed up by the First Minister saying that she will publish a plan and a draft bill on the question of independence. Here is a question for the First Minister: when will education be your number 1 priority again?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thought I had said not to use "you".

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Yes, exactly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Try to remember that. It is a simple lesson, and that is for everybody in the chamber. I do not need help from anybody—[*Interruption.*] Excuse me! I do not care

where you sit in the chamber, the rules are for everybody.

John Swinney: Yes, I know.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, no; you do not answer me back, Deputy First Minister. The rules are for everybody. You are just one of us!

16:06

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):

This year, we have faced the single greatest public health crisis of our lifetimes. On an almost daily basis, my hard-working constituency team and I have spoken with people who are worried about their families, their health, their jobs and their businesses, and I understand their concern. All areas of our lives have been touched—our health, the economy and society as a whole. Everyone has been affected, but some have undoubtedly been affected more than others. We are not all in the same boat. The harms that have been caused by the pandemic and the harms of the measures that have been put in place to keep people safe and save lives are not felt equally. Existing inequalities have been exacerbated and, as is often the case, the burden has fallen on the shoulders of women and children, older people, those with disabilities and black and minority ethnic people.

However, we have also seen what is possible. We have seen that, with urgency and movement of resources, change does not have to be at glacial pace. The roll-out of the digital consulting system in the national health service was completed in less than a month, a new hospital was created in a matter of weeks and citizens who sleep rough on the streets were given places to stay. An unprecedented support for business was distributed quickly and effectively. Legions of volunteers and public sector workers made sure that those who were most at risk in our communities had access to food, medicine and human contact. I know that we are all very grateful to them, but our gratitude is not enough and I believe that now we have not just an opportunity but an obligation to build on the good policy and practice that has been implemented during the pandemic to bring lasting change and not just tackle but end inequality.

As we rebuild our economy, we must make sure that it is stronger, fairer and more sustainable, and we must address many of the deep-seated challenges and the injustice of inequality that so many of the people that we represent face. I welcome the fact that the programme for government aims to do just that and shows determination to recover from the virus and deliver a fairer, greener and more prosperous Scotland for everyone.

There is much to talk about in the programme in relation to addressing inequality, but I will spend my time on housing. We have delivered more than 95,000 affordable homes since 2007, including 66,000 for social rent. The commitment from the Government to complete the delivery of 50,000 affordable homes as quickly as it is safe to do so is particularly welcome. In the most recent reporting year, relative child poverty after housing costs was 7 percentage points lower in Scotland than the UK average. That is a significant impact delivered by housing, and it articulates why it is important that we continue to progress affordable housing across the country. Good-quality, affordable homes, as well as being good for health, support valuable local jobs. They are a good example of creating a wellbeing economy.

I have raised the issue of affordability of housing association rents with the Scottish Government a number of times. I give members an example of one constituent who, after a 6 per cent rent increase one year, saw his rent increase by 6 per cent again the following year—higher than the consulted amount—with few or no improvements to his home. He told me that his rent had increased by 30 per cent over five years. I believe that, as we commit to address unfairness, the affordability of social housing for low-paid workers requires urgent attention, and I ask the Government, when summing up the debate, to comment on what action it will take to deal with that particular problem.

Any vision to improve our country and make it fairer for our citizens cannot ignore the constitutional question. Increasingly, people see the constraints and the risks of being tied to our larger neighbour. They also see the possibilities of restoring independence to Scotland. If this was a programme for government in an independent Scotland, we would not have to contemplate the damage of Brexit, we would not have to spend our money mitigating heartless welfare policies and we would not have to plead with another Government to take action but could instead do that ourselves. We could implement even more far-reaching plans around things that our people need, such as an immediate extension of the job retention scheme to protect business and save jobs; the greater use of borrowing powers—the borrowing powers that any other normal country has—to further stimulate the economy; the transformation of our national grid to support faster development of renewables; the creation of a migration system that recognises talent, not bank balances, and which welcomes and supports people to make Scotland their home and enrich our country; and the introduction of a universal basic income and a social security system that is geared wholly, not just partially, to lifting households out of poverty.

Our Scottish Government's programme is strong and it will make a difference to the lives of our citizens, but we could do much more and, as each day passes, the case for restoring Scotland's independence grows stronger.

Scottish people are sovereign. They will have their say. As we do the work to build that stronger, fairer country now, that is a day that I am very much looking forward to.

16:12

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): We live in the most difficult of times, and we demand that our Government and our decision makers respond in a way that recognises the magnitude of these dreadful times. So many lives have been disrupted and there has been so much personal loss. There has been deepening inequality, which has been felt not only by those who previously lived their lives in poverty, because many inequalities have emerged over the course of the pandemic, with some people being able to manage through it and some not, through no fault of their own.

It should not be acceptable to say that we cannot help everyone who has been affected by the Covid pandemic. After all, each and every decision on the pandemic response was made—in good faith, I accept—by the First Minister and the Prime Minister, and I am sure that both of them recognise that they have made decisions for the public good that have profoundly affected people's lives. At the peak of the crisis, Scotland had the third-highest number of excess deaths in Europe, and we see cases rising and, as has been referred to already today, restrictions being imposed in Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire.

Scotland is in a difficult place just now. In a sense, we are fighting for our survival and, in doing so, we are all discussing how we can build back better. I believe that we must work together and must have a single focus on building back Scotland. The backdrop to our efforts is a situation in which almost one in five people are living in absolute poverty, and that is after housing costs. We hear lots of figures, but the one for absolute poverty is what concerns me. I whole-heartedly agree with what Ruth Maguire said on the very important point about housing. Understanding the relationship between poverty and housing costs is one of the most important things in tackling poverty.

I believe that the fair rents bill that I proposed would have made a significant difference to tenants' rights—I want to put that on the record. I take the points that James Dornan made as convener of the Local Government and Communities Committee and I have had discussions with the Minister for Local

Government, Housing and Planning, Kevin Stewart. We are not the only party that believes that, although the Parliament has had five years to enhance tenants' rights, because of the pandemic we need to do it more than ever. However, the Government has chosen not to include anything about tenants' rights in the programme for government. I believe that that is a huge mistake, because it is impossible to overstate the importance of good, secure, warm housing in the fight against poverty.

We agree that Scotland requires an ambitious programme of building new homes, particularly social housing. From all parties, regardless of who is in power in the next parliamentary term, there needs to be a commitment to continue to build that level of social housing. The programme for government does not seem to commit to much beyond the existing level.

I will speak about renters. Andy Wightman and I have consistently raised the issue of debts that people who are struggling to pay their rent have accrued during the pandemic. Those people previously had jobs and security, but now they do not; we predicted that. I raised it many times during the course of the first and second coronavirus bills. My amendment 22 to the Coronavirus (Scotland) (No 2) Bill called for the creation of a tenants fund, but the Government voted against it. I am pleased to see the announcement of a tenant hardship fund, but I wonder why it took so long for the Government to come to the same conclusion as Labour and the Green Party that tenants would need help. I want some recognition from the Government that it is listening to us. We will work with the Government on areas where we agree.

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, almost half of tenants in the private rented sector have had a drop in their incomes since March 2020. That is extremely acute. We agree that we cannot afford to see mass evictions, but we need to act to make sure that they do not happen.

More broadly, it is important to recognise that citizens will need advice on the way forward in their daily lives in a way that they did not before. Therefore, I was deeply concerned at Glasgow City Council's decision on advice centres' funding. I welcome the announcement of the £4 million transition fund, but the thinking behind that decision concerns me. Why would any administration take from under the feet of its citizens the very service that they will need through this pandemic? Let us say that it is good that the council has had a rethink on that.

The Scottish welfare fund has a vital role to play during the crisis, and the Poverty and Inequality Commission has argued that the Scottish welfare fund is currently the most important Scottish

Government policy to prevent people in poverty being pulled under during the pandemic.

Ministers know that there has been an underspend of that funding; the commission's briefing said:

"We are shocked that more of the funding available was not used to provide a much-needed lifeline for people battling hardship during this pandemic."

We need to look at why that has been the case.

I declare an interest as a member of the Co-operative Party. What the Co-operative Party has to say about people having a stake in their economy and owning the future is also an important principle. When people talk about building back better, owning our future is also important. One of the few positives that can come out of this pandemic is the opportunity to shift to an economy that empowers people and encourages co-operatives and different models of business. I will quote one of the figures: 62 per cent of people who were questioned by the Co-operative Party say that, during the recovery, we should give priority to considering how we allow people to share in the wealth as well as create it.

In conclusion, when Fiona Hyslop is summing up, could she also address one other question for the city of Glasgow about how desperate the aviation industry is?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Because of a lack of time, I am afraid that you might have to write to her about that.

16:18

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The announcement of the programme for government is always an important day in the parliamentary calendar. However, this year, it came during a moment for which it is difficult to find parallels in modern times. The programme for government has taken on a new significance for every aspect of our national community and economy, so the First Minister's statement yesterday provided welcome and substantial commitments to rebuilding and developing our national infrastructure, as well as every aspect of our collective life.

Many of the commitments will have a positive impact that will be felt throughout the country. For instance, the decision to establish a comprehensive review of the provision of adult social care comes at a moment when the country has, I hope, a new sense of appreciation for the work that care workers do. The measures to close the poverty-related gap in university access are equally welcome. As others have said, the incorporation into Scots law of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child will deliver a

revolution in children's rights and put power in the hands of our young people.

Some measures take on a particular importance in rural Scotland—not least in the island communities that I represent. My constituency is set to be the largest beneficiary per capita of the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver 50,000 affordable homes. We have a significant shortage of affordable housing in the islands, and ageing and less energy-efficient housing stock. The investment in decarbonising the way that we heat our homes and, therefore, in tackling fuel poverty will be crucial in tackling the housing problems from which my constituency and others suffer.

There has been a growing national debate about whether the experience of lockdown will produce longer-term cultural and economic changes. One of the questions that is asked is whether, in the future, it will continue to be sustainable for as many people to commute, every day in life, to an office in a city centre. That debate comes at the same time as continuing anxiety about the shortage of working-age people in many rural communities. We need to remember that not everyone wants to spend their days commuting and that, at the same time, a great number of people who grew up in rural and island communities would happily move back, if only the job opportunities were there for them.

I therefore make a case again for us to seize the opportunity to think about what all that means for the decentralisation of public sector jobs in particular. There need to be more and more opportunities for people in the public sector to work either from home or from hot desks in rurally based offices—most likely, it will be a combination of both. Just as important, the right of people to work in that way will need to be advertised, and planning needs to be done for what people taking up those opportunities might mean in some of our rural communities.

All that, of course, implies connectivity. The pandemic has highlighted just how critical digital connectivity is to so many aspects of our lives. It was very welcome that, yesterday, priority was given to increasing the reach and speed of broadband across Scotland. The Scottish Government has already ensured that the proportion of homes in my constituency with access to superfast broadband has increased from 0 to 79 per cent in the past six years. We need, of course, to ensure that everyone is able to enjoy the benefits of enhanced connectivity, and to get to 100 per cent as soon as possible.

The programme for government makes no apologies for seeking to build a Scotland that has the powers that it needs as we, I hope, move out of the Covid crisis. As the First Minister said

yesterday, that means lifting our eyes. That means—lest that idea need explained to those whose unambitious gaze is generally lower—new constitutional powers for Scotland.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the member remind us when the commitment to the R100 programme was first made in the chamber and how many years late the programme will be when it is delivered?

Dr Allan: As I indicated, I want us to get to 100 per cent. I am conscious that, despite the fact that broadband and superfast connectivity are reserved matters, it has been the Scottish Government that has paid towards my constituency and others having any superfast broadband at all. However, I do not disagree with the member about the ambition and the need to get to 100 per cent as soon as we can.

I mentioned that some members have unambitious views about Scotland and its constitutional journey. Opposition members who groan at the very mention of independence perhaps now need to consider that, increasingly, people in Scotland can see what they cannot. Without greater borrowing powers and, indeed, the powers to make decisions about things such as the future of the furlough scheme, Scotland is constrained in what it can do to rebuild economically. As the programme for government makes clear, Scotland is preparing to find our own voice in the world.

Perhaps the last shot in the locker available to those who have argued against Scotland embarking on that journey—apart, of course, from the friendly fire that is directed along their respective front benches at the moment—was the assumption that the opponents of independence have been speaking for the majority and, therefore, have not needed to explain themselves much further. There is now much evidence to show that they no longer do that. The opponents of independence and the knee-jerk opponents of this programme for government would do well to attune themselves mentally to that new reality.

16:25

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I begin with some consensus. From the responses that we have had so far to the First Minister's announcement yesterday, it is clear that there is a primary focus on the economy and on encouraging willing co-operation between the private, public and third sectors in meeting the challenge, which is very welcome. Whether that relates to job creation, stimulating investment, economic growth or tackling the immense challenge of climate change, we should be grateful for that focus.

The green recovery that was spelled out in July by the climate emergency response group specifically asked Government—at Westminster or Holyrood—to consider carefully where it could invest public money and deliver best value, and to consider what incentives would be needed to stimulate the private sector to invest in key sectors and infrastructure, including in our rural communities, which are so critical to the green recovery. Likewise, it called for a future of green skills in employment, and several colleagues debated that point yesterday.

It would be churlish not to recognise that the Scottish Government has shown leadership in some key aspects of climate change, as it has on domestic food production, harnessing power, capturing carbon and championing the circular economy.

Fiona Hyslop: I appreciate the member's points, but does she agree that it is not always about money, and that some of the ways of unlocking private investment—particularly in renewables and green energy—will be in transmission and regulation? Will she join us in trying to ensure that the UK Government responds positively to the requests that are made by many Scottish companies to unlock that green potential?

Liz Smith: That is already happening. It is partly about money, but that is by no means the only thing that matters.

I want to speak about changing public attitudes, because all of what we are trying to deliver will be undermined unless we can ensure that there are better attitudes. Specifically, we need to try to harness the goodwill and enterprise in our local communities—much of which we have seen during the pandemic—to give people ownership of their communities. That is not going to happen unless they feel completely supported.

I want to speak about one particular issue that, judging by the inboxes of all of us in this chamber, is very real and of increasing concern to our local communities: the triple blight of litter, fly-tipping and antisocial camping. Those are all very much on the increase, and they are all costing local communities and local authorities huge sums of money, as well as significant aggravation and inconvenience. In some areas, those problems have become so bad that they are not only turning away tourists—how badly do we need those these days?—but repelling people in this country from visiting those places. Absolutely no one should have to put up with that situation, and it is high time that it was addressed, because the measures that are currently in place are clearly not working well enough.

Therein lies the biggest challenge. Despite the best efforts of the police, environment agencies,

local authorities and local communities in trying to weed out the problem, both the detection of the culprits, and—perhaps more important—the enforcement of the law is proving extremely difficult. That needs to change. It is all very well identifying antisocial behaviour as a crime, which it is in many cases, but if it cannot be addressed effectively then we are collectively failing.

What are the actions that will help as that issue comes to the forefront of policy? First, it is clear that the many groups who have come to this Parliament to give evidence want to see an extension of many of the local byelaws. In the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park, current byelaws allow for a fine of up to £500 for camping in a restricted area without a permit, leaving waste or failing to leave when required to do so. Surely, there is a case for extending those fines. A much stronger deterrent is required. Some groups also want to see annual permits introduced for legitimate wild camping on the same basis that annual permits exist for fishing, and for measures that will quite clearly distinguish between that and antisocial dirty camping.

Local authorities often feel that their hands are tied because they do not have the resources to combat irresponsible behaviour. They have powers to report antisocial behaviour and to provide the relevant data to assist the police and rangers in their duties. However, the process is too often incomplete, because there is no statutory duty for local authorities to do those things, although there are duties for the collection and reporting of other data.

Many good things are happening. There are good community councils, and good suggestions come from people who have given evidence to Parliament committees about what we must do. We must be able to enforce the law. That is clear. If that means legislative change, so be it.

We must strike the right balance between rights and responsibilities and we must ensure that policy is led by evidence. In the view of members on this side of the chamber—and in the opinion of almost every group that properly represents those who look after the natural environment—our legislation has not always been evidence led. At times, it has been skewed towards public rights, with less focus on the responsibilities that must come with those. As a result, it has become difficult to predict the need for, and to deliver, conservation. That should be a worry to us all. We must address those concerns, because they matter to everyone in Scotland. If we do not address them, some of the bigger challenges that we face will not be met.

16:31

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): The word “unprecedented” has been used more times in the past six months than ever before and it has been used here today.

We have had extraordinary levels of hardship and have faced health worries, including those about mental health. Young people have had abnormal amounts of time off school and no one yet knows what that means for their futures.

However, there has also been outstanding community resilience, support and friendship. Neighbours have helped neighbours. Families have connected through technology when forced into different ways of keeping in touch. That has been an issue not only for those learning how to use Zoom—which has been around for years although I had never heard of it—but for those whose digital capacity can be less than reliable. I represent a huge rural constituency where some people must continually search for a mobile signal, let alone any kind of 4G or 5G, but digital capacity can be an issue in towns and cities too, as we have seen with our own remote voting system.

I am pleased to see that there are plans to invest almost £49 million in superfast broadband contracts in 2021-22 alone, and to see the promised delivery of 4G infrastructure and services through the Scottish 4G infill programme, backed by £15 million of Scottish Government funding and £10 million from the European regional development fund.

Committing to digital connectivity will be ever more essential as we move towards more remote working. The pandemic has shown us the importance of our digital infrastructure; it is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

Our rural sector, including food and drink, has been particularly hard hit during the pandemic and faces a possible 20 per cent downturn this year. We will publish the third land use strategy, setting out how the land can contribute to tackling climate change. We will publish a recovery plan for our food and drink sector, with farmer-focused supply chains and markets putting farmers and food producers at the heart of the recovery, making farming more sustainable and profitable in the long term.

Even for those who do not yet know it, the events of the past six months will take an unimaginable toll on our wellbeing. We are a social species: although some of us may have enjoyed a bit of peace and quiet, we are not built to be left alone for such long periods of time.

Wellbeing is at the heart of everything. In schools, it has—or should have—equal weight with academic achievement. More workplaces are

realising that true potential can be reached only if wellbeing is seen as paramount and services are prioritised accordingly. The expansion of mental health services in the programme for government is therefore extremely welcome. It is not a footnote; these are important announcements.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): The member will be aware that long before Covid, mental health waiting times for young people were, unfortunately, unacceptably high. Will she join all members in the chamber in lobbying the Government to reduce those waiting times, because it must be done as soon as possible?

Gail Ross: I thank Jamie Greene for that intervention, which feeds into what is in the programme for government. The announcements on community health and wellbeing services that will support children, young people and their families, which will be in place in all local authorities in 2021, with a particular focus on mental wellbeing, show that the Government has listened and is acting on exactly the point that Jamie Greene has just made.

The Scottish Government will work with boards to retain, develop and support mental health assessment centres as part of a broader approach to improving access to appropriate health services as quickly as possible for people with mental health needs or distress. NHS near me is another initiative, which started in Caithness and has helped many people access health appointments without the need for a face-to-face consultation. Loads of people in Caithness were making needless journeys to Inverness to access healthcare. Luckily, the technology was advanced and working well, so we were able to roll it out around the country.

One of the issues affecting people's mental health at the moment is employment, because of jobs already lost or the fear of losing them. As has been said, the job retention scheme is about to come to an end, so I join the calls for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to continue the scheme, as other countries have done with theirs, for those who are still unable to go back to work as normal. There are lots of good initiatives for employment and jobs in the programme for government, as the cabinet secretary laid out in her speech.

The £100 million green jobs fund will help businesses and organisations to scale up significantly green, low-carbon and land-based employment and skills opportunities. We cannot dispute—and have never done—that Scotland stands on the cusp of the green revolution. With 25 per cent of Europe's potential for wind power, we need to grasp that now. It is more important than ever that our journey to net zero is supported and accelerated.

I mentioned earlier the community response to the pandemic. Community resilience groups have been formed in our areas and have looked at things from a different perspective, and we cannot afford to lose that momentum. Community planning has to be done from a grassroots level by those on the ground with the contacts, working in those sectors.

No, this is not a normal programme for government, because these are not normal times. Whatever normal is now, we have to work with it, work through it and work towards a better Scotland—and the programme for government does exactly that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I call Iain Gray, to be followed by James Dornan.

16:37

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I begin in a spirit of positivity, of which I know that Mr Swinney believes me to be a paragon, by starting with a welcome for those things in the programme for government that can be welcomed—it is always best to get that out of the way. There are a couple of really big, even historic, things to welcome in this year's programme for government, not least the incorporation of children's rights into Scottish law. That is something that we on the Labour benches have supported for a long time now. Although the commitment was made earlier in this session of Parliament, I confess that I was concerned that the Government might be running out of time to deliver it. I am therefore very glad that it has prioritised it now. That bill will certainly have a fair wind from us.

As will, in principle at least, the redress bill, which will finally, after so many years, create a scheme to compensate those who suffered abuse while children in care. We cannot, though, support the requirement in that bill currently for those who access it to waive their rights to civil justice; to say, as the Deputy First Minister did in introducing the bill, that that is to encourage the guilty organisations to contribute to the redress fund is to leave survivors feeling that their rights are being abrogated to protect the funds of those who perpetrated the abuse against them. That has to change during the passage of the bill.

Welcome, too, is the jobs guarantee—a critical response to the pandemic and to the potential impact on employment as furlough ends. Here, though, the devil really is in the detail. The guarantee needs to do much more than extend the existing opportunities for all guarantees, and not just by age range. It must also create new and additional courses, jobs and apprenticeships. It cannot simply incentivise employers to take on apprentices that we would have had in any case,

nor can it subsidise them to get away with paying lower wages than they would otherwise have had to pay.

All that must be additional, readily accessible and navigable for young people. If the jobs guarantee can do all that, that would be welcome, because those aspects are vital.

Much more disappointing is the programme's lack of anything new to say about education. For years now, closing the attainment gap has been, we were told, the Government's defining mission by which it should be judged.

We know that the action that was already being taken had stubbornly failed to close the gap significantly; we also know that lockdown will, undoubtedly, have widened the attainment gap. Despite that, ministers exacerbated the situation by requesting, signing off and then defending an exams replacement measure that institutionalised the gap. Although the Government was saved from itself by a combination of pupil protest and a motion of no confidence in this chamber, the inequity of regrades upwards ended up having to remain.

Schools have now returned, and nothing is in place to support the pupils who face the greatest barriers to learning. There was supposed to be an equity audit to measure the impact of lockdown and plans to give additional support to those who needed it. The audit is now swirling about in limbo, and the additional support has disappeared into a long-term strategy.

Funding for closing the attainment gap is exactly what was in place pre-pandemic—no more, no less. Indeed, schools have been told that they can use the funding flexibly. I am not sure what that means, since we all know that it was previously backfilling cuts to core budgets. I wonder how much more of that will happen now in schools, which are being told that they must pay for personal protective equipment and hand sanitiser out of their own budgets.

As for the extra teachers, where are they? That money has not reached councils yet. It is also temporary—at best, it can fund only temporary jobs. In addition, dozens, if not hundreds, of probationer and newly qualified teachers still do not have jobs. No wonder the Educational Institute of Scotland reported just a couple of days ago that 92 per cent of its reps say that, in their schools, no classes have been reduced in size to try to increase social distancing and deal with the pandemic. The truth is that we still have thousands fewer teachers than we had 13 years ago, and that has made dealing with the pandemic harder than it should have been.

Make no mistake: pupils from deprived communities and pupils with additional support

needs are continuing to fall further behind every day, despite the schools being back, and there is nothing new in the programme for government to help—not even for looked-after children on whom the First Minister lavished many warm words yesterday.

The backdrop to that was yesterday's new statistics showing that the attainment of children in care is falling, not improving. Some 89 per cent of them leave school without a single higher, and 65 per cent leave without any qualification at all. On the same day, I received a response to my parliamentary question that turned down flat Who Cares? Scotland's request for a tutoring programme to help those children.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr Gray.

Iain Gray: Let me just remind ministers, too, that they are committed by parliamentary vote to provide nursery funding for all children who defer entry to primary 1. No, we have not forgotten that promise, either.

When it comes to education—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, no—thank you.

Iain Gray: —this is a programme of a Government out of ideas.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, thank you.

Mr Dornan, you were not in the chamber when you were called, so I will take Maurice Golden before you.

16:44

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): The on-going pandemic is rightly at the heart of the programme for government. As ever, I welcome efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus and ensure a swift economic recovery. It is the need to start that recovery that increasingly concerns the public, from workers at Rolls-Royce—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Bear with me for a minute, Mr Golden.

You are looking bewildered, Mr Dornan. When your name was called you were not in the chamber. Think about it.

Please continue, Mr Golden.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I am sorry, Presiding Officer. May I respond to that and say why I was not here?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—you are not getting to respond. Sit down. Mr Golden, please.

Maurice Golden: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The need to start the recovery concerns the public, from workers at Rolls-Royce in Renfrewshire and those at the airport here in Edinburgh, to north-east oil and gas businesses and countless others in communities across Scotland. The crisis is unprecedented, but it also offers us an unprecedented opportunity to do things differently and to build a better country.

We need action, and the Scottish Conservatives have set out clear and concise steps to start the recovery. Our plans include establishing job security councils to match skills with vacancies in target sectors, to help stave off further unemployment. We propose creating a hardship fund to protect businesses that are forced to close again because of local lockdowns. A town centre adaptation fund would enable us to widen pavements, install cycle paths and make other health and safety changes.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way on that point?

Maurice Golden: We want to ensure that communities and workers have a right to buy at-risk businesses that are vital to them.

I give way to Fiona Hyslop.

Fiona Hyslop: Is the member aware of the £3 million that is already being invested in our town centres, to support business improvement districts and others to do exactly what he has described? A lot of what is in the Scottish Conservatives' plan is already being delivered by the Scottish Government. Some of their plan's proposals are just out of date because they have not caught up with the momentum of action that is already being taken.

Maurice Golden: I am glad that the SNP is listening to calls from the Scottish Conservatives.

Another point on which we would like the SNP to go further is a Scotland-first procurement plan that would see the Government favouring local suppliers when spending the public's money. We would also use the city deals model to help our smaller town and rural areas.

However, we also need to ensure long-term change. Our export network needs a boost. A good start would be to create trade offices across the rest of the UK, which, after all, is Scotland's most important market. That would be aided by reforming Scottish Enterprise along regional lines, to mirror city and growth deals. Such new regional agencies would be more effective and client friendly, with an emphasis on scaling projects.

We must also consider improving infrastructure and research. Creating a joint UK and Scottish infrastructure investment vehicle would make common sense—the city deal model has already

laid down a framework for that—and it would allow joint funding of national-level projects.

We want direct investment in research to increase to 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2026. Alongside that, there should be university spin-off employment grants to create skilled jobs, and new innovation funding streams to target the commercialisation of intellectual property opportunities.

The fundamental point is that, in order to get our economy up and running, we must co-operate for the common good, which is what being part of the UK is about. Almost a million Scottish jobs have been saved by the UK Government, and the recent GERS figures show that our public services are receiving an extra £15.1 billion from it.

I take the opportunity to welcome certain aspects of the Scottish Government's programme for government. The publication of the Higgins report was a welcome step forward, with its recommendations to save jobs, reduce inequality and give young Scots a better shot at life. The Logan review on placing digital skills and infrastructure at the heart of the programme for government is also long overdue. Sandy Begbie's initial report on the youth guarantee also contains much that we can whole-heartedly support.

However, anyone listening to the First Minister yesterday would surely have asked the obvious question: after 13 years in power, why has all that not been done already? I say that not in an attempt to score points, but to make a sincere request. Things must change, otherwise Scotland will be stuck in a pattern of repeating the same mistakes but expecting a different outcome.

Failing to deliver is a running theme for the SNP Government. Members will remember Alex Salmond's promise of 20,000 renewables jobs by 2020, most of which actually went abroad. That was followed by Derek Mackay's ferries fiasco, which has overrun by more than £100 million and is years behind schedule. Nicola Sturgeon has boasted about the Scottish National Investment Bank opening this year, but that will be three years after it was originally announced. Then there is the SNP's refusal to back our fishermen. Further, the Government promised to deliver superfast broadband to everyone in Scotland by 2021—a target that is now set to be missed. Nicola Sturgeon's call yesterday for another divisive referendum is so disappointing. It is the last thing that families, workers and businesses need right now. That is why the programme for government is simply a programme for grievance that tries to ignore the First Minister's own record in government.

Instead, the Scottish Conservatives want to use the talent that we have in Scotland right now to

save jobs, protect businesses and give our young people a brighter future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I now call James Dornan. Mr Dornan, you came in halfway through Iain Gray's speech, so you were not here when your name was first called. You should be in the chamber when your name is called. What has happened to you will happen to anyone else who does what you did.

16:50

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): My apologies, Presiding Officer.

It is a pleasure to take part in the proceedings and to speak as the last backbench SNP MSP in this Parliament's final programme for government debate.

It is a programme for success and renewal and it shows that, 13 years on, it is still this Government that has the strategy and vision to take Scotland forward. Understandably, the programme for government announcement was focused on our recovery from the greatest public health crisis of our lifetime; a crisis that has substantially impacted on our health, economy and wider society.

Over the course of the parliamentary session, each programme for government has had a clear theme: in 2016, the focus was on education and closing the attainment gap; in 2017, the priority was to build the economy; in 2018, the focus was on innovative actions to improve our mental health services and in 2019, the emphasis was on how we could tackle the global climate emergency. I am delighted that those Government priorities are common threads that run through this year's programme for government, ensuring that we take holistic actions to see us through the stages of the pandemic.

The Scottish Government's plan offers hope in challenging times and I urge all parties to back it and to work with us to rebuild our society and economy over the remaining months of the parliamentary session. The pandemic has highlighted, and in many cases worsened, the inequalities in our society. Those who had the least before the crisis are often the worst affected by the health and economic impacts of the crisis.

The programme for government offers an opportunity to embark on a different path to sustainable recovery, a path that will remobilise and reform our National Health Service and social care sectors through, for example, the consideration of creating a national care service; tackle and reduce child poverty through the introduction of the Scottish child payment; and take radical action to end homelessness and

support tenants through a £10 million hardship loan fund. This is a time to be ambitious and no one can seriously doubt how ambitious the Government's plan is.

One of my personal priorities, before and throughout this crisis, has been how we best protect women and girls who are isolated, vulnerable and facing domestic abuse. I have campaigned on that issue for some time and my fears have been exacerbated by last night's understandable decision to restrict many from visiting other people's homes. Due to the imposition of necessary lockdown measures, there is an increased risk of violence against women and girls at home. I strongly support and welcome the announcement of the introduction of a new domestic abuse bill that will legislate for emergency protection orders to better safeguard those who are at immediate risk of domestic abuse.

As we can see, the pandemic touches almost every aspect of our lives and, thankfully, the programme for government is extensive and far-reaching in order to meet many of those challenges. Next year's election is fast approaching and that is the strategy that Scotland needs to see us through the short term and the coming years.

The Scottish Government already has a record to be proud of: new groundbreaking domestic abuse legislation; delivering the baby box; the implementation of Frank's law to provide free personal care to those who are under 65; the creation of a Scottish national investment bank; and establishing Scotland's social security system, to name but a few. The Scottish Government has already achieved that with one hand tied behind its back. The programme for government will ensure that Scotland becomes a fairer, greener and more prosperous country.

It is because of the Government's forward thinking that I am confident—although no one will take it for granted—that it will be an SNP Government that will build on our recovery plan after next year. It is my fervent wish that that next programme for government will be set by an independent Scottish Government. We get the usual jibes from the soon-to-be ermine Tory leader and the soon to be elbowed Labour leader that we should not even be discussing independence at this time, but at no time has independence ever shown itself to be more crucial to the people of Scotland than it has now. A perfect storm is fast approaching: the abrupt ending of the furlough scheme and the very real threat—

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

James Dornan: Yes, of course I will.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful to the member for giving way. He says that at no point in Scotland's history has independence been more important to the people of Scotland. Is he aware of polling that suggests that only 14 per cent of Scottish people would categorise independence in their top three priorities for the Scottish Government?

James Dornan: Thank you for the intervention, Mr Cole-Hamilton. I have to say that if my partner were given a list of three or four things and was asked "What is the most important—education, health, policing or independence?", she would probably put independence fourth. However, that is because she would be thinking in the short term and not in the long term, and those other three are things that have to be dealt with immediately. Independence is for the long term. It is for our kids, our grandkids and future generations.

A perfect storm is fast approaching Scotland, with the abrupt ending of the furlough scheme and the very real threat of a no-deal Brexit. With the powers of an independent country, we would be in a better place to face those challenges.

It has been clear during the pandemic that, when we make decisions for ourselves, the results are better for the people of Scotland. The First Minister has shown time and again that we do things differently in Scotland—more openly, honestly and frankly than our counterparts in England. When, for example, is the last time that we saw bumbling Boris face difficult questions from the media? Compare that to the First Minister, who on almost a daily basis faces the press and takes on the hard questions—although not always to the liking of some dinosaurs in the sleepy House of Lords, apparently.

Our attentions have rightly been focused, and will continue to focus, on dealing with Covid-19 and ensuring that we can suppress the virus further. Despite support for independence now being the settled, majority position in Scotland, it is also right that work on independence has been paused. However, when the time is right, Scotland must get its chance to make its choice. I have no doubt that when we make that choice, it will be for the option that allows us to make our own decisions on our own future. That, Presiding Officer, will be called independence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. I see that Angela Constance is not in the chamber for closing speeches; no doubt she will have a reason to give the Presiding Officer.

16:56

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Before I start, I refer members to my entry in the

register of interests. I am a trustee of Shetland Women's Aid.

As others have done, I begin by welcoming elements of the programme for government that deserve celebration. The new domestic abuse bill, which will allow for emergency protection orders, is the kind of work by the Government that I whole-heartedly support. It is a sensible, progressive policy change, which my party has long called for. I also share the concerns that James Dornan highlighted in his speech about domestic abuse.

The incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an ambition that my party has had for a long time, too. I am glad to see that that work is now set out, and I hope that it lives up to the billing in practice, because we are still disappointed that the work to raise the age of criminal responsibility fell below the level that was expected by the UN. Angela Constance referred to a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity", and she is certainly right about that with regard to the rights of the child.

It is almost a year since I made my first speech to the Parliament after being elected as Shetland's MSP. In that speech, I told the chamber about my ambition for Shetland. After looking at this programme for government, I am disappointed that the Government does not appear to hold Shetland in the same regard. Basic asks that Shetlanders have been calling for for years went unacknowledged again.

A Scotland-wide tech revolution is exciting and could be transformational, but there was no acknowledgment that the R100 programme is two years behind, and that its roll-out in the Highlands and Islands is on the brink. The people in Foula and Skerries would be delighted to have a boost to their digital capability—they do not even get basic broadband service, never mind superfast. Alasdair Allan is right about islanders moving back to live in the islands when the opportunities are there. Digital connectivity is essential for that.

I note the headline "supporting local economies", but there was no sign of funding for the replacement of the Good Shepherd, the 34-year-old ferry that serves the community of Fair Isle and its economy. A "green recovery" was another headline, but there was no acceptance of the financial and environmental sense that it would make to explore fixed links in Shetland.

After last summer's by-election, I thought that those on the SNP benches would be well acquainted with the sky-high cost of travel to the islands; as their election return made clear, it is not cheap. Therefore, it was discouraging, but not surprising, to see the islands once again batted around over fair funding for the internal ferry

service in this year's budget negotiations. The programme does not take that any further forward.

For visitors who are looking for a holiday, paying eye-watering sums is difficult enough, and that is no help to Shetland's tourism industry. For islanders who need to travel to the mainland to access the basic services that others take for granted, it is not just difficult—it is stifling. Those costs are not just part and parcel of living in the islands; they are the result of years of choices by a Government that prefers to look elsewhere.

I can also see that blinkered approach in other areas. On childcare, councils such as Shetland have stepped up, but we know that other parts of Scotland are struggling. I was interested when the First Minister said yesterday that many areas are already delivering 1,140 hours of childcare, because parliamentary questions and freedom of information requests by my party asking to see the evidence of that have been dismissed.

My inbox has been inundated with questions and concerns about the state of education from people across Scotland. From exams to face coverings, the education secretary has been slow off the mark, and schools and teachers have been left in the lurch. Education Scotland seems to be missing in action, leaving teachers to bear the burden of the pandemic themselves. Last week, a survey was released that showed that a fifth of teachers in Scotland do not think that they will be recruited by the Government's plan will not plug that gap.

The same survey said that only a quarter of teachers thought that they could intervene to support a pupil's mental health. Yesterday, my colleague Willie Rennie read out waiting times for child mental health support. More than 1,500 children have been waiting for more than a year for treatment. That is shameful. When the Liberal Democrats led a debate on Scotland's mental health crisis last December, the Scottish Government responded by submitting an amendment that deleted the phrase

"there is a mental health crisis in Scotland".

There is a mental health crisis in Scotland—it is just that this Government has not yet addressed it.

When we talk about economic renewal and recovery, we should not just be talking about recovering from the pandemic. We should be talking about recovering from the crises that were in play before the pandemic hit.

17:01

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): The Greens were pleased to see the programme for government. There is much in it that we agree

with. Of course, its focus is very much on tackling the Covid health crisis and economic crisis. In the past few months, the Greens have focused on a number of key elements of the pandemic, such as testing, housing, the green new deal, and active travel. Most parties recognise that, although we are in the middle of a pandemic, we need to ensure that our response deals with the challenges that we face, and with the significant underlying issues that have been exposed by the pandemic, including inequality, precarious work, and insecure and unaffordable housing, all of which raise fundamental questions about a degree of complacency in public policy during the past decade—indeed during the Parliament's existence over the past 20 years.

As Robin McAlpine argued today in an article on the Source website,

"if you wish to be progressive, then you don't give all your tight public finances to corporations".

For example, £150 million over five years for forestry is welcome, but virtually all of that will go to wealthy private landowners when that investment should be devoted to communities, local authorities and others who would benefit from it. The £10 million Scottish land fund went straight into the pockets of landlords. We need a fundamental review of whether that fund continues to be fit for purpose.

As I have indicated, there is much to welcome in the programme for government and, along with others, I welcome the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; the domestic abuse bill; getting short-term let regulations back on track by spring 2021; and the welcome commitment to continuing work on incorporation of other human rights instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

However, I want to reflect on where we are on housing. We know from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and others that tenants are facing hardship and reduced incomes. It helps no one if folks lose their homes, which is why the coronavirus emergency powers were and continue to be so important, and we welcome their extension. However, there is a frequent refrain from the Government. The First Minister said yesterday:

"we legislated to stop people being evicted"—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2020; c 22.]

No, we did not. We legislated for a delay. I welcome the tenant hardship loan fund and I thank the First Minister for her engagement on that in recent weeks and on wider matters relating to private tenancies. I would welcome further, ongoing engagement in the coming months.

However, a loan to pay rent is still debt. It will be a lifeline for some but not others, and the details will be important. We argued for no evictions to be allowed for rent arrears. If we cannot have legislation to deliver that, we should seek to place conditions on the tenant loan fund, with a contractual agreement, at the very least, that there will be no evictions on grounds of arrears for tenants who are in receipt of a loan and who continue to pay over the term that has been agreed. In the past, we have suggested contractual arrangements between credit unions and landlords, underwritten by the Scottish Government. I hope that we can have some discussion about how such arrangements are designed.

However, I continue to be troubled by the prospect of evictions. We know that they are happening. For anyone who doubts that, just this morning my office staff looked at the tribunal records and found that, since just last Wednesday—one week ago—the tribunal had issued 28 eviction orders. Of those, 24 were for arrears. The people who were evicted included a pregnant woman with three children, a man in the process of applying for housing benefit who had been unable to find alternative accommodation and a tenant who could not pay her rent because she had lost her job due to Covid.

I am troubled by the fact that we missed the opportunity to properly protect tenants through a two-year rent freeze, a bar on eviction for arrears and a bar on issuing notices to leave for the duration of the pandemic. I am troubled by what might happen this winter, which is why we say that there is a need for a winter eviction ban, as there is in France.

Over the coming months, more and more tenants will be evicted. Some of them may escape that if they can handle the challenging of eviction orders in tribunal, if they can represent themselves and if they persuade the tribunal to use the discretionary grounds to refuse such orders. Many of them will not, however.

We are where we are, however, so we need to commit in the longer term to fundamental reforms in the private rented sector beyond the pandemic, for example by permanently making all eviction grounds discretionary and by stopping landlords being allowed to evict tenants because they want to sell the tenant's home or they want to move in themselves. Importantly, as Richard Leonard and Patrick Harvie said, we need effective rent controls.

We welcome the 20-minute neighbourhood idea in the programme for government. That idea has been promoted by very many people over a long period of time, but it is undermined by a planning system that has increasingly been a vehicle for

securing private interests over public interests. To achieve that goal is very ambitious.

Patrick Harvie mentioned Alexander Dennis. I had the privilege of visiting the factory in the course of an inquiry by the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee. The programme for government discusses green jobs, but many manufacturers that are involved in green technology are making redundancies, including Alexander Dennis. I commend the unions there for the important work that they are doing.

Ruth Maguire raised the vital question of unsustainable rent rises, even in the so-called social/affordable sector. Like her, I have concerns about that, and about mid-market rents. I find that constituents are facing unsustainable rent rises, even as their incomes are frozen.

Pauline McNeill also emphasised that, and we regret that the Government has not included the relevant elements of her bill in its programme for government.

The next six months to dissolution will be dominated by Covid, but Covid is as nothing compared with the climate crisis that we all face. Greens will contest the forthcoming election on a platform of radical reform, based on the Green principles of equality, environmental sustainability, peace and radical democracy. We look forward to that election. We will continue to support the Government in the meantime where we agree, but we will continue to challenge and oppose it where we do not.

17:08

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Speaker after speaker has reflected on the unprecedented times that we are living through. The programme for government has been published in the context of, and in response to, a global and national crisis. We face huge tests not only in relation to health but on the economy and climate, too.

There is much to welcome in the programme for government, but it must not be the final word. MSPs on all benches have much to contribute, and I hope that the Government continues to listen, adapt and deliver. The programme for government must be scrutinised and delivered in tandem with the Government's response to the pandemic, which can often change at short notice, understandably.

I put on record our thanks to ministers, officials and the staff of the Parliament, who have kept our democracy functioning through a year like no other.

Listening to the debate, I am reminded that being sent to the Parliament by our communities is

a privilege and a responsibility beyond compare. I believe that we all came here to do good, not harm. However, the exchanges in the chamber sometimes camouflage the cross-party work and collaboration that happen when the cameras are not on but that are often a catalyst for change. It is important to say that, because the debate has got a bit lively at times today. We should reflect on the fact that, although a bit of hilarity and banter is good, there is a lot of pain and suffering in our communities and we do important work here.

With regard to the content of the programme for government, we really welcome the commitment to a national care service, as has been said yesterday and today. Probably no section of society has been more affected by the pandemic than those who live in our care homes, and we believe that that commitment is a necessary and welcome move. It has, of course, been a long-term policy of Scottish Labour.

The proposal for national standards in our care system is not just a talking point or a symbolic gesture; it is to ensure that no postcode lottery exists in the level of care that someone can expect to receive and that the system has enough resources to ensure that everyone is treated with dignity and respect and does not receive rushed visits or substandard levels of care.

The stand-out speech in the debate was that of Angela Constance. It was a very personal speech—I had not been aware of some of her professional background—and she was absolutely right to talk about the need for an ethical model of care. As Richard Leonard has said, and as I have said to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, we will work with the Government—in fact, with anyone—to ensure that we have a national care service that puts people before profit, so that we never again see the hardships that our care workforce have faced or the harrowing tragedies that we have seen not just in care homes but in people's own homes.

The debate also tells us that we have to create space in our Parliament to allow people to change their minds and work together. We should not be embarrassed about doing that but should embrace it. That is not in the speech that I wrote earlier—bear with me while I get to my next page.

We welcome other commitments, such as the Scottish child payment, as a move in the right direction.

Ruth Maguire: I welcome Monica Lennon's thoughtful contribution. Members have spoken about division. Does she agree that all of us, as parliamentarians, have a responsibility, when we disagree, to do so respectfully, no matter how whole-heartedly we hold the opinions that we are expressing?

Monica Lennon: I absolutely agree with that. We do our constituents a disservice if we let ourselves down with our standard of behaviour.

There is a lot to welcome in the programme for government. As the co-convenor of the cross-party group on women's health, I am pleased to see important commitments on women's health. I also look forward to the progression of my member's bill on access to free period products and continue to work positively with the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government.

The commitment to a patient safety commissioner is also really important. It is one of the many recommendations of the Cumberlege report, and having the commissioner in Scotland will make a big difference. Our national health service gets things right most of the time, of course, and its staff are absolutely tremendous, but the NHS can also get things wrong, which can be partly about resources, training or cultural issues. The commitment is important, because we have seen injustices around mesh implants and problems at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital. I pay tribute to the work of Alex Neil, Jackson Carlaw and Neil Findlay. They are an unlikely trio, but that shows that it is important that we come together and join forces when constituents come to us with real issues that affect not just one individual but people across the country.

There is no denying that the programme for government still leaves unanswered questions on other major challenges. There is not enough in it about the on-going viability and resilience issues that the pub sector faces in the wake of lockdown. Furthermore, the impact of Covid-19 on health and social care charities has highlighted the huge role that they play in tackling inequalities and supporting people in times of illness and crisis. Charities such as the British Heart Foundation, Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland and many others provide vital support and research—without them, the NHS would be under even more pressure. Yesterday, I asked the First Minister a direct question about the need to expand access to residential rehabilitation in drug and alcohol recovery services, and we do not yet have a good enough answer on that.

On wider national health service investment, health boards continue to struggle financially. It was an issue before Covid and it is a big issue now. There are serious challenges ahead with regard to winter preparedness, and the remobilisation of the NHS is far too slow. I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has worked very hard on her waiting times improvement plan, but, to put matters into context, even before Covid hit, if we had continued at the same pace, the treatment time targets would not

have been met until 2029. We all need to get round the table and work out how we will rescue our NHS.

I agree with Ruth Maguire, who said that we are not all in this equally and that not everyone is in the same boat. I think it was Pauline McNeill who made the point that we cannot just say that we cannot help everybody. There are people whom we have not talked about in the debate, such as family carers, including young carers, who have had to experience shielding in lockdown and not being in school. Support for disabled people has also been stripped away—we need to bring it back and build back better.

This year will continue to be a challenge for everyone. We must not allow entrenched views on the constitution to distract and deflect us from our duties. Where we can work together to achieve positive progress, let us do so. Where there are legitimate questions and issues of scrutiny, the Scottish ministers would do well to listen.

17:16

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I close for the Scottish Conservatives in today's debate on the final programme for government in this session of Parliament.

I, too, was struck by Angela Constance's powerful speech, and what she said about how the pandemic has given us time to pause, reflect and really question what we are doing. It is an opportunity. That said, I cannot help thinking that there are, in the programme for government, many missed opportunities for small businesses and job creation, and for easing the burden that our NHS is facing. I will develop that point a bit later.

However, there are aspects of the programme for government that my party and I welcome, especially its focus on the economy. I think that it was Patrick Harvie who spoke about tension in the programme for government debates, and about being open to ideas from all sides.

There are some things to welcome, and some things that we cannot support. In the latter category, I am afraid that one glaring announcement stole the limelight. It is slap bang in the middle of the legislative programme: the announcement of another independence referendum.

We are in the middle of a pandemic, and we are having periodic flare-ups of the virus across the country, as was exemplified only last night in the west of Scotland. People remain anxious about their health and the health of their parents, children, friends and family. People are fearful for their jobs, their livelihoods and even their way of

life. A second independence referendum is the last thing on their minds.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Can Donald Cameron tell me when the right time will be?

Donald Cameron: The referendum was meant to be once in a generation.

The lack of appetite for another referendum is clear for everyone to see. A poll that was published only last month showed a second independence referendum being seventh in people's list of top priorities. If there was ever a time when, just once, the SNP might have shown some restraint on the constitution, given everything that the country is going through, this is the time. This is the time when they could have given it a rest—they should have given it a rest. It is shameful that the SNP Government thinks that it is a priority to spend taxpayers' money on, and to direct civil servants' time to, drawing up another independence referendum bill.

Members rose—

Donald Cameron: I am sorry. I cannot take an intervention—I need to crack on.

We are frequently told that civil servants are up to their eyes in dealing with the pandemic and its aftermath.

I will move on to some of the detail. Many of the big announcements in the programme for government, which were serialised by the First Minister yesterday, do not contain much that is actually new. Murdo Fraser touched on that yesterday and today, and noted a commitment to delivering a new inward investment plan, which was promised a year ago but has not yet been delivered.

Fiona Hyslop: The minister who is responsible for that was delivering on personal protective equipment and was ensuring that Scottish procurement was delivering for the health service. Officials from that department were involved in delivering the grants that Murdo Fraser was asking about.

Donald Cameron: The promise was made this time last year and has not been delivered.

There was also a pledge to publish the housing strategy to 2040—another promise that was made last year that has not been delivered.

The First Minister also said:

"We will also double to £20 million our flexible workforce development fund"—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2020; c 14.]

That was another promise that was made in the previous programme for government.

However, it is welcome to see the SNP Government taking on board measures that were proposed by the Scottish Conservatives—policies including early diagnosis centres for cancer, which we proposed last year, and plans to expand pharmacy services through the pharmacy first Scotland service, which we proposed back in 2018.

The approach to community procurement in the programme for government copies our plan to power up Scotland—except that, as Maurice Golden noted, we would go further and focus on a Scotland-first approach by ensuring that Government procurement favours local businesses.

There are measures in the programme for government that I welcome. I welcome the proposals for a green recovery programme, especially for our island communities, which desperately need more investment. I welcome the focus on tourism in the Highlands and Islands, especially the “Scotland Outlook 2030” framework. I note the proposal to establish a new productivity-club pilot in the Highlands, which local businesses will welcome.

However, unfortunately, there are also too many failures that have accumulated over many years that show that the Government is failing Scotland. Let us take broadband, for instance. The SNP promised 100 per cent superfast broadband to every home and business premises by the end of this parliamentary session, and the First Minister repeated that promise yesterday. However, we know that that simply will not be the case. Everyone knows that R100 will not be ready by the 2021 deadline, which is a Scottish Government target; it is no one else’s. It is a promise that has been made and broken by the SNP.

I turn to health, which deserves further scrutiny. As many members have said, Covid-19 has been and continues to be an unprecedented event, and has undeniably been one of the biggest tests for our NHS in its history. Our front-line staff have done a phenomenal job and have put their lives at risk to help others. They continue to deserve our gratitude and appreciation.

I know how tough it will have been for clinicians to temporarily cease providing their normal services and treatments during the height of the pandemic, in order to focus attention on dealing with Covid-19. It was right that that happened, just as it was right to ensure that the NHS had the capacity to deal with a surge in hospital admissions.

However, it is right that we now look to reopen services as quickly as possible—assuming that it is safe and practicable to do so. I reiterate our support for plans in the programme for

government to remobilise services, but as I stated yesterday, we learned last week that there are some 71,000 patients waiting longer than 12 weeks for treatment. Almost 100,000 patients are waiting for routine tests, including MRI scans. The people who are waiting for treatment will be anxious and might even be in pain. They need reassurance and they need to be given a timeframe for when they will be treated.

I am the first to acknowledge that much of the backlog can be pinned on Covid-19, but huge waiting times have long been a problem under this Government, so we need urgency in tackling the backlog. Remobilisation initiatives over the next year are all well and good, but much more needs to be done for people who are waiting right now for treatment.

In closing, I will focus on some of the many important points that have been made by colleagues across the chamber. Many members commented on the exceptional and abnormal circumstances in which we find ourselves. There were interesting speeches from Ruth Maguire and Pauline McNeill on social housing, from Andy Wightman on the tenancy sector and from Alasdair Allan on housing in the islands. Jamie Greene rightly called out the SNP on its failures in education, and Liz Smith was firm in her arguments about the huge problem of littering and rubbish around Scotland.

Unfortunately, the programme for government lacks the ambition that is needed to take Scotland forward. It fails to support our small businesses and to power up our economy. It fails our health service and it obsesses over a second independence referendum that nobody wants. This has been the hallmark of the Government over the past 13 years: failure to tackle the issues that people care about and throwing everything behind separation. In short, Scotland deserves better.

17:24

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): Monica Lennon set a really important tone in her contribution to the debate, and a reasonable expectation for a programme for government debate: the Government sets out its position, Opposition members set out their thoughts and reflections in a constructive spirit, and the Government engages on those questions. I intend to try to do some of that in the time that is available to me. I thank her for a very thoughtful contribution to the debate. However, before I get to those thoughtful reflections, I have a couple of blunt points to make.

First, I fear that Alex Cole-Hamilton was operating under a misapprehension in saying to Parliament that the measure of any Government is how it is reported in the press. I say to Mr Cole-Hamilton that that is not how it works. The measure of any Government is whether it can be re-elected. This Government has managed that twice already.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful for the opportunity to clarify my remarks. I did not say that the measure of any good Government is how it lands in the press—it is how its agenda is received by the press, which tells a story. It says a lot about the Government that all that was noteworthy in the programme for government was yet another tilt at independence.

John Swinney: I think that Mr Cole-Hamilton, in his response, has made my point for me. The measure of any Government is whether it can command the confidence of the public. This Government has managed that on two occasions, and I remind Mr Cole-Hamilton that we replaced a Government in which his party was a member, and that there were more Liberal Democrat members at that time than there are now. Perhaps he should reflect on that point, in the spirit of Monica Lennon's remarks, and tone down some of the vehemence that we got from him, which was not consistent with Monica Lennon's appeals to us.

The second blunt point relates to Murdo Fraser's suggestion that the Government's programme was outclassed by Douglas Ross's contribution on Monday. Mr Ross's attempt to explain that he would pay for his ambitious third lane on the M8 with money that has already been spent was something of quite awesome and legendary incompetence. If the Scottish Conservatives really thought that the nicest thing that they could do for Scotland was to dismiss Jackson Carlaw and replace him with the incompetent Douglas Ross, all I can do is thank them for making much easier the task of defeating them in the forthcoming elections.

Murdo Fraser: This week, we learned in figures that have been verified by the Scottish Parliament information centre that the level of fiscal transfer to Scotland from the rest of the UK since 2007, when the SNP came to power, amounts to a cumulative total of £62 billion. What does the SNP Government have to show for that money?

John Swinney: What the SNP Government has to show for it is that we have been returned to office twice with the endorsement of the electorate, and the Conservatives have been in opposition for all that time. I think that defeating the Conservatives on a sustained basis is a pretty good accomplishment. Let me give a word of

warning: we intend to continue doing that in the period that lies ahead.

Having made my blunt remarks, I will try to address the programme for government. It is focused on three principal pillars, around the national mission to create jobs in the very difficult economic circumstances that we face; the objective of promoting lifelong health and wellbeing; and the determination to enable our young people to grasp their full potential, through the promotion of equality and human rights.

I was delighted with the reaction of members of the Parliament and of many stakeholders to our announcement today on the publication of a bill to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been strongly supported by colleagues across the chamber for many years. I am delighted that we have reached that starting point and I commit the Government to constructive engagement with everyone on the matter.

There were a number of central points in the debate. The national care service dominated much of the debate. Like Donald Cameron, I appreciated and valued enormously the speech that Angela Constance made. Her theme was that this is the moment—the opportunity—for the call for us all to put right the things that have never been put right. Richard Leonard has done sterling work to advance the arguments for a national care service, and the speeches that Ruth Maguire and Angela Constance made demonstrated some of the elements and challenges that we must confront in the detailed work that will be required, should we embark on such a policy approach.

Ruth Maguire highlighted the sense of urgency in reforming the provision of healthcare services that we have seen during the Covid pandemic. In all honesty, I think that many members think that reforms, particularly on digital consultations and services, happened at a much faster pace than we are accustomed to seeing when it comes to health service reform. I say to Angela Constance, Richard Leonard and Ruth Maguire that we need to ensure that we capture some of that spirit of urgent and timeous reform as we advance the arguments about a national care service. That issue will be uppermost in the work that Derek Feeley and the advisory panel take forward.

The second major theme was housing. I recognise the long-standing interest that Pauline McNeill and Andy Wightman have taken in the matter. There is broad agreement on many areas, but we have not managed to reach agreement on all the technical points, so, without trying to do that today, I commit the Government to continuing engagement with Pauline McNeill and with Andy Wightman and the Greens, particularly on regulation of the private rented sector—the issues

that Andy Wightman raised about people's anxieties about the winter are ones that we take deadly seriously. Swift progress—again—was made on homelessness during the Covid pandemic, and we would like to see that replicated.

Pauline McNeill: We would whole-heartedly welcome discussions. I hope that the cabinet secretary recognises that the centrepiece legislation on rent pressure zones has failed—Kevin Stewart and I have talked about that. Some commitment has been made, to be fair, and the minister and I are in dialogue about the matter, but I hope that there will be a recognition that at some point the Parliament will need to legislate for more tenants' rights. It might not be through my proposed bill, but there should be something.

John Swinney: The housing minister will engage in those discussions and ensure that those issues are advanced.

On education, at the beginning of the debate Iain Gray asked the economy secretary about the Logan review. I agree fundamentally with him that there is a need to ensure that we have much greater industry engagement and participation in computing education, because the pace of technological change is a challenge for computer studies teachers. We need to ensure that our education system is equipped with real, lived experience of changes in digital technology. I have had a constructive conversation with Mark Logan, who is developing further, more detailed propositions for the Government, which I will of course share with the Parliament.

There was a lot of discussion about issues to do with equity and the implications of Covid. The Government has, of course, put in place additional funding of £75 million to recruit additional teachers. The initial intelligence that I have from local authorities is that more than 700 additional teachers have been recruited as part of the allocation of that money, which has been distributed to local authorities.

As I said earlier today to Mr Rowley, there is no question of schools having to use pupil equity fund moneys to fund hand sanitiser in schools. The Government has said that it will make money available to local authorities and has already distributed £20 million to enable local authorities in that regard.

Jamie Greene spent five and a half of his six minutes running down Scottish education and then said that lots of good things are going on. I gently encourage him to rebalance his speeches so that he spends five and a half minutes talking about the good things and maybe only 30 seconds running Scottish education down.

On early learning and childcare, 11 local authorities are delivering 1,140 hours in full and 18 are delivering a blend of 600 hours and 1,140 hours. In Edinburgh, 85 per cent of ELC settings are delivering 1,140 hours; in Renfrewshire the rate is 80 per cent; in Perth and Kinross it is 86 per cent; and in West Dunbartonshire it is 72 per cent. A great deal is going on on the ground in early learning and childcare.

I will close on the issue that has divided Parliament. It continues to be debated vigorously in Parliament and I am pleased to say that it is an issue that is uniting more and more members of the public, according to opinion polls, and that is the question of independence. More and more people are united around the prospect of Scotland becoming an independent country. Ruth Maguire and Patrick Harvie set out the necessity and urgency of having the powers in the Scottish Parliament to enable us to overcome a number of the challenges in relation to which we are still dependent on the United Kingdom Government to take decisions that are beneficial to Scotland's interests. We need to take those decisions into our own hands, and I look forward to making that argument in the Scottish Parliament and at the forthcoming Scottish parliamentary election, when my party for one will say to the people of Scotland that it is time for our country to be independent.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the Scottish Government's programme for government 2020-21.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:36

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-22598, in the name of Graeme Dey, on an acting convener. I call Patrick Harvie to move the motion on behalf of the bureau.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 12.1A, the Parliament agrees that the period of time specified in motion S5M-21129 is varied as follows—

Delete

9 September 2020

and insert

6 January 2021—[Patrick Harvie]

Point of Order

17:36

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We have a point of order from Richard Leonard.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. During First Minister's questions this afternoon, in an answer to a question from Alasdair Allan, the First Minister provided inaccurate information to members. The First Minister claimed that North Lanarkshire Council was not delivering any of the 1,140 hours of childcare provision. That statement is categorically false and the First Minister has misled the chamber. In fact, 69 per cent of early years establishments in North Lanarkshire are currently delivering the 1,140 hours provision, and North Lanarkshire Council has committed to delivering the provision in full by the end of this month. Statements such as the First Minister's are disrespectful to North Lanarkshire's early learning and childcare staff, who have worked diligently to deliver the programme.

Will the Presiding Officer ask the First Minister to apologise to those workers, North Lanarkshire Council and members for that misleading and inaccurate statement, and to correct the *Official Report*?

The Presiding Officer: I thank Richard Leonard for advance notice of the point of order. It is a point of information, contention and debate, but it is not a point of order for me to rule on. If the member wishes to pursue the point with the First Minister, there are a number of methods by which he can do so, including through questions or by writing to her.

Business Motion

17:38

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-22596, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I call Patrick Harvie to move the motion on behalf of the bureau.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 8 September 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Baroness Cumberlege Report
followed by Financial Resolution: Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 9 September 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Question Time: Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform; Rural Economy and Tourism
followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Fisheries Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.00 pm Decision Time

Thursday 10 September 2020

12.20 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 12.20 pm First Minister's Questions
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity
followed by Stage 1 Debate (Committee Bill): Scottish Parliament (Assistance for Political Parties) Bill
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 15 September 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 16 September 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Justice and the Law Officers; Constitution, Europe and External Affairs
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 17 September 2020

12.20 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 12.20 pm First Minister's Questions
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Economy, Fair Work and Culture
followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 7 September 2020, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[Patrick Harvie]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:38

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S5M-22598, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on an acting convener, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That, under Rule 12.1A, the Parliament agrees that the period of time specified in motion S5M-21129 is varied as follows—

Delete

9 September 2020

and insert

6 January 2021

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:38.

Correction

Nicola Sturgeon has identified errors in her contribution and provided the following correction.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):

At col 26, paragraphs 6-7, and col 27, paragraph 1—

Original text—

Eleven councils are currently delivering 1,140 hours in full: Angus, Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee City, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Scottish Borders, Shetland, South Ayrshire and Stirling.

Eighteen councils are delivering 1,140 hours in some or most nurseries, and some of them are substantially delivering them. For example, 84 per cent of nurseries in Perth and Kinross are delivering them in full; the number is 80 per cent in Renfrewshire and 85 per cent in Edinburgh.

There are only three councils in the whole country that are not delivering any of the 1,140 hours provision, although, to be fair to them, they all have plans in place to progress it. The three councils not delivering any right now are Labour-led North Lanarkshire, Labour-led West Lothian and Tory-led Aberdeenshire. I hope to see progress in those three councils as we deliver that flagship commitment in full.

Corrected text—

Eleven councils are currently delivering 1,140 hours in full: Angus, Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee City, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Scottish Borders, Shetland, South Ayrshire and Stirling.

Nineteen councils are delivering 1,140 hours in some or most nurseries, and some of them are substantially delivering them. For example, 86 per cent of nurseries in Perth and Kinross are delivering them in full; the number is 80 per cent in Renfrewshire and 85 per cent in Edinburgh.

There are only two councils in the whole country that are not delivering any of the 1,140 hours provision, although, to be fair to them, they all have plans in place to progress it. The two councils not delivering any right now are Labour-led West Lothian and Tory-led Aberdeenshire. I hope to see progress in those two councils as we deliver that flagship commitment in full.

Further correction—

Eleven councils are currently delivering 1,140 hours in full: Angus, Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee City, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde,

Scottish Borders, Shetland, South Ayrshire and Stirling.

Twenty councils are delivering 1,140 hours in some or most nurseries, and some of them are substantially delivering them. For example, 86 per cent of nurseries in Perth and Kinross are delivering them in full; the number is 80 per cent in Renfrewshire and 85 per cent in Edinburgh.

There is only one council in the whole country that is not delivering any of the 1,140 hours provision, although, to be fair to it, it does have plans in place to progress it. The one council not delivering any right now is Tory-led Aberdeenshire. I hope to see progress in that council as we deliver that flagship commitment in full.

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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