



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

**Wednesday 30 September 2020**

**Session 5**



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## Wednesday 30 September 2020

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 30 September 2020

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

## Point of Order

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Good afternoon, colleagues. Today's business starts with portfolio questions. Our first portfolio is social—

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

In this chamber, on 17 January 2019, the First Minister said that the Salmond inquiries

“will be able to request whatever material they want, and I undertake today that we will provide whatever material they request.”—[*Official Report*, 17 January 2019; c 14.]

Will the Presiding Officer ask the First Minister to explain why she lied to Parliament?

**The Presiding Officer:** I recognise the point of order, but before I address it I suggest to Mr Mundell that using words such as “lied” is not appropriate in the chamber. Mr Mundell is perfectly able to find words to express his concern without using such language. I ask him to consider that point.

Secondly, I believe that Mr Mundell may be a member of the Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints, which is considering the matter. If he is not, I beg his pardon. The convener of that committee is pursuing that issue on behalf of the whole committee. That is not the only route by which to raise such issues. Mr Mundell is perfectly at liberty to submit either written or oral questions, or, through his party's business manager, to ask that parliamentary time be put aside for such matters. There are a number of ways in which the issue could be pursued.

However, I do not think that it constitutes a point of order for me, as Presiding Officer; it would be a point of order for the convener of the committee concerned. Mr Mundell is at liberty—as is any other member—to attend the meetings of that committee.

I ask Mr Mundell to consider his use of the term “lied” in the chamber, and I ask him to apologise for doing so.

**Oliver Mundell:** I apologise to you personally, Presiding Officer, but in this case I feel that that is the appropriate word. I cannot find anything else that would express my sentiment.

**The Presiding Officer:** That is not an apology. Do you want to rephrase what you said, please?

I do not think that it was fitting of Mr Mundell, nor does it reflect his character. I am sure that he is perfectly capable of finding language that will express his view about the accuracy of comments without personalising his remarks or using pejorative terms that are disrespectful to other members.

**Oliver Mundell:** With due respect, Presiding Officer, I say that I think that it is disrespectful to Parliament for the First Minister to make a promise and not keep it. Therefore I cannot withdraw the word that I used.

**The Presiding Officer:** Very well. I think that Mr Mundell has made his point. I am afraid that I have to ask him to leave the chamber. I do not think that such language is acceptable.

## Portfolio Question Time

### Social Security and Older People

14:03

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** We begin this afternoon's formal business with portfolio questions on the theme of social security and older people. Our first question is from Mark Griffin, who joins us remotely.

#### Covid-19 (Disability Assistance Benefits)

**1. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how its planned disability assistance benefits will support people experiencing the long-term health impacts of Covid-19. (S5O-04633)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** People experiencing long-term impacts on their daily lives as a result of Covid-19 will be encouraged to access disability assistance benefits in the same way as clients who apply with other health conditions and disabilities.

**Mark Griffin:** The cabinet secretary will know that many key workers have caught Covid-19 in the workplace and that, sadly, some have died. Health workers, carers and retail and public transport workers have been—and still are—on the front line. Some are already suffering from so-called long Covid, which is the most devastating disease that Scotland has seen in the workplace in a generation.

Will the cabinet secretary say how the Scottish Government might use its powers on assistance for people with employment injuries to support workers who are suffering from the long-term impacts of Covid-19? How might people who have contracted the virus at work contribute to the Government's thinking?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The Government is keen to ensure that it is supporting front-line workers who have contracted Covid-19 as a result of their employment. That is something that I know the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport in particular has taken seriously, especially when it comes to health and social care staff.

We will, of course, look at all the powers that we have in the Scottish Parliament to ensure that we protect workers as much as possible, and to ensure that we can reduce as much as possible the numbers who contract Covid-19 through their employment.

We encourage people who have long-term Covid-19 and are experiencing symptoms to access the benefits system as anyone else would,

as I said in my original answer. However, we will, of course, review closely whether more can be done on the issue.

### Scottish Child Payment

**2. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the estimate by the Scottish Fiscal Commission that 194,000 children under six will be eligible for the Scottish child payment. (S5O-04634)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** I am proud that we are using our new social security powers to introduce the Scottish child payment, which will open for applications in November, with first payments to start from the end of February 2021.

The payment will provide £10 a week to families who are on a low income, and with no cap on the number of children who can be claimed for. It will support up to 194,000 children this year, which is a 14 per cent increase since the last Scottish Government forecasts were given. That rise is due to an increase in the number of people who are receiving universal credit as a result of the pandemic.

**Joan McAlpine:** The SFC's forecast is, as the cabinet secretary said, considerably higher than its original estimate, due to more households needing to rely on United Kingdom benefits. Although the new Scottish child payment will make a world of difference to low-income families, does the minister agree that many households are not served well by the UK Government, which has cut benefits to children and capped family benefits, and that reversing those decisions would make a huge difference in tackling child poverty?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I agree absolutely with Joan McAlpine. We have continually called on the UK Government to scrap the two-child limit, the rape clause and the benefit cap, and to fix other flaws in the universal credit system.

We know, for example, that more than 13,000 households in Scotland are affected by the two-child limit, and are receiving around £232 less per month than they would otherwise get for every child over the limit, and that more than 6,000 households are impacted by the benefit cap, and are losing on average £2,600 a year. That would be unacceptable at any time, but it is particularly so at this time.

Prior to the pandemic, the Institute for Public Policy Research estimated that ending the benefit cap and the two-child limit would bring 10,000 children out of poverty in Scotland. In June, it reported that their removal could prevent the expected rise in child poverty resulting from the pandemic.

We will do what we can within the powers of the Scottish Parliament. We are demonstrating that with the launch of the Scottish child payment, but with our having responsibility for only about 15 per cent of the UK Government's benefit spend, there is clearly an absolute imperative for the UK Government to take seriously its support for low-income families at this time—and, indeed, at all times.

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that portfolio questions 3, 4 and 8 are grouped together, so any supplementaries should be taken after question 8, but members can press their buttons to request a supplementary at any time.

Question 3 is from Annie Wells, who joins us remotely.

### Covid-19 Restrictions (Older People)

3. **Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** [*Inaudible.*]—Covid-19 restrictions, what action it is taking to help older people who are more likely to be at risk from extended periods of loneliness. (S5O-04635)

**The Presiding Officer:** We missed the beginning of that question, but I think that Ms McKelvie can answer from the written version of the question.

**The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie):** Yes, I can. Thank you.

We know that the pandemic has created and exacerbated feelings of social isolation and loneliness for individuals, and we understand that the new restrictions will continue those challenges.

I continue to meet regularly—most recently on 10 September—with the national implementation group for our social isolation and loneliness strategy. I am pleased to say that we have extended the funding that is available to organisations including Befriending Networks, Generations Working Together and Age Scotland to enable them to continue to work together with us to address the harms that are caused by this awful pandemic.

I also recognise the mental health impacts that social isolation and loneliness can bring, so we have provided an additional £2.6 million to expand the work of national health service mental health and wellbeing services. Work continues with Public Health Scotland and mental health partners to ensure that social isolation and loneliness remain at the forefront of our approach during the pandemic and beyond it.

**Annie Wells:** As we move into the colder months, it will be essential for older people to have contact with their loved ones—their families and friends. What, if any, restrictions are likely to be lifted for the colder months for that specific group of individuals?

**Christina McKelvie:** I cannot yet say what restrictions will be lifted. Obviously, that will be led by the science and by Public Health Scotland and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, who will determine where restrictions are applied and disappplied, which is challenging.

However, we have been working closely with organisations and with health colleagues on winter planning and how it can be informed more closely by the work of the social isolation and loneliness national implementation group and our older people's strategic action forum. We continue to feed all that into a proposed winter plan. We will provide Annie Wells with updated information on that, via my health colleagues, as soon as possible.

### Covid-19 (Older People)

4. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact on older people of reduced contact with family and friends as a result of Covid-19. (S5O-04636)

**The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie):** We have never before seen anything like this awful virus and the restrictions that are in place to keep people safe. I know that we have all had experience of those. A careful balance has to be struck to keep the virus under control and protect lives. We measure everything against four social harms, and we are, of course, aware of the impact that the restrictions have across society on families and friends who have not been able to have face-to-face contact or make the usual social connections. That will, of course, include many older people. We hear about that from our older people's strategic action forum and about the work that it is doing to alleviate that.

We have taken a number of steps to mitigate the impacts. In addition to the actions that I just outlined to Annie Wells, as part of the £350 million communities fund, we have provided approximately £2 million to projects in communities across Scotland that are supporting older people. That includes preparing and delivering meals, signposting to information and local support, and offering telefriending and telephone support services.

**Willie Rennie:** I quote:

"When my mother moved to the care home she started to settle in and pick up—until lockdown. She has severe anxiety and depression and this has been deteriorating since I have not been allowed to visit."

That is just one example of the many families who are suffering as a result of the restricted visiting regulations for care homes. What can the minister do to change Government policy in this very important area?

**Christina McKelvie:** The impact of the restrictions on visiting has not been lost on any of us over the past few weeks. We probably all have family members that we want to spend time with—it has been very difficult not to do that. There will be a debate on the issue later this afternoon, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport has met families who are looking for changes to the restrictions. There might be updated guidance on that. The health secretary will be in a much better position to update Willie Rennie on the position than I am. I had a conversation with her yesterday on the topic, and I will have a follow-up conversation with her tomorrow.

If Willie Rennie is minded to accept this, I will get the most up-to-date position from the cabinet secretary after her meetings with families, and I will let him know what progress has been made.

### **Covid-19 (Family Contact with Older People)**

8. **Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the imposition of more restrictive regulations in response to the Covid-19 outbreak, what discussions the minister for older people has had with the health secretary regarding allowing families contact with older relatives while in care. (S5O-04640)

**The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie):** The answer is similar to the one that I have just given Willie Rennie. We are very aware of the profound impact that the coronavirus has had on so many people, including those who want to visit their loved ones in care homes as well as the residents. We know that visiting is a fundamental part of the health and wellbeing of those who live in care homes and that they really need it. I recognise how incredibly hard it has been for residents and their families not to have regular face-to-face contact.

I have been kept fully apprised of the situation. As the member may have heard me say earlier, I spoke with the health secretary just yesterday and I will have a follow-up meeting with her tomorrow, at which I will get an update on the work that she has been doing with families.

A complex balance needs to be struck in allowing visiting to take place safely. In making sure that everyone gets what they need, we must take account of the risk of harm. That is part of the work that we need to do. The Scottish Government continues to work with Scottish Care and others on such difficult decisions. As I said, the health secretary recently met campaigners, and we are looking forward to receiving an update from her on that.

It is important to make the point that, with the exception of care homes that are in areas where local restrictions are in place, the restrictions that

were announced by the First Minister will not have any further impact on care home residents and their families. In areas where further restrictions are not in place, there will be fewer impacts.

**Gordon Lindhurst:** My 22-year-old constituent Lucy wrote to me to say:

“I am my Grandma’s Power of Attorney and also my Mother’s legal Guardian ... I feel a great deal of responsibility to keep them both safe and well ... Having two family members in care homes during a pandemic is extremely difficult. I had to go 4 whole months without seeing my mum due to lockdown.

Visiting restrictions are having a devastating effect on people’s mental health.”

She went into a lot of detail on the situation that she has faced and what she thinks could be done.

Will the minister show compassion and meet Lucy to work out a way forward on the issue?

**Christina McKelvie:** Gordon Lindhurst will know that, since 3 July, care homes have been able to permit residents to meet one designated visitor outdoors, provided that their home meets certain strict criteria. In addition, since 10 August, care homes have been able to allow outdoor visits involving two or three visitors once a week, and I know that some care homes have designated visitors for indoor visiting.

As I said in response to previous questions, work is being done on the issue right now. The health secretary met some families last week, and I know that she plans to meet them again. We will ensure that we get up-to-date information on the situation and that every step that we take is informed by those families and that it strikes a fine balance that takes into account the risk of harm. We will give Mr Lindhurst an update on that as soon as we can, which I am sure will give his constituent some comfort. I will ask the health secretary to consider involving his constituent in the conversations that she is having with other families, with a view to ensuring that she gets the hearing that she wants to get.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** The pandemic has emphasised the importance of digital connectivity for education, for access to public services and online shopping and for staying in touch with friends and family. How will older people be helped by the Government’s new Connecting Scotland programme?

**Christina McKelvie:** The £5 million first phase of the Connecting Scotland programme is being delivered in partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, local authorities, third sector organisations and the digital sector, led by ScotlandIS. More than 7,500 people who, clinically, are at increased risk of getting Covid have been supported with a package of a device, internet connection and support to get online.



Demographic data on end users is still being collated from the 456 organisations that are supporting end users through Connecting Scotland, but initial evaluations show that around 40 per cent of those users are aged 60 and over.

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The minister has said that living with varying degrees of lockdown and loss of contact with family and friends is hard enough for all of us, but does she agree that it must be even worse for disabled elderly people, particularly those who are currently being denied audiology services, which means that they cannot interact with family or listen to the television or use other devices such as phones?

Will the minister commit to assisting my elderly deaf constituent who has been without a hearing aid since July and desperately needs a replacement to alleviate his isolation and loneliness?

**Christina McKelvie:** I am happy to do that. If Elaine Smith wants to drop me the details of her constituent, we can raise the matter on her behalf to make sure that he gets the support that he needs.

Work is being done right now to enable care homes to allow such routine services to recommence. Work is under way with our health colleagues and social care professionals to ensure that face-to-face meetings with podiatrists, physiotherapists, optometrists and dentists can go ahead, and I am sure that audiologists will be included in that.

If Elaine Smith drops me a line, we will get her the most up-to-date position. The situation will be linked to what NHS Lanarkshire is doing, so I will have a personal interest in the matter.

### **Covid-19 (Disabled People)**

5. **John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how Covid-19 has impacted on disabled people. (S5O-04637)

**The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie):** We have been working closely with a number of disabled people's organisations to understand the impact of Covid-19 on disabled people and, wherever possible, to develop solutions to issues as they have emerged. We have had regular contact with disabled people's organisations throughout the pandemic, at both official and ministerial levels, and nearly £275,000 of funding has gone directly to DPOs to support their Covid response work.

On 17 September, the Scottish Government published a number of statistical releases that set out the evidence that we have that tells us about the impact of Covid-19 across the protected characteristics, and they can be found on the

Scottish Government's website. We know what disabled people are more likely to be affected by. They have difficulties in getting food and medicines, paying bills and collecting pensions or benefits, and those are the areas where they are most likely to need help. We also have reports about people feeling anxious about becoming seriously ill with Covid-19 and, of course, feeling lonely, which we have just spoken about.

**John Mason:** The minister may be aware of the report that was produced in August by the Glasgow Disability Alliance, which is based in my constituency. It feels that inequalities have been supercharged by Covid. Will the minister commit to engaging with the GDA and disabled people in general to make sure that they are involved, that their rights are respected and that they are supported?

**Christina McKelvie:** Yes—absolutely. I speak to the GDA's chief executive officer, Tressa Burke, regularly, especially during the pandemic. Tressa is a member of our social renewal advisory board and takes part in regular disability round tables with officials and ministers.

As a direct response to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Scottish Government has granted the GDA over £190,000 to meet specific needs. The funding supports its welfare rights helpline and wellbeing helpline. The GDA piloted the work to have disabled people digitally connected, often for the first time, and I have heard stories about how transformational that has been for some individuals. That is being done in conjunction with our Connecting Scotland programme, which I outlined to Rona Mackay. The GDA has also received further funding to help it to deliver food to isolated people.

However, it is always a pleasure to get the opportunity to meet the GDA, and I can absolutely commit to engaging with it.

### **Wave 2 Benefits (Delivery Timetable)**

6. **Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will provide an update on the social security delivery timetable for all wave 2 benefits. (S5O-04638)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the Scottish Government, Social Security Scotland and the Department for Work and Pensions, whose support we need to transfer social security powers. As I set out in April, we are having to rework our timetable to deliver the remaining devolved benefits and complete case transfer. That is an on-going and complex exercise.

We need to consider the impact of the pandemic not only on our services, but on the availability of health and social care professionals across health boards and local authorities to bring their expertise to the co-design and delivery of disability and carer benefits at a time when many of them are still needed on the front line to support communities during the pandemic. That includes the recruitment of practitioners to help us to make consistent, high-quality decisions about entitlements and the role that health professionals and local authorities will play in providing the agency with supporting information on clients' applications.

We also have to take account of the extraordinary pressures that the DWP is still experiencing following the unprecedented demand for universal credit, which is impacting on the resources that it is able to devote to the devolution programme.

**Peter Chapman:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but can she tell me, first, what the current staffing level is within Social Security Scotland and what it should be; and, secondly, when the body will be sufficiently equipped to deliver all the wave 2 benefits that could and should have been fully devolved and delivered by now? Lastly, does she welcome the UK Government's work to continue to deliver the benefits successfully on her behalf?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I will respond to the member in writing on the current staffing level in the agency, but I can confirm today—and I reassure him about this—that the agency has the number of staff that it requires to deal effectively not only with the live benefits, but with the Scottish child payment, applications for which will open soon.

Recruitment for dealing with the Scottish child payment has largely been done just before or during the pandemic. I assure Peter Chapman that we are ready to deliver the benefits that we have said that we will deliver this year.

The member attempts to deride the work of the Scottish Government and the agency but, as I said, the pandemic has affected all parts of the Scottish Government and of the UK Government, which includes the DWP. Elements of the devolution programme in the DWP are not staffed in the same way as they were pre-pandemic—as is right; I make no criticism. That is a responsible move by the DWP so that it concentrates its efforts where they are needed.

We will update Parliament as soon as we can. We depend partly on the DWP, because we have a joint programme with it. The DWP is under extreme pressures too, as I hope Peter Chapman appreciates. We will continue to work

constructively with it during the devolution of benefits.

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We will update Parliament as soon as we can. We depend partly on the DWP, because we have a joint programme with it. The DWP is under extreme pressures, too, as I hope Peter Chapman appreciates. We will continue to work constructively with it during the devolution of benefits.

### **Covid-19 (Older People)**

**7. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports organisations helping older people through the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-04639)

**The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie):** Older people have been adversely affected by restrictions that have been put in place to combat the spread of the coronavirus, and we have provided a range of support for them. As I have outlined in a number of answers, we continue to support organisations—for example, from our £350 million communities fund—that directly help older people, such as Age Scotland, whose vital lifeline provides support to older people, including through advice and friendship, on a range of issues.

The Scottish Government has provided more than £1.1 million to support older people's organisations at a national level and has supported local community projects that help older people. I meet the older people's strategic action forum monthly—the most recent meeting was on 17 September—to hear at first hand about the issues that older people face and to consider what additional support the Scottish Government can provide.

**Linda Fabiani:** Following some of the bad press that young people have got lately, will the minister commend young people's befriending services, through which they voluntarily befriend vulnerable elderly people and help them with loneliness? Will she commend in particular the award-winning

scheme at Calderglen high school in East Kilbride?

**Christina McKelvie:** I am absolutely delighted to do that. As the member will know, Generations Working Together is a nationally recognised centre of excellence that supports the development of intergenerational work across Scotland. It is also a valued stakeholder and a vocal key member of the older people's strategic action forum, which carries out excellent work.

Along with creating training and guidance around intergenerational practice, the organisation runs a number of projects to promote intergenerational activities, including the valued befriending project at Calderglen high school. Now in its 10th year, the befriending scheme pairs up senior pupils with older people in the community and is valued by both pupils and older people. The school was recently awarded the most improved project 2020 by Generations Working Together, which is a great achievement for the school and all the volunteers.

The befriending project is organised in association with Claremont church, and Generations Working Together is working with the church minister to set up Zoom meetings to facilitate online connections between younger and older people.

We could not possibly miss out mentioning local activist Avril Anderson and the great work that she does locally in ensuring that young people and older people get connected.

## Finance

### Covid-19 (Aviation Sector)

1. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how much funding it is allocating to support the aviation sector to recover from the impact of Covid-19. (S5O-04641)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes):** As part of our £2.3 billion package of business support, we have provided 100 per cent non-domestic rates relief for airports and ground handling providers in 2020-21—something that is not available in England or Wales. That relief is worth an estimated £18 million.

We are also working with airports on route recovery, to help rebuild connectivity for business and tourism and win back routes and employment opportunities. As part of that work, we provide support to airlines in the form of co-operative marketing packages, and we provide market intelligence and data on the potential of the Scottish market.

**Jamie Greene:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that update.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that the Fraser of Allander institute recently warned that many thousands of jobs are at risk of being lost due to the pandemic. We all accept and understand some of the reasons for that, but the First Minister, in a recent update to Parliament, shared her opinion that no one should travel overseas. That advice will be taken literally by many in Scotland. Does the cabinet secretary agree with that sentiment? Should people be travelling overseas? Has the cabinet secretary considered with her Cabinet colleagues the introduction and implementation of testing and detection facilities in our airports? Surely that is one way of saving what is left of our vital travel industry.

**Kate Forbes:** That is, of course, one of the major concerns that I have about the cliff edge that we know is coming at the end of October. The chancellor may well have just written off thousands of Scottish jobs when the furlough ends in October.

On the substance of the point, Jamie Greene mentioned testing. We know, for example, that Covid has an incubation period of up to 14 days, so we are looking very carefully at how we can operate, on a four-nations basis, additional measures at airports that might be required. That includes testing. We want to continue to explore the quarantine and testing balance to ensure that the risk to public health is minimised.

The First Minister has been very clear that she is not casting judgment on the choices that people make. However, with the potential for the number of cases to increase, we need to ensure that we provide guidance and support to individuals to take the right decisions to minimise the spread of the virus and ensure that we eliminate and suppress it.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** The news today that the preferred bidder for Prestwick airport does not wish to complete the purchase of the sale will be deeply worrying for the 300 workers who are directly employed by the airport and the many thousands across Ayrshire whose jobs rely on it. Is that a wake-up call for the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government to listen to the trade unions that represent those workers and to provide more sector-specific support before the current unemployment crisis in aviation turns into an unemployment tsunami?

**Kate Forbes:** On the latter part of Colin Smyth's question, he is right to say that we need to work together to ensure that we prevent the risk of mass redundancies. That is precisely why we have been calling for two things: an extension to the job retention scheme, because the replacement does not avert the risk of mass

redundancies; and additional consequentials to ensure that we can tailor our response. Where we can go further, we have done so—that was demonstrated in my first answer on rates relief. We are willing to go further but, with a fixed budget, we cannot do so without additional consequentials.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Can the cabinet secretary say how many direct and indirect jobs would have been lost at Prestwick and through the wider supply chain if the Government had taken the advice of North Ayrshire Council's Tory group leader Tom Marshall and closed Prestwick airport?

**Kate Forbes:** Glasgow Prestwick airport directly employs around 300 people, and it has been estimated that it supports a further 1,400 jobs indirectly. Frankly, the Tories need to wake up to the risk that we face when it comes to mass redundancies across the country.

**The Presiding Officer:** Alexander Burnett is joining us remotely for question 2.

#### Non-domestic Rates (Revaluation)

**2. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with local authorities regarding the proposal in its programme for government for a revaluation of non-domestic rates in 2023. (S5O-04642)

I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests in respect of businesses that pay rates.

**The Presiding Officer:** The Minister for Public Finance and Migration, Ben Macpherson, is also joining us remotely.

**The Minister for Public Finance and Migration (Ben Macpherson):** Councils were notified through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation. The Scottish Government also engaged with a number of business organisations in advance.

The challenges around the tone date for the next revaluation were the key determination in our decision. A tone date of 1 April 2022 will allow for market conditions to properly adjust to any post-Covid and post-Brexit effects—more so than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Parliament, taking account of the views of key stakeholders, will have the opportunity to consider the subordinate legislation that we will introduce this year to set the revaluation on 1 April 2023, with a one-year tone date.

**Alexander Burnett:** According to the Scottish Government's own figures, Aberdeenshire businesses have lost out on Covid-19 funding

because of controversial rate hikes, with 73 per cent of properties in Aberdeenshire paying more following the increase in 2017, despite the oil crash in 2015. That meant that fewer than half of all businesses were eligible for grant funding. Will the minister review the support that is available for those Aberdeenshire businesses, or will he continue to use the north-east as a cash cow?

**Ben Macpherson:** I remind Mr Burnett that the position that we have taken on the 2023 revaluation is the same as that taken by the United Kingdom Government; it also has broad support from the Federation of Small Businesses. Of course, there are considerations for us in the period before the budget with regard to support for businesses, and we are considering those prudently. Like all aspects of the support that we are considering as a Government, those considerations are dependent on the financial position that is available to us.

I urge Mr Burnett to relay his points and any ideas that he has to me and I will consider them in good faith. However, I emphasise the position that the Scottish Retail Consortium has also highlighted: there is a cliff edge coming, not just with the end of furlough, but at the end of this financial year when it comes to business rates.

I wish to work with all members of the Parliament to urge the UK Government to take action to create the Barnett consequentials to support business rates in the next financial year in the way that we have been able to do together during this financial year.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 3 has had to be withdrawn.

#### Autumn Budget Revision

**4. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the autumn budget revision. (S5O-04644)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes):** As I outlined in my ministerial statement yesterday, the Scottish Government's financial response to Covid-19 is now over £6.5 billion. That follows the autumn budget revision deploying £2.5 billion of funding, £1.8 billion of which is for health and social care.

**Colin Smyth:** Many businesses and organisations are currently facing financial difficulty as a direct result of Covid-19 restrictions—often specific to Scotland—having been placed on them. For example, soft and indoor play centres have been allowed to open in the rest of the United Kingdom, but not in Scotland; outdoor education centres are not being allowed to provide residential education; and self-catering accommodation providers were told one

day that they could open and host mixed households and the next day were told that they could not.

Will any of the unspent £537 million of Barnett consequential that the cabinet secretary says are fully committed to the Covid-19 response be spent on those sectors? Without more direct support, the clock is ticking down to the point where many of those organisations might have to close.

**Kate Forbes:** Although the £500 million of resource consequential that the member references are formally unallocated, the balance is fully committed. When it comes to providing specific support, he will know that when the Aberdeen City Council area was facing a localised lockdown, we provided a package of support of £1 million to ensure that some of the local businesses could get grants.

As normal, we were not informed in advance about the UK Government's equivalent scheme and the announcement on 9 September about providing grants of up to £1,500 to businesses in England that are impacted by local lockdowns. However, I am pressing the UK Government in the hope that there will be funding implications and consequential for Scotland that we can use to develop broadly equivalent schemes for sectors that are not able to open, or for localised lockdowns.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** A lot of the aid that we have been able to give to businesses and others has been a result of the United Kingdom's funding. Does the UK Government's failure to have an autumn budget have any impact on the cabinet secretary's projections?

**Kate Forbes:** It has significant implications. Delaying the UK budget this autumn is deeply problematic, as anyone who was involved in last year's budget process on any side of the chamber will know. In terms of our funding position, every penny is deployed and committed to our Covid-19 response. The two areas that I have been pressing the chancellor on are to either extend the job retention scheme to avoid the cliff edge or to provide additional consequential so that we can tailor our response in the event of localised lockdowns or for the sectors that are hardest hit.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The cabinet secretary told us yesterday, and has just repeated in her answer to Colin Smyth, that there are more than £500 million of Barnett consequential that are unallocated, but she also says that that money is fully committed. Both those statements cannot be true at the same time, so which is it? Is the money available or is it fully committed, and if it is fully committed, when is she going to tell us what it is fully committed to?

**Kate Forbes:** I know that, as a long-standing member of the Finance and Constitution Committee, Murdo Fraser understands how the budget revision process works. He will know full well that we have two opportunities to revise the budget, and we have had a third opportunity this year. That means that we formally update the budget position in those revisions. It does not mean that every penny is allocated at every budget revision.

As for the finances that are not yet formally allocated, he will know that the Treasury guaranteed a certain amount of consequential, and I was very grateful to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury for announcing that. That means, however, that not all the finances should be allocated at this point. We will continue to connect the funding that we have been given to, for example, the issues that Colin Smyth raised around localised lockdowns. We need to compensate local government for the lost income scheme. We are providing further support for transport networks, which we know are under funding pressures. We have the scheme for individuals who are self-isolating. Those are all committed areas of spend that are not formally allocated in this budget revision but will be committed in February.

#### **Covid-19 (Budget Shortfall)**

**5. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it has concerns that it could face a budget shortfall this financial year as a direct result of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-04645)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes):** The Covid outbreak, as well as our exit from the European Union, presents an unprecedented challenge to the Scottish Government's resources. In the absence of additional fiscal powers, consequential and reprioritisation of spending remain the only funding sources available to us.

We have already undertaken significant reprioritisation, of around £600 million to date. Without additional United Kingdom Government funding or flexibility, we face the impossible choice of either not funding further essential Covid spend and thus harming recovery, or making deep cuts to other areas of expenditure, which would similarly undermine the recovery and directly impact the people of Scotland. It is an impossible choice that we have been given.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I wonder what that impossible choice will mean for service delivery and employment in the public sector and, indeed, the wider Scottish economy.

**Kate Forbes:** [*Inaudible.*]—Covid, we have maintained funding for key public services. We will do everything in our power to continue to do so. We will use every power and every penny at our disposal. Public sector employees are crucial in the delivery of those services and in our response to coronavirus. Our commitment to their employment, including to no compulsory redundancies, remains in place.

#### **Covid-19 Restrictions (Business Support)**

**6. Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how much funding it is allocating to support businesses in the west of Scotland to sustain the local economy as increased restrictions are implemented. (S5O-04646)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes):** As the member will know, restrictions in the west of Scotland mainly concern households, so no specific funding has been allocated for local restrictions there. We have provided a package of direct support to business that is worth over £2.3 billion. That support is provided on top of support from United Kingdom Government schemes, which can and should go further to support Scottish businesses through these challenging times, for example, most obviously, by extending the job retention scheme.

We are pressing the UK Government for clarity on the funding implications for Scotland of its local restrictions support grant, so that broadly equivalent schemes can be developed in Scotland.

**Maurice Corry:** One of the worst-hit sectors throughout the Covid crisis has been the tourism and hospitality industry, which provides a vital lifeline of work for many of my constituents. A recent study by the University of Edinburgh highlights a significant risk to younger businesses in the sector that have no profit and increasing debt. With the increased likelihood of a second wave of infections and continued localised lockdowns ahead, what action has the Scottish Government taken specifically to offer financial support to younger businesses in the tourism sector?

**Kate Forbes:** I agree with Maurice Corry that tourism and hospitality have been particularly badly hit. That is precisely why we have put in place the hardship scheme and the pivotal enterprise resilience fund to provide additional support, which was not available elsewhere.

I also gently say to the member that that is precisely why we are pleading with the UK Government not to write off businesses that still have not opened or cannot open, which is what the new job support scheme will do. The

chancellor is determining what is and is not a viable business, but we know that what he believes is not always the case, given that some businesses would be able to operate in normal circumstances but, through no fault of their own, cannot yet do so.

#### **Covid-19 Restrictions (Business Support)**

**7. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how much funding it has allocated to support businesses in areas that have been affected by localised lockdowns. (S5O-04647)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes):** When it came to the localised lockdown in Aberdeen city, we allocated £1 million to provide grants to businesses that were required to close due to local restrictions. That included discretionary support for sectors that were not required to close as well as support for those that were. As of 23 September, 257 grants have been made. We will continue to consider the needs of businesses to reflect the circumstances of local outbreaks and we are pressing the United Kingdom Government for clarity on the funding implications of its equivalent scheme, which is the local restriction support grant.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Yesterday, the First Minister flippantly dismissed the genuine concerns from Aberdeen, showing that the Scottish National Party Government dismisses concerns about the impact of shutting down businesses for three weeks. Those concerns are not patent nonsense. People's livelihoods are at risk. There are inconsistencies in the SNP approach to Aberdeen and Glasgow, and that sets an unfair precedent and creates anxiety about potential future lockdowns. With Covid cases on the rise again, and my constituents rightly worried, in the event of an SNP-inflicted lockdown, will the Scottish Government commit to publishing supporting evidence to back up its decisions and tell us when a financial lockdown support package will be created and will be available to cushion the blow to the Scottish economy?

**Kate Forbes:** What is absolutely patent nonsense is assuming that we base decisions on localised lockdowns on anything other than cold, hard evidence. When it comes to local restrictions and business support, perhaps the member could join me in pleading with the UK Government to provide the clarity that I have asked for on the consequential coming from its local restrictions support grant. When it came to the Aberdeen lockdown, we moved ahead of the UK Government to put in place the £1 million of support. Rachael Hamilton knows full well that, with a fixed budget, and without any fiscal flexibility, the only source of funding that we have

is consequential. As soon as those are available, we will be able to develop our equivalent scheme.

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** We all know how important the furlough scheme has been in supporting businesses that were affected by coronavirus. With many sectors still unable to reopen and others being required to close, it is the wrong time to bring the scheme to an end. Does the cabinet secretary share my concern that the job protection measures that were set up by the UK Government last week do not go far enough, given that our economy has not yet fully reopened?

**Kate Forbes:** In Scotland, 217,000 people remain on furlough and the chancellor has said that the scheme is designed to support viable jobs, but it is still unclear how those in what he would classify as unviable jobs will be supported. It is disappointing that the scheme makes no provision for local lockdowns, the needs of sectors that are dealing with on-going restrictions, or those that have not yet reopened. I share David Torrance's concerns, which were also reflected in comments from the Scottish Tourism Alliance and the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary will be aware of the significant concerns of the self-catering industry about the changes in guidance on household composition; 60 per cent of businesses have already experienced cancellations, and 42 per cent expect significant financial losses. What action will the cabinet secretary take to minimise the impact on the sector of the revised guidance coming from the Scottish Government?

**Kate Forbes:** Jackie Baillie will know that I have many self-catering properties in my constituency, so I also get the casework.

First, Fergus Ewing has spoken as recently as yesterday to the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers to understand its concerns and see what more we can do. Secondly, Jackie Baillie will know that there was financial support for self-catering businesses during the first lockdown. I am keen to ensure that we provide what support we can to those businesses, but the big issue is that the replacement for the job retention scheme will not do so, and we do not have the funding that would allow us to tailor our response to Scotland. We will use every penny that is at our disposal to provide support but, at this point, we do not have the funding to develop new schemes for financial support.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the cabinet secretary whether guarantees will be offered to ensure that, whether it is Barnett consequential or not, newly announced funding will be directed to cash-

strapped councils and we will not see a repeat of the situation that occurred during the summer when councillors were crying out for funding to be delivered.

**Kate Forbes:** The member will know that we have already passed on more funding to local authorities than we have received in consequential. I will make three other points. Recently, we agreed additional funding of £49 million for local authorities; we are developing a lost income scheme to help councils that have lost out on income, fees and charging; and, thirdly, I have written to the chancellor with a package of fiscal flexibilities for local authorities that the leader of my local council, Highland Council, who is not an SNP member, called a game changer. I hope that that package will provide the support that local authorities need.

### Tax Revenues (Impact Assessment)

8. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether an up-to-date impact assessment on Scottish tax revenues post-Covid-19 and post-Brexit has been prepared. (S5O-04648)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes):** The Scottish Fiscal Commission, as Scotland's official forecaster, published a report on the likely fiscal impacts of Covid-19 on 3 September. The report shows that the pandemic continues to have a profound effect on the fiscal and economic outlook in Scotland. The Scottish Fiscal Commission's work to date has been based on an orderly withdrawal from the European Union on 1 January, so it is clear that those forecasts might be worse. The fact that we still do not know the precise nature of Brexit is unacceptable and it makes our modelling and planning very difficult.

**Colin Beattie:** Does the Scottish Government have concerns about future Barnett funding arrangements, given the predictions that a lethal combination of Brexit and the winding down of the furlough scheme will be seriously detrimental to the economy?

**Kate Forbes:** We have committed to spending all the £6.5 billion of additional Barnett funding to tackle Covid-19. If we are to meet the combined challenges of Brexit and Covid, as well as supporting economic recovery, we need either additional funding or the powers to respond. The fact that, right now, we are overly reliant on policy choices made by the United Kingdom Government means that we are responding to those multiple issues with one hand tied behind our backs.

## Supporting Students through the Global Pandemic

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** The next item of business is a statement by Richard Lochhead on supporting students through the global pandemic. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:52

**The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Richard Lochhead):** Going to university or college is an exciting time for our young people, with many leaving home for the first time to make lifelong friends, join new clubs and learn new things. However, this year is different and challenging, because we are in the middle of a global pandemic.

I would like to say directly to all students and staff in our colleges, universities and student accommodation: thank you. I thank you for the sacrifices that you have made since the start of the pandemic and for what you are doing to support each other and to help to keep everyone safe.

I know that it is really hard right now; indeed, it is heartbreaking, especially for first years who may already have missed out on once-in-a-lifetime experiences such as final school exams, proms and traditional freshers' weeks. I know that I speak for the whole Parliament—and, indeed, the country—when I say to students that I am truly sorry that due to the pandemic your introduction to college and university life is not what you, your families or I would have wanted it to be.

It is important that students have the opportunity to continue with their learning. Limiting access to education has a negative impact on their personal development, wellbeing and life chances. Also, our country needs a stream of talented and trained individuals and we need our world-leading colleges and universities, which employ many people and underpin our economy.

That is why we have consistently planned for some face-to-face teaching in colleges and universities as part of a blended return to campus during phase 3 of the Government's route map. That approach is supported by recent SAGE advice, which highlights that some sectors, such as research and healthcare, require face-to-face teaching. The SAGE report also highlights the impact of remote learning on wider health and wellbeing. It states:

"Changes to the structure of higher education may exacerbate these effects by decreasing the ability of people to make friends, engage in social activities together, gossip

and chat, and interact with tutors or mentors, as well as by increasing the difficulty of work and studying."

I am sure that members will all agree that that is especially important for vulnerable students and for social inclusion, as well as for first years, who have already missed out on so much because of Covid.

Against the backdrop of a global pandemic, there were no easy, risk-free options. A record number of young people worked hard for their entry qualifications and were stuck at home for months, and they then geared up for going off to university or college and the next stage of their lives. Along with stakeholders, we decided that asking all those young people to stay at home and begin their courses online would have inflicted significant harm on them and on the wider further and higher education sectors in Scotland.

The advice also pointed out the risks and likelihood of Covid outbreaks when the new academic year got under way. We were never advised to keep students at home, but we were advised that mitigation factors were vital. We have worked together with colleges, universities, accommodation providers, unions and other key stakeholders throughout the crisis on the safe return of further and higher education.

We issued sectoral guidance that clearly states the rules that we expect to be followed, and we have worked extensively to support the sectors in its implementation. Throughout, we have used the best scientific advice available, including advice from SAGE, in helping us to make decisions on balancing the risks. That is why our guidance emphasises that colleges and universities should use risk and equality assessments to decide what a blended learning model and approach looks like in their institutions. Institutions should be working with their staff and students to discuss any concerns that they have about the use of face-to-face teaching, and they should be enabling more online teaching where that can be done. Our guidance also sets out the infection prevention control measures that we expect institutions and accommodation providers to have in place. Importantly, in the context of the current situation, we expect institutions to help students to comply with the rules and to support them in doing so. They have a clear duty of care to their staff and students.

It is important to emphasise that any new restrictions that we put in place are for the protection of the whole of society. All of us, students included, are being asked to follow the same rules on socialising and self-isolation. Last week, we published additional guidance to inform students who wish to return home of their options and how the new national restrictions apply to student households. It contains advice on



returning home for a short visit; returning home while self-isolating; and returning home on a more permanent basis.

Our key message is that students should remain living in their current student households and on campus if they are able to do so. That will ensure that students can maintain social connections, access student services and access face-to-face teaching where appropriate and where it is taking place. Crucially, it will reduce the risk of large-scale virus transmission and help to keep us all safe.

Although we have no evidence to date of transmission in an FE or HE teaching setting, we have outbreaks among our student population, with significant clusters in university student accommodation. Of the approximately 250,000 students who attend our universities every year, around 45,000 of them, give or take, usually stay in student halls, around 43 per cent of whom will be first-year undergraduate students.

From data that we have received from public health today, we are in the unfortunate position of having 759 of those students test positive for Covid and, as we know, many more are self-isolating. We are using testing in line with our published testing strategy to ensure that it will have the greatest impact in reducing the risk of disease transmission, by testing those with symptoms so that those with Covid-19 can be identified and asked to self-isolate and their close contacts can be traced.

Test and protect was ready for the new academic year and is working. Nonetheless, we are always working to improve access to testing for students and the wider communities. Kits have been provided and mobile test units dispatched in Glasgow and Dundee, and there are now walk-through test centres in St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh. Further centres will open in Stirling and Glasgow in the next week or so, and there are more sites under development.

We remain mindful of clinical advice about the limitations of asymptomatic testing and the need to prioritise our testing capacity, in line with our testing strategy. However, we are exploring the merits of some targeted surveillance testing that is focused on individual institutions to understand the level of asymptomatic cases.

To be clear, due to the incubation period of the virus and the testing that is taking place, we expect to see more positive cases in the coming days. That is why everyone with symptoms should self-isolate, along with their household.

I have heard some really good examples of how institutions are supporting isolating students, for example by providing food and cleaning materials, as well as proactive welfare and mental health

support. Like others, however, I have been disappointed to hear from some who have been struggling to access that support or information.

Whether you are a student from Scotland or from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, perhaps away from home for the first time, or one of the tens of thousands of international students who have chosen to study here and are thousands of miles from home, each and every student deserves the utmost support. Anything less is wholly unacceptable.

I want to be clear: universities and student accommodation providers have a duty of care to their students. Right now, that must be their number 1 priority. Universities should be providing a gold-standard stay-at-campus support package for all students who are self-isolating. I note that the 19 higher education institutions have this afternoon published a joint pledge of what they want to deliver for students in Scotland, and I welcome that.

That support should include signposting for the mental health counselling services that are already available, many of which have been funded by the Scottish Government. We are actively considering what further support we can give in that regard.

Universities should look sympathetically at students who have left or want to serve notice on their tenancy and reapply at some future point. These are extraordinary times, and we are asking every institution to be extraordinarily supportive and understanding.

We will provide resources to student associations and to NUS Scotland to help them to engage directly with students, to hear what they have to say and to ensure that students have the latest public health advice and know their rights.

I have asked the national incident management team, which is overseeing the outbreaks on campuses, to reflect on the experience of recent days and to specifically consider what can be done to minimise repeated periods of self-isolation, as well as considering the general issues around isolation for students. We all know—perhaps from our own history of being students—that many of them live in small rooms in halls.

We are six months into the pandemic, and it is far from over. In light of the outbreaks and the cases among students, we must now redouble our efforts to control Covid-19. Importantly, we want students to have the option to return home safely at Christmas, and we are working with the sector on the best approach. That covers public health measures, staggering term end dates and transport considerations. We will work with the UK Government and other Administrations to bring as much consistency across these islands as possible.

I emphasise that students are in no way to blame for the circumstances that they and we find ourselves in. The reports that I am hearing say that the vast majority of students have coped well in the very difficult circumstances in which they find themselves, and that they are complying with the guidance.

It is often said that, until we have a vaccine, we have to learn to live with Covid. However, while we have Covid, we must also allow our citizens to learn, to teach and to educate—to get on with their lives. We must not allow the virus to steal one of the most important years in the lives of our young people.

We must not underestimate how tough it is, but to staff and students I say again: thank you for all that you are doing to keep yourselves and others safe. My message to all our students is: you are Scotland's future, but we need your help right now. We are all in this together, so let's keep working together to get through this.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for his statement, and I thank students and university staff for their efforts.

I agree about the importance of face-to-face teaching, but the current situation is quite bleak for many. The handling of recent events has left thousands of students confused over guidance that was hastily written and then rewritten as the Scottish Government struggled to respond to circumstances that were entirely predictable. Students were told last Friday that they were banned from going to the pub or going out; they were banned from returning to their family homes that weekend; they were ordered to stay in their halls of residence en masse, despite not testing Covid-positive or being tested at all; and many of them were given no physical or mental support.

In his statement, the minister was keen to stress that students are being treated equally to the rest of us in society, but I simply say to him that he should speak to them, as many of them feel as if they are not.

I ask the minister for some clarity. Given the virus's prevalence on campuses, why has frequent, widespread community testing among students, with the obvious benefits that that would bring, still not been introduced? Does testing capacity prohibit its introduction, or is there some other reason? Why is the Government asking universities simply to be sympathetic to students who have to leave their accommodation, but providing no comfort or certainty to those students that, if they leave, they will receive refunds for accommodation and guarantees that they can return?

Finally, on an important point of process, I have a request for the minister. Such major and

important changes to guidance or regulations should be announced to the Parliament in the first instance—not announced hours after we leave the building and changed again before we return to it. That is not good enough for us and it is certainly not good enough for students.

**Richard Lochhead:** I thank Jamie Greene for his questions. He makes a number of points—some were, of course, wildly inaccurate—and I will address them briefly.

On testing, we follow the test and protect regime and have been advised, in relation to students and the rest of the population, that our focus has to be on the delivery of testing capacity for students with symptoms. We have also been advised that international students who arrive from certain countries have to undertake a two-week quarantine.

We know that a couple of universities in England are involved in a research pilot of random testing—perhaps that is the mass testing to which Jamie Greene referred—and we are paying close attention to it. I have said that, in Scotland, we have asked public health officials to explore whether asymptomatic testing has a role on Scottish campuses as well. We follow a testing regime that is similar to the regime elsewhere in the UK, and I am not sure why Jamie Greene thinks that following advice of public health officials is the wrong thing to do.

We published our guidance for the safe opening of our college and university campuses on 1 September. We worked with stakeholders on the guidance, and it was published in time for the campuses opening.

This past weekend, we issued guidance for students so that they could understand the new restrictions, which had been in place in Scotland for only a few days. The leader of the Tory party in Scotland attacked me for not publishing that guidance several months ago, but the guidance that was put into context for student households had been published only a few days previously.

It was important that students on our campuses understood how the restrictions that came into force only a few days ago applied to their circumstances if they wanted to go home. I said to Jamie Greene yesterday that students and student representatives warmly welcomed the guidance, which gave them the clarity that they needed about what the restrictions meant if they wanted to go home.

Universities Scotland issued advice, which the Scottish Government endorsed, that followed a successful policy at the University of St Andrews, where the student population was asked not to socialise on one particular weekend to help curb the spread of the virus. As a whole, the sector sent

the same message to the rest of the student population: it was not a ban, but an ask of the student population. Thankfully, many of Scotland's students abided by that request and played their role in helping to keep us all safe, and I thank them for it.

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** The truth is that the Government failed to properly prepare a plan for the return of students and then, panicking, rewrote and contradicted its own advice every few hours over the weekend, communicating randomly by press release and tweet. Universities were left to police the ever-changing guidance, to provide food and to refund rents.

Now universities are ordered to provide gold-standard support. This is a gold-standard Government fiasco, just like the Scottish Qualifications Authority results shambles, to which many of these young people were also subjected.

Today's frankly insipid statement will provide little consolation or hope. At least ministers admitted that they got the SQA results wrong. Will the minister admit that he got this wrong and apologise properly to Scotland's students? Will he publish all the advice that he has said he followed and information about the stakeholder discussions that he has said he has had? Will he promise universities actual financial support now, to allow them to support students and to refund rents?

**Richard Lochhead:** I will start with Iain Gray's last point about financial support for the sector. This is a huge challenge for Scotland's students and universities, and, to an extent, for our colleges. We are having regular conversations with them, and will continue to discuss the financial consequences of coping with the outbreaks and the current situation across Scotland. We are certainly keeping the matter under review.

With regard to our overall approach, I explained that the guidance for the safe reopening of colleges and campuses, which has largely been adhered to—we have no evidence that it is not being adhered to—was published on 1 September, prior to the opening of Scotland's universities, which open earlier than those in the rest of the UK. A similar approach was taken by the Labour Government in Wales, the Conservative Government down south, and the Northern Irish Administration. Unfortunately, and as I am sure members have seen, because we are in the middle of a global pandemic, there have been outbreaks under all Administrations. We are in a very difficult situation, in which there are no easy options. I am not sure what different approach Iain Gray is suggesting we should have taken. The approach that we took was to let people get on with the next stage of their lives, and we are doing our best to keep them safe.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Both front-bench questions went over time, so I do not think that I will get through all the questions, although I will try, if everyone else tries, too.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** We know that students in Scotland have access to the most generous level of financial support anywhere in the UK. What discussions has the minister had with the Student Awards Agency for Scotland and the Student Loans Company to ensure that applications from students who might need to submit a late application to gain access to financial support will be processed and awarded as quickly as possible?

**Richard Lochhead:** We have had many conversations with the Student Loans Company and the Student Awards Agency to make sure that we are taking into account the extra challenges that Scotland's students face at this time, and they have already introduced some flexibility. Given that there are students who are self-isolating or otherwise caught up in the current situation in Scotland, we would expect the Student Loans Company and the Student Awards Agency for Scotland to continue to take that approach. Rona Mackay makes an important point about making sure that students do not experience extra anxieties at this time.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The minister's statement makes it clear that he had advice highlighting the

"likelihood of Covid outbreaks when the new academic year got under way."

We know that at least one adviser to the Scottish Government advocated routine testing of students on arrival and again after a short interval. Only now is the Scottish Government exploring the merits of some targeted surveillance testing. On 2 September, I raised with the minister my concern that I did not have confidence in the testing regime that the minister was then relying on.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could you get to your question?

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Seven hundred and fifty-nine identified cases later, does the minister now accept that his failure to introduce routine testing in halls of residence was a mistake?

**Richard Lochhead:** We have a test and protect strategy that our public health advisers, the chief medical officer and the advisory groups that give us the scientific advice have agreed with us, and which we are implementing across all parts of Scottish society, including campuses. The strategy is that we should focus on testing students, and any citizens in Scotland, who have symptoms of Covid, ensure that they get their test results and

trace their contacts. That is working well and is why we have so many students who are, unfortunately, self-isolating. We have identified those students, so that we can protect them and the rest of society.

Of course, how tests are delivered and the results that they can give are always being developed, so our scientists are taking a close interest in where that work is going. If it offers further opportunities for our testing regime, I am sure that they will be taken on board.

The testing regimes in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland are similar, because the regime is the best one that is available. That is why we are using it.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** As a former international student, I ask what reassurances have been provided to international students, who will be feeling the extra pressure of being in a different country, and potentially under different rules to those in their home country.

**Richard Lochhead:** I have discussed with our universities and know that they are aware of the importance of supporting international students at this time. That work has been under way for many months, because the global pandemic has been with us for months and months. It is not something that has arisen in the past few weeks.

Stuart McMillan makes an important point. I know that some universities are offering additional support to international students, and I urge them all to do so.

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** The statement seems to be a ministerial catch-up to the rest of the world—and not a terribly convincing one, at that.

Richard Lochhead argues for the benefits of blended learning. Students were told that they were coming back for blended learning, only to discover that their learning is entirely online. Did he agree a definition of blended learning with universities and colleges? If so, when and how was that shared with students?

**Richard Lochhead:** I refer to my opening remarks on blended learning and how we approached it. I have already explained that to Parliament.

We are working closely with stakeholders—trade unions, student organisations, universities and colleges—and have said that where we are with the pandemic means that although there will be many cases in which students can learn online, there will always be a requirement for some teaching to be face to face. We have said, as I indicated in my opening remarks, that students might be uncomfortable with that because of

where we are, with virus case numbers having been increasing in Scotland for some weeks now.

Therefore, lecturers should be sympathetic if students want more online learning and less face-to-face teaching. There are some courses for which face-to-face teaching is essential—practical healthcare, veterinary and medical courses, for example—and they simply cannot take place without it.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** I appreciate that some of the issues that I wrote to the minister about have been addressed, but I do not understand the lack of detail or what seems to be a lack of urgency around some of this. Specifically, because students are isolating now, what additional support is the Government considering for self-isolating students? When will a decision be made on that and when will the support be delivered?

**Richard Lochhead:** It is the duty of the universities, which have a duty of care to their students and staff, to deliver the support that is required. That is why we said that it is absolutely essential that support be delivered as a matter of priority. As I said in my opening remarks, the 19 higher education institutions collectively published a statement pledging to do so. We have told universities that we stand ready to help, if that is required.

I thank Ross Greer for his constructive letter. I hope that he feels that the ideas in his letter have been reflected in today's statement, because some are being taken forward. We are in a fast-moving evolving situation, and we have to ensure that no student in Scotland is left without what they require to get through it.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Three sets of guidance in four days is not good enough. The minister has been warned about this for months, yet he ignored the warnings. He should have the good grace to apologise to students around the country.

The reasons against asymptomatic testing seem to change constantly; today, it seems to be an issue of capacity. Will the minister clear up exactly why we are not doing routine asymptomatic testing? Principals and student leaders around the country support the idea; he should support it, too.

**Richard Lochhead:** We take advice from our public health professionals. The testing regime in Scotland is not my decision, as Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science.

The advice at the moment is, and has been up until now, that the focus be on testing anybody in Scotland, including students, who has symptoms. Other forms of testing potentially have a role to play, but with asymptomatic testing, because the

virus could be incubating, the test result is only good for that day—the person might have the virus and it would not be picked up by the test. Focusing on the people who have symptoms, tracing the people whom they have come into contact with and asking them to self-isolate is the advice that we have had from the public health professionals in Scotland.

We are keeping that under review. As the higher education minister, I will continue to listen to the advice that we receive for the context of university campuses. As a whole, Scotland is following the best test and protect approach and testing regime that is available to us.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** Will the minister provide an update on uptake of the £5 million fund that was provided to universities to tackle digital exclusion and to support students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds with their online studies, particularly during this time?

**Richard Lochhead:** That money is now available to our universities and other further and higher education institutions to ensure that nobody is left behind, as there is clearly a big emphasis on urging people to study online, where that is appropriate. The funds are to ensure that nobody is left without the equipment to do that. I understand that Scottish universities and colleges have already been using their own funds to ensure that that happens, but the £5 million is there as an insurance policy, and I am sure that it will be required in due course.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Senior figures in the HE sector have said that, last Wednesday, when the Scottish Government indicated that it would issue updated guidance to students, the 19 higher education institutions' students had precisely four hours to comply with Scottish Government instructions.

Given the confusion that ensued in the following days, does the minister regret both that there was not fuller discussion of what the measures should be, and all the U-turns since then, which have led to so many mixed messages and so much anxiety and concern?

**Richard Lochhead:** There have been no U-turns on the issue by the Scottish Government. I am not sure to whom Liz Smith is referring.

On the guidance for students who were asked not to socialise last weekend, we endorsed the approach of Universities Scotland, in making that request. However, I accept that the communication was not perfect. Some of the newspaper and other headlines that I saw, which talked about bans, were not helpful. I am not apportioning blame for that; I am just explaining that, clearly, there was a communication issue.

Other guidance for universities and colleges was published on 1 September. Because we are dealing with a situation in which national guidance was brought in, also at short notice, on social gatherings and on not visiting other households indoors, we quickly adapted that guidance for the context of student households, so that students could understand how the national restrictions apply to student households—given, in particular that there were outbreaks on campuses, and that many perhaps wanted to go home, as they were really struggling to cope. We got that guidance out as quickly as we could.

We are living in the middle of a global pandemic. We do not have as much time as we would like and we do not get notice of the rate of the pandemic. We are doing our best to get through the situation, so it would be really helpful if everyone could join together in doing that.

**Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP):** I welcome the minister's statement that a mobile testing unit has been dispatched to Dundee. Will he provide more information on when the unit will be in place and operational, and where it will be located?

In his statement, the minister said that further walk-in test centres are under active development. Will one of them be in Dundee?

**Richard Lochhead:** I am told that Dundee is under consideration for a city-centre walk-in testing centre, and that conversations about that are going on with NHS Tayside, Abertay University and other stakeholders. I hope that we will be able to update Shona Robison and Parliament on that as soon as possible.

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** This is one of the poorest sets of decisions that has been made in the crisis, by ministers and universities. They knew, or ought to have known, of the risks to students in communal halls, who have found themselves trapped and sick, only to find that teaching for them is online.

Why, why, why did the minister not insist that students be tested on arrival? Was not it his duty to insist that students—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Will the member come to a close, please?

**Pauline McNeill:** Was it not the minister's duty to insist that students who were coming to communal accommodation should be tested on arrival?

**Richard Lochhead:** Pauline McNeill has raised the testing regime again.

As I have explained, the advice that we have is that the best testing regime is, because of the issues around asymptomatic testing, to ensure

that we test students who have symptoms. I understand that that process is being followed in Wales, where Pauline McNeill's party is in Government, as well as south of the border and in Northern Ireland. I do not take those decisions. The scientific advice to us from public health professionals is that that is the best testing regime. We have evidence that it is working well on campuses.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask that questions and answers be quick.

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I ask my question following a visit to the Robert Gordon University, in my constituency, to see what measures it is taking.

What steps are being taken to ensure deliveries of foods and other essentials to students who are self-isolating? Can the Scottish Government facilitate a dialogue between universities and supermarkets, in order to prioritise deliveries for those who are self-isolating—not only in halls, but in smaller units of accommodation?

**Richard Lochhead:** A few days ago, I met the Covid leads for all the universities, who are co-ordinating their strategies at local level, on each campus, to make sure that self-isolating students get the supplies, medicines and foods that they require. I will ensure that they also take forward the suggestion about involving supermarkets.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes questions on the ministerial statement on supporting students through the global pandemic. I apologise to Neil Findlay for not being able to take his question.

We move to the next item of business. I ask members to take care to maintain social distancing when leaving the chamber.

## Family Care Givers

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-22860, in the name of Monica Lennon, on recognising the importance of family care givers.

I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now. I call Monica Lennon to speak to and move the motion.

15:26

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I am grateful for the opportunity to open, on behalf of Scottish Labour, this debate on recognising the importance of family care givers.

I know that members across the chamber care deeply about the issues raised in the motion, and have been supporting their own constituents who have been affected. We need to find a strategy that keeps care givers connected with their loved ones, whether they are in a neonatal ward, supported living accommodation, a hospice or a care home. I hope that, alongside the work that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is leading, the debate will take us closer to achieving that.

This is a week of milestones, but unfortunately not all of them are happy ones. Tomorrow we will mark the international day of older persons, which will be an opportunity to celebrate our older citizens. However, it will also be a day on which to reflect how we might better respect their rights, needs and aspirations. This week also marks the passing of 200 days since most care homes went into lockdown. Thousands of people live in Scotland's care homes, and they have been among the groups who have been hit hardest by Covid-19. Yesterday we reached the grim milestone of Covid-19 having caused a million deaths worldwide, so we know that we are still living through a global pandemic, with all the challenges that it brings.

At the start of the pandemic, in March and April, none of us—least of all care home residents, the staff who look after them, or their families—could have imagined what was to follow in the months ahead, or that, six months on, so many of them would still be living under such harmful restrictions.

This year has been a sad and difficult one, and our sympathies remain with all those who have lost loved ones due to Covid-19. Almost 2,000 deaths in Scotland's care homes have been confirmed as having been caused by the virus. Worryingly, excess deaths are also increasing,

including those from dementia, in comparison with those in previous years. The impact of isolation is awful and cannot be understated.

The First Minister has said on many occasions that mistakes would be made, and we cannot turn the clock back to January or February and change what has happened. However, we can ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated in the future. We must have a strategy to ensure that care givers and their loved ones can be together. We must avoid a winter of hell for families whose loved ones have so far survived the impacts of the pandemic but who are nevertheless grieving in their own ways as we near the mark of six months having passed since restrictions on them having contact were put in place.

Last week, I asked the First Minister about evaluation of the shielding strategy, and how such learning might inform our future approach to care homes and care givers. In response she said that although some scientists hold the view that vulnerable groups in our society should be sealed off and everyone else should be allowed to get on with their lives normally, she did not agree with that, either practically or ethically speaking.

The First Minister said:

“We cannot segregate our lives in that way. We live interdependently; younger people live with older people. I also do not think that it is ethically right to expect one group of the population to bear all the burden of dealing with the pandemic.”—[*Official Report*, 22 September 2020; c 30.]

I absolutely agree with the First Minister, but the fact is that, right now, thousands of people are in effect sealed off from their family care givers due to the current guidelines.

I pay tribute to Cathie Russell and other members of the care home relatives Scotland group because they have been instrumental in making me and people like me better understand the role of family care givers. They are not just visitors—I think that that phrase and the Twitter hashtag has left a strong impression on all of us.

I am grateful to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport for her recent meetings with Cathie Russell and some members of that group and I know that she is meeting them again this week, with a view to making real progress. I was heartened to hear the cabinet secretary, in her evidence to the COVID-19 Committee this morning, acknowledge the harmful unintended consequences of restrictions on family care givers. She talked about her aspiration to increase not just the frequency of contact but the duration of that contact and she talked about the importance of touch. That will have given a lot of people some hope; I feel strongly that people should not have to come to the Parliament and hold a rally to get a response from their MSPs. Apart from the rally, we

have had petitions, and I pay tribute to Natasha Hamilton and Pauline Rodger for their respective petitions on this important issue. Pauline’s petition has been running since May and it is really sad that, as we enter the autumn, there are still many issues to resolve.

One woman emailed me yesterday to tell me about her mum, who lives in a care home and is frail and elderly. Her mum does not have dementia but, even though she is fully aware of what is going on, she does not fully understand why she is being deprived of family contact and, importantly, trips outside the care home. I feel that I must give a suicide trigger warning here because her mum’s mental health deteriorated badly and, in June, she tried to take her own life—she is 92.

These individual stories are absolutely heartbreaking. Of course we need to do everything possible to stop the virus getting into care homes, but there is a hidden catastrophe in relation to mental health and we must do something about that too, so we must make access to family care givers a priority.

I want to stress that not everyone who relies on family care givers is elderly. Gary’s adult sister, who has learning disabilities, and his elderly mother live in separate care homes in South Lanarkshire and they have not seen each other for the past six months. Gary said that their care homes are just 8 miles apart, but they may as well be 8,000 miles apart.

There are other stories, such as that of Sylvia Watson, whose mother Mary just recently turned 104 years old, but can see only one of her daughters right now, due to the one visitor per household rule. Why can we not change that rule so that Sylvia and her sister can both be recognised as designated care givers? There are thousands of stories like that, so we must do better.

What is the solution? The current approach in the guidelines is leading to hundreds of different scenarios—possibly more than a thousand—with some families not knowing from one day to the next what they are able to do or when they are able to provide care. As we head into the winter, we know that the opportunity for outdoor contact will not be reliable, so a care giver strategy needs to be put in place rapidly, to restore contact between families and their loved ones.

We know that lots of testing capacity is unused every single day, so why can we not be more innovative and use that testing capacity for the benefit of family care givers? I know that colleagues such as Alison Johnstone, who is in the chamber, have been consistent in calling for regular and routine access to testing. That is really important and it is addressed in the motion. No

one is suggesting that testing negates the need for other safety measures, including personal protective equipment, but it would be a step in the right direction.

I have a constituent who is a carer for his wife. Due to a serious brain injury, she is in a care home, despite being only in her 50s. Because she lost so much weight during lockdown, my constituent was granted access to come in every day at lunch time and dinner time to help to feed her. He was given regular access to testing, and he wore PPE. Thankfully, her weight stabilised. However, when the Lanarkshire lockdown was brought in, his contact was stopped immediately. He has nothing but praise for the care home staff but, as my constituent says, why is it more dangerous for him to be a care giver than it is for the staff to be there? We have to recognise that there should be equal status between family care givers and those who are employed to provide care, and I hope that the motion achieves that. None of us really feels that we have the balance right at the moment.

In a global pandemic, we can learn a lot from other countries and exchange information with them. For me, the approach in Ontario stands out. A bill has been lodged by Lisa Gretzky, who is a member of the legislative assembly, to address the issues that we are talking about. The bill's aim is to recognise the important role and status of family care givers.

In the UK, including in Scotland, there have been really good examples of care home staff moving into care homes. In one care home in England—I think that it is in Oxford—when new residents move in, the family care giver is allowed to move in for the two-week isolation period. We have seen other examples that look quite quirky, such as people hugging through plastic sheets and jackets. People are trying to do a lot.

Of course, recognising family care givers does not take away from the professionalism and unique skills of people who provide care. The vast majority of those who have spoken to me do not have a bad word to say about the amazing staff who look after their loved ones. We know that, on an individual level, there are people of great dedication and skill who do an incredible job.

I welcome the clarification in the Scottish Government's amendment that it will set out its winter plans really soon. That is important. I do not disagree with the content of the Conservative amendment, which was lodged by Donald Cameron. I fully agree that there is a need for a public inquiry. Many of us feel uncomfortable about the fact that we do not know when the inquiry will be, and we do not want it to be kicked into the long grass. A public inquiry has to be

about much wider issues than simply what is happening in care homes.

I am not sure whether this is deliberate, but Donald Cameron's amendment would take out the important reference in the motion to testing and it would kick out the reference to the principles in the Ontario bill. I am not trying to bind the Government's hands on that, but we should all sign up to those principles, which go beyond people living in care homes and are about ensuring that people of all ages and in all circumstances have that important connection with family care givers.

Our care sector has been and continues to be terribly affected by the Covid-19 lockdown. Tomorrow, as we begin a new month and mark the international day of older persons, it is absolutely vital that we agree a way forward that avoids another 200 days of isolation for our care home population. I welcome the new funding that was announced yesterday for health and social care services. We need urgent investment in PPE and testing, and a clear winter plan that will get us through the difficult months to come. We need an end to the unintended consequences of lockdown, which has kept families apart for half a year, and we need to move forward with a strategy that recognises that family care givers are more than just visitors, and that they deserve equal rights.

For the past decade, it has been Scottish Labour policy to have a national care service. That is rooted in a deeply held belief that we should put people before profit. As we move forward into the 2020s, we want a national care system that puts people at the centre and gives them choice and freedom to live with dignity. We see the review as progress, but we need swift action, and we need change to happen now, starting with important family contact.

I am sorry, Presiding Officer, I thought that I had 13 minutes, but I have got that wrong, so I will finish now.

As we look round the world to our neighbours, we must learn every lesson possible. I want us all to act now to reunite families across the country.

I move,

That the Parliament observes that 1 October is International Day of Older Persons; notes that more than 200 days have passed since care homes began locking down in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; further notes with great sadness the scale of the pandemic in Scotland's care homes and the tragic loss of life that has occurred; believes quality social care to be essential to the health and wellbeing of people across Scotland and concludes that it is time for a National Care Service, which will deliver pay for social care workers that reflects their value and professionalism; is concerned that limited or no contact with family caregivers is having a negative impact not only on the health and wellbeing of care home residents, including those with Alzheimer's



disease and dementia, but also on children, young people and other adults affected by restrictions on their caregivers; agrees that receiving care and support from one or more designated caregivers is important for the health and wellbeing of individuals, and that testing should be available to everyone involved in providing care; commends Bill 203: More Than A Visitor Act (Caregiving in Congregate Care Settings), 2020, which is currently progressing through the Legislative Assembly of Ontario; calls on Ministers to adopt a similar approach, and further calls on the Scottish Government to set out its plans for how social care services will be properly protected during winter.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** If you had had 13 minutes, I would have given you 13 minutes. I had better tell members how much time they have.

I call Jeane Freeman to speak to and move amendment S5M-22860.2. You have eight minutes, Ms Freeman.

15:39

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** As members across the chamber well know, we are in the middle of a global pandemic. To give some context to what I am about to say, it is perhaps worth reminding ourselves of some important statistics. As Ms Lennon said, yesterday was a particularly grave milestone. In nine months, just over 1 million people have died from Covid-19 worldwide, and there have been at least 33.5 million cases. Global mortality tells us that one in 10,000 people under the age of 20 will die from the virus but that, for the over-85s, the number is one in six.

We know much more about the virus than we did nine months ago, but we do not know everything yet, even though the world's scientific and clinical community is working faster than it has ever done to understand the virus and its impacts, and is searching hard for a vaccine that works and treatment that is effective. However, we know what harm the virus can do to sections of the population, including those of us who are older and people with individual or multiple health conditions. Increasingly, we are understanding the long-term health impacts for those who survive serious cases of the virus. We know, too, that the virus spreads.

Today, we have had the tragic duty to report that there have been a further seven deaths of people with Covid-19 in Scotland. Today, we have also had to report that there are 137 people in hospital with the virus, whereas on the same day last week there were 83 cases. That is an increase of 65 per cent in a week. The virus is still with us.

Mr Cameron's amendment calls for an urgent public inquiry into the discharge of hospital patients into care homes. I make it clear that we are absolutely committed to holding a full public inquiry into all aspects of Covid-19 and its impact

on all aspects of our nation. I hope that the United Kingdom Government will also hold a public inquiry into the handling and impact of Covid-19, at the right time.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Jeane Freeman:** I will do, in a moment.

Given that, I hope that Mr Cameron will understand that I cannot support his call for a separate public inquiry into only one aspect of the pandemic. I want Scotland's inquiry to start at the appropriate time, when the impact of Covid-19 has been substantially reduced. In the light of the numbers, which I have just reminded all members of, I hope that Mr Cameron understands that, at the moment, my focus and that of our expert advisers must be on our continued efforts to control and suppress the virus and thereby save lives.

**Neil Findlay:** We know that a public inquiry will come, but the cabinet secretary has been asked on many occasions when she first knew that people were being discharged to care homes without being tested. We need only a few short words from the cabinet secretary in response to that question. We just need a date—nothing else. The cabinet secretary has been asked the question umpteen times. Why can she not give a straight answer to a simple question? On which date did she first know that that was happening?

**Jeane Freeman:** We were initially alerted to the situation by reports in the national press on what was happening south of the border. That was when we began to investigate what was happening in our care homes. In May, June and July, there were a number of such reports. That is why we commissioned the specific piece of work that Public Health Scotland is undertaking. It is looking at the dates of discharge from hospital into care homes, whether the individuals were infectious at the point at which they were discharged and what the rationale was for the discharge of patients who were infectious.

It is in the context of the global pandemic and its presence in Scotland that we sought to introduce measures to protect those who are most vulnerable to being harmed by it. Among others, those measures included what were undoubtedly severe restrictions on visiting care homes. Those restrictions lasted for a long time, except in the case of essential visits. Since 3 July, we have been steadily trying to ease those restrictions, initially with outdoor visits, and then by increasing the number of outdoor visitors and preparing care homes for the return of indoor visits from early August, with each resident having one designated visitor. Care homes have had to be free from Covid for 28 days and to be participating fully in

the staff testing programme. Most recently, we have worked to restore some of the normal communal activities and health and wellbeing services that residents previously had access to. However, none of that is normal when physical distancing remains necessary, staff are wearing additional PPE and enhanced cleaning is in place.

None of those decisions to restrict visiting or then to open it up in a limited way has been taken without strong and clear clinical advice on risk levels and mitigation, particularly from those with considerable experience in older people's physical, neurological and mental health care. We have worked closely on this and other issues with groups such as the dementia in care homes group and Scottish Care, and we have listened to others and looked at approaches elsewhere.

Of all the decisions that we have had to make this year and all the decisions that I have had to make this year, those have to have been the hardest, because I know so very well their impact and the harms that can be caused as we try to prevent harm.

Listening to those views, I am acutely conscious that what is probably missed the most is time and touch—time with the loved one to talk, have a cup of tea and catch up on news, and the chance to touch, holding their hands and giving them a hug. When I spoke to members of the care home relatives Scotland group a few days ago, that came across very strongly, but as strong were their recognition and understanding of the need to protect their loved ones from the virus.

The work that we now have under way, on which I intend that we will reach a conclusion, in part, very shortly, is to open up visiting to designated visitors so that they can visit more often and for longer, with all the appropriate PPE and other measures being in place, and also eat with their loved ones if they wish, bring in gifts and personal possessions, and have a named back-up visitor for times when they cannot visit.

I want us to reach a better balance in the measures that we take, bearing in mind, of course, that where there are increased numbers of cases in the locality of a care home, the local director of public health has a responsibility to act to increase protective measures if that is what their professional judgment tells them is the right thing to do.

All those steps and the many views and propositions that are on offer about the future of adult social care are well within the scope of the independent review that was announced in the programme for government. The review is well under way and it is on track to produce recommendations in the very early part of next year. It has the expertise and experience of both

its chair, Derek Feeley, and its advisory panel, and its work at pace includes listening to unions that represent staff, to providers, to local government, to families, to carers and, most important, to those who receive care.

In adult social care as in the NHS, the most important resource that we have are the staff who work there. Be it in care homes or in care at home, they bring compassion, skill and expertise to the job. In creating a national approach to this vital service, be it a national care service or any other option that this Parliament chooses, there are important decisions to come on valuing those staff and offering jobs that not only are worth while and rewarding in themselves, but offer future progression, training and learning in a coherent and consistent way.

Those will be vital questions for all of us in the coming months, but for the residents of our care homes and their families right now, there is, I am sure, a better balance that we can strike. That work is under way and I intend to be able to update Parliament and, most important, relatives and care home residents shortly on the first steps towards that better balance.

I am pleased to support Ms Lennon's motion. I move amendment S5M-22860.2, to leave out from “, and further calls” to end and insert:

“; notes that the Scottish Government will soon be setting out winter plans for the NHS and social care to ensure that they are as protected as possible during the winter; welcomes that the independent review of social care is examining how adult social care can be most effectively reformed to deliver a national approach to care and support services, including a National Care Service; recognises that everyone has a part to play in ensuring that transmission of COVID-19 is curtailed in order to protect the most vulnerable people in society, and further recognises that, while some restrictions on care home visiting may be required to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to and within care homes, these should be removed, mitigated and amended as soon as it is clinically safe to do so in order that care home residents can safely see their loved ones.”

15:48

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands)**

**(Con):** I am grateful to Labour for bringing the issue to the chamber. There is much in its motion and in the Scottish Government's amendment with which we agree in principle, in terms of both the main issue, the spirit of which is that we must recognise the importance of family care givers, and many of the more specific, practical aspects that arise.

I acknowledge the consensual tone of this debate, and for the most part I will try to replicate it in my speech. It is very hard to dispute much of what has been said by both Monica Lennon and the cabinet secretary.

I pay tribute to every care worker in Scotland for all their efforts during this unpredictable and unprecedented moment in our history and for all that they did before Covid-19. The role in society of those who work in care was hugely important long before the pandemic struck us. Whether someone works in a care home, delivers residential care in the community or cares for a family member or friend, we value immensely what they do and appreciate their commitment to that vital role, especially at this juncture. Many across the chamber will express such sentiments today; they need to be repeated, but no one should think that such repetition in any way diminishes the import of our words or our sincerity in saying them.

We acknowledge that Thursday is the United Nations international day of older persons. We recognise the aims of this year's campaign, which include the need to increase understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on older people and on healthcare policy, planning and attitudes. The crisis has been a challenging period for many—no least those who provide care, as clear dangers exist for care givers and care receivers. Whether it is through the increased likelihood of transmission of the virus or the heightened risk of complications for those who are older or who have underlying health conditions, it is clear that the risks are greater, but the care sector has adapted to many of the challenges, and care providers should be commended for all their efforts.

The care sector has faced issues during the crisis, which have been touched on—by Monica Lennon in her motion and by other MSPs in the chamber and in the media. There have been almost 2,000 deaths in our care homes because of Covid-19, which is almost half of all such deaths in Scotland. Testing of care home staff has been inadequate, and hundreds of untested patients were moved to care homes between 1 March and 21 April. It was unacceptable to allow into our care homes at least 37 patients who tested positive for Covid-19, which exposed staff and the most vulnerable residents to the virus.

Yesterday, we learned that Public Health Scotland intends to delay until the end of October the publication of a crucial report on the true number of Covid-19 positive patients who were moved to care homes, although the First Minister confirmed that the Scottish Government asked for that report to be completed by the end of September—today.

**Jeane Freeman:** I am sure that Mr Cameron will appreciate that Public Health Scotland's reason for not publishing at the end of September, as it and we had hoped, is that it wants to be absolutely sure, when bringing together the number of data sets that are required to produce the report, that the data is robust and analytically

sound. That is exactly the responsibility that it has and the job that it should do.

Although I, too, am disappointed that the report is not available, I am sure that we can all agree that Public Health Scotland has sound and correct professional reasons for reaching the position that it has. It has given us as much notice of that as it could do.

**Donald Cameron:** I acknowledge that those were the reasons that were given, but the cabinet secretary can be under no illusions: the delay represents more heartache and distress for the affected families who lost loved ones in care homes. We need to know the full number of Covid-19 positive patients who entered care homes, and Neil Findlay is right: we need to know when the First Minister and the cabinet secretary first learned that that was happening. We also need to know what guidance, if any, clinicians were following when the transfers were made. That is why our amendment repeats our call for an urgent public inquiry, so that families can get those urgent answers.

I would like to move on to other areas of the debate. We recognise the immense worry and concern of family care givers who have had limited or no contact with their loved ones, particularly those who have conditions such as Alzheimer's and dementia. We acknowledge that some work has been done to ensure that care home residents can meet people outdoors, although that will clearly become less practical as winter approaches. I take at face value what the cabinet secretary has said, in both her amendment and her public statements, about the issue, and I do not doubt her sincerity for a moment. However, as Jason Leitch said to the COVID-19 Committee this morning, it is one of the most difficult issues that has to be addressed by any Government dealing with Covid-19 anywhere in the world.

I note what the cabinet secretary said about allowing one designated visitor to meet a resident indoors, but, from my inbox—I am sure that this is the same for many MSPs—I know that family members, in particular, are increasingly distressed about not being able to see their loved ones. For instance, I have read about people being separated by Perspex screens. It is heartbreaking to read some of those stories.

The care home relatives Scotland group has called for more access for relatives in care homes to improve people's quality of life. Members may have seen the message from Mary Fowler, who is a 104-year-old care home resident who took to social media with an emotional plea to see her family. The existing restrictions made her feel like she was in prison. That is a stark example of the people who have made significant sacrifices and a reminder that we should keep looking for ways to

safely return to some kind of normality for those who are most vulnerable.

Labour referred to the national care service in its motion. We welcome the review to investigate that, which was announced in the programme for government, and we await with great interest its findings in January. We believe that that review should happen first and that its conclusions should be digested before we come to a final view.

There are undoubtedly wider issues across the whole sector—in both the public and private sectors—and we must do all that we can to remedy them by working with care workers, care providers, residents in care and bodies such as Scottish Care and the Care Inspectorate.

It seems obvious that reform of some sort is coming. As things stand, we cannot support a blanket commitment to a national care service, as in Labour's motion, but that should not be read as Conservative members being resistant to change in the sector.

In conclusion, we are sympathetic to much of the motion. We need an urgent inquiry, and we believe that the national care service review should be carried out before we come to a final view. I hope that other members support our amendment.

I move amendment S5M-22860.1, to leave out from "concludes that it is time" to "similar approach" and insert:

"welcomes the review into a National Care Service; acknowledges the very significant contribution of social care workers, both in general and in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic; shares the concerns of families calling for better care home visiting arrangements, given that limited or no contact with family caregivers is having a negative impact, not only on the health and wellbeing of care home residents, including those with Alzheimer's disease and dementia, but also on children, young people and other adults affected by restrictions on their caregivers, and believes that this policy should be reviewed; calls for an urgent public inquiry into the unacceptable transfer of COVID-19-positive patients to care homes".

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now have no time in hand, so members must absorb interventions. I am sorry.

15:56

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I thank our wonderful care staff, who have done incredible work in often extremely difficult conditions throughout the pandemic. They have been a source of care—obviously—support and comfort to many care home residents during a distressing and frightening time.

The issue is an important one that we cannot debate too often, and I thank the Labour Party for bringing it to the chamber.

It is clear that errors have been made during the pandemic. Although it is essential that a public inquiry provides more detailed answers, we are in the second wave, and learning must take place now.

The Scottish Greens have been calling for regular Covid-19 testing of front-line health and care workers since April. Participation in a Covid care staff testing scheme is one of the conditions that care homes have to meet before they can resume visiting, so robust and regular testing is vital to ensure that those who have been isolated in care homes can once again see their loved ones.

As the motion states:

"more than 200 days have passed since care homes began locking down in March".

During the lockdown, families have been unable to grieve, to celebrate or to share words of comfort together. The psychological toll that that has taken on residents of care homes and their families is immense. The motion also rightly notes the significant impact of isolation on

"those with Alzheimer's disease and dementia".

Although care home residents undoubtedly need to be protected from the potentially fatal harm of Covid, we have to strive to lessen the psychological harm and to maintain dignity and quality of life.

Regular testing of care workers has now been delivered, but there have been reports of long waits for test results. Only two weeks ago, a Unison poll indicated that half of care home workers had not been tested for the coronavirus.

Care-at-home workers also provide vital care to people who are often very vulnerable, and they must not be overlooked. Labour's motion states:

"testing should be available to everyone involved in providing care".

I could not agree more.

Scottish Care has described support for care at home as

"the Achilles heel of our pandemic response"

and has said that it has been

"insufficiently planned for nationally and locally."

We cannot afford to neglect that area of the care sector. That is evidenced by the stark warning that Scottish Care issued about a potential link between excess deaths in the community and

"the removal or reduction of homecare supports as a pandemic response".

A report that the Care Inspectorate published this month detailed the impact that the removal of such support has had on service users. It said:

“reduced community access, due to lockdown, resulted in a loss of daily routines and predictability”

and an inevitable rise in stress levels.

More widely, Inclusion Scotland conducted a survey in July that showed that 79 per cent of respondents who were in receipt of social care support prior to lockdown had lost some or all of their social care support during March and that just over a third of respondents who had had their support reduced or stopped were still being asked to pay care charges to their local authority.

Covid-19 has exposed the fundamental flaws in the care system and the devastating consequences for disabled people and unpaid carers. Engender says that

“As many as 39% of unpaid carers are providing more care due to local services reducing or closing as a result of Covid-19”

and that

“Survey data published for Carers Week 2020 suggests that there are now as many as 1.1 million unpaid carers in Scotland, of which 61% are women.”

Any reintroduction of care packages will have to take into account the significant damage that may have been inflicted on people’s physical and mental health as a result of the pandemic as well as the disproportionate effect on women, who continue to take on the majority of care work.

Action is also needed on staff wellbeing. Many of our care workers will be exhausted after the trials of the past six months, and workforce issues are exacerbating that. In Scotland,

“20% of registered care services report having nursing vacancies and the level is significantly higher in care homes for older people, with 46% of these services reporting nursing vacancies.”

The Royal College of Nursing tells us that

“registered nurses working on the frontline in care homes are feeling the impact of these nursing shortages daily and this strain has been amplified during the COVID 19 pandemic”

and that urgent

“Action is needed to deliver fair pay, terms and conditions for registered nurses and other nursing staff employed within care homes.

We have often discussed the on-going undervaluing of care workers in the chamber, but it bears frequent repetition. Care work is essential for our society and economy, but it remains unappreciated and underpaid. There is a vast mismatch between the value of care and the support that carers receive. Much social care in this country is still done by volunteers: partners, children, parents, friends and neighbours all contribute to helping those who are in need of care. Three out of five of us in the chamber will become carers at some point in our lives, yet the

value of the work that carers do is not fully recognised. Carers’ benefits do not recognise the immense contribution that is made by unpaid carers. Better conditions are needed for both professional care workers and unpaid carers who are attending to family and friends. Social care workers do hard and vital work in people’s homes and care homes in every community, but it remains one of the lowest paid sectors, fuelling the gender pay gap.

The Scottish Green Party stood on a manifesto commitment to pay all care and support workers significantly above the living wage, financed by progressive taxation, not by care charges. We have also long called for improved working conditions for social care workers such as paid travel time, sick leave, skills training and an end to zero-hours contracts. More than half of working age carers juggle paid employment—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry, but you must conclude.

**Alison Johnstone:** I will conclude my remarks there.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am very sorry. I was trying to signal to you.

I now call Alex Cole-Hamilton. Please watch the pen, Mr Cole-Hamilton, and I will not have to interrupt you.

16:02

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I will never ignore the pen, Presiding Officer.

I thank Monica Lennon and the Labour Party for lodging this important motion. Monica Lennon and I attended a demonstration outside the Parliament last week, which involved the care home relatives Scotland let us visit campaign. It was one of the most compelling demonstrations that I have attended outside the Parliament building. We heard real human stories about anxiety and loss.

Since those weeks of high infection rates, in early March and April, when we had to pass emergency Covid-19 legislation, I have been deeply concerned about the psychological impact on constituents. Whoever you are, these are days of high anxiety. At a time when all of us most need a hug, we are denied it.

Nowhere are the privations of human contact that have been caused by lockdown more keenly felt than in those care settings that are at both ends of life’s journey: our neonatal wards and care homes. Among all the angst, people have been told that they cannot do the most natural thing—hold the hand of a premature baby or an elderly parent. They have been denied that for over 200 days. That is a dark situation.

It does not have to be like that. I believe that we can harness what we know about the virus to better inform our public health policy so that we can allow care home residents to receive family care as well as keep everyone safe. The motion mentions Canada, and we have heard a lot about it. In Ontario, family carers are treated in a similar way to agency care staff. They undertake the same hygiene measures and are allowed to safely continue to provide the care that they provided before the outbreak, which is a vital part of the care package. I want to see that happen in Scotland.

We know that family members will stick to the rules because they do not want to jeopardise the safety of their loved ones. We also know that allowing family carers to come in can improve outcomes in homes. They are informal carers and will pick up on corners that are being cut or changes in their family members that might have otherwise been missed.

I am sure that we can all agree that it is distressing to have a sudden change in your care package, but that distress is especially acute for those who are in the early stages of dementia. I find unsettling the sight of everybody around me in masks; I cannot imagine what that must be like for people who are struggling with dementia.

Often, friends and relatives have been caring for a resident for many years, so they can pick up on early signs of deterioration. The people whom we met last week are witnessing those during the Zoom calls and the conversations through windows that they are having to make do with.

Even if care is top rated in the home and it is run very well, anxiety and separation can only exacerbate conditions and reduce life outcomes. A few months ago, we all enjoyed seeing photographs on social media of drive-by hellos at care homes, where residents sat outside in gardens and waved. It was lovely, and it meant so much to so many of them, but it is not summer any more. Autumn will soon turn to winter, and—after all, we live in Scotland—those outdoor meet-ups will just not be practical. Behind those images, as we heard at the demonstration, was also the reality of residents with dementia clawing at the screens between them and their loved ones, trying to touch or even hear their families, because it was so difficult.

We can do a lot of this through testing, and it is very important that we expand our testing operations. While we are seeing local spikes, we can box clever with adequate testing. Applying the same rules to family carers as we apply to bank and agency staff will ensure that we can allow family carers in. Willie Rennie has repeatedly called for a test for everyone who can make care homes a safer and controlled environment. We

have staff tests up and running; why can we not expand that to family members?

I will come on to the Government's amendment briefly, before I close.

One positive outcome is that people who are fortunate enough never to have been in a hospital, to have been carers or to have needed care are, for the first time, properly valuing what the social care sector means for this country. I echo Alison Johnstone's thanks to our social care workers. They deserve the claps that we all came out and delivered to them on Thursday afternoons as much as anybody else in our health and social care system. We are relieved to know that they are there when we need them. As a country, we have been taking them for granted for far too long. I welcome a review of pay structures. Careers in social care are not only vital but in high demand, and that is only going to become more true. The number of carers needs to rise exponentially with our ageing population, so we need to make social care a profession of choice.

I will close by covering the national care service. Liberal Democrats absolutely support the national review on the formation of a care service. The sector fundamentally needs reform; however, we have grave concerns about controlling that entirely from the centre. Accountability for the delivery of social care should always have a link to the communities in which it is rooted and be responsive to regional variation.

However, that is not what today's debate is about. Therefore, although we have some difficulty with the wording of the Government's amendment, we want to embrace the spirit of consensus that is being forged across the majority of the Parliament today. We want to recognise that the motion and the amendments around it speak to the very needs of the families that Monica Lennon and I met on a cold day outside the Parliament last week. It is their love that keeps them going, and they want to keep their relatives going by extending that love and extending the care. They will do that not by visiting—they are not just there to hold a hand—but by being there to provide care and to be those informal inspectors who can pick up on problems. Above all those things, first and foremost, they want to provide the human contact that has been denied to so many of our most vulnerable constituents and residents of this country since the start of the pandemic.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if you wish to speak, you must press your request-to-speak button. I call Anas Sarwar, to be followed by Angela Constance.

16:08

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I welcome the debate and all the contributions that have been made so far. I say, too, that it is important to acknowledge context. Covid has changed not just Scotland and the United Kingdom; it has changed the world. It is important to recognise that the people who are in positions of power have had to make difficult decisions. The science goes only so far—it cannot provide the answer to every situation, and ministers will have, largely, to make judgment calls. Sometimes those judgment calls will be correct and sometimes, in hindsight, they will be wrong. We should not forget that ministers are working round the clock to try to make the right judgment calls. I want everyone to know that any criticisms—perceived or otherwise—that I might make in my contribution are made in that context.

The past couple of weeks have emphasised that it is important to recognise that an effective communication strategy is not the same as a virus elimination strategy. I fully accept that the Scottish Government is better at communicating about the virus than the UK Government, but their decisions on the big calls have been largely the same. Six months into the pandemic, I believe that we should, despite some recent progress, be further down the road, whether that be in testing in care homes or in visits to care homes.

Care homes have faced the greatest burden of the pandemic so far. There have been almost 2,000 deaths in care home settings. Almost half—46 per cent—of all deaths have been in care homes, despite residents representing just a fraction of the wider population.

Patients were discharged from hospital without being tested. Testing them did not require scientific advice; it is just common sense that no one should have been transferred into a care home without being tested first, and that no one who tested positive should have been transferred into a care home. At the appropriate time, an enquiry will have to look into that.

I can only begin to imagine the emotional toll that this has all taken on people. I feel blessed, in a sense, that I do not have any direct family members in a care home. However, having had to visit my granny and look through the window to give her a wave, and seeing my children cry as we drive away while I hold back tears in front of them, I have an idea of how difficult the situation has been for so many of our fellow citizens.

I can only begin to imagine how difficult it must have been to have seen and to have read the reports about what has been happening in our care homes. For thousands of our fellow citizens not to be able to have direct contact with their loved ones must be simply heartbreaking.

I will talk about more that in a moment, but first, as Alison Johnstone, Alex Cole-Hamilton and Monica Lennon have done, I pay tribute to our care home staff. The pandemic has been extremely difficult for them. They should not feel as though they are to blame for the spread of the virus in their workplaces. They went to their workplaces and risked their own lives and the lives of their families. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is who really keeps our country going in times of crisis. That should be recognised in how those people are regarded—not just through applause, but by how they are paid and how they are treated in the workplace and by wider society.

I will go back to wider issues around care homes. We are talking fundamentally about human rights and the right to life, not about the presumption that a person who lives in a care home has a certain healthcare need or certain mental capacity. I find it really frustrating that we have, at times during the pandemic, treated care homes as palliative care centres rather than as care homes. Good quality of life matters, but too many of our fellow citizens are feeling as though they are imprisoned in their care homes, and are suffering from loneliness, isolation, and emotional, psychological and physical trauma, as a result. We will see their scars, and the crises that are being caused by the mental health scars, in the following generation for years to come.

Last week, the First Minister said that it would be ethically wrong to single out a community. She is right, but we have singled out one community—care home residents. We have heard the heartbreaking personal stories of individuals feeling disorientated, their health deteriorating and many sadly giving up on life altogether and presuming that these are their final moments in this world. It is simply heartbreaking, so I want to pay tribute to all the people with relatives in care homes, particularly care home relatives Scotland, who have been sharing their stories.

Eliminating the virus matters, but human relationships also matter. I fear that how we have responded to the virus will cost more lives and cause more long-term morbidity than the virus itself. After six months, we can do better than this—we should be doing better, and we must do better. We need rapid testing and efficient and equal personal protective equipment in care homes.

We need to recognise that human interactions are a key part of our lives and that they have to happen so that we can give justice to all the people who live in care homes and those who care for people who live in care homes. I hope that through this debate we can do better for all those citizens, and respect the human rights of all those in our care homes.

16:14

**Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP):** I very much welcome the debate, because the pandemic and the national response have reminded us that, often in life, the hardest decisions are those that we do not want to make—but make them we must. Even life-saving and necessary decisions come at a cost and with consequences. It is apposite and correct that we talk about that and mitigate it, where we can safely do so.

I was grateful to the cabinet secretary for outlining the work that she is overseeing on how to make visits to care homes more humane where possible, including some creative ways to approach that. That was certainly important to my family before my grandmother passed: my family knows what it is like not to see a loved one.

I also welcome the debate because we should recognise the United Nations international day of older persons. It should be a springboard to increasing our resolve. The debate also gives us a great opportunity to solidify and build on the growing consensus for a national care service, given that the debate is shifting from whether we should establish one to how we do it.

Like me, the cabinet secretary will remember well our journey in building a social security system for Scotland. Although devolution of powers was only partial, it was nonetheless a mammoth task. Within and outwith Parliament, there was much debate, negotiation and argument, and votes were won and lost on all sides. However, our starting point was to build on a foundation of consensus about purpose and principles. We need to do likewise with a national care service.

Given that the Scottish Government has kick-started a comprehensive but short review of adult health and social care, now is the time for all parliamentarians to start building consensus, and to make sure that it is based on firm foundations by testing and debating not just the aspirations and vision, but the “How?”—the plan and the next steps. I know that many of us are already doing that, as individuals and as members of our political parties and other organisations that we are involved in. As others are, I am carrying out a consultation that is specific to the experience of residents, staff and people who have had a loved one in a care home.

Given the spectrum of care services and the desire for services to be delivered locally—in people’s homes, where possible—and to have national standards that provide a national safety net, members should make no mistake: building a national care service is a much bigger and more complex task than delivering a new social security

service, or any other previous or existing government reform programme. However, I know that the prize is greater, because care touches, directly or indirectly, every aspect of our society and lives, and every public service.

Yesterday, we heard from the Reverend Dr Nanda Groenewald at time for reflection. I hope that everyone was listening, because Nanda is a minister in my constituency. She quoted Nelson Mandela and said that things may seem impossible until the next time. The pandemic remains the biggest public health crisis of our lifetimes, but even with the virus on the march again, I and others remain of the view that now is also the biggest opportunity in our lifetimes to rewrite the rules and to put right things that have never been right.

First and foremost, we need to take a human rights approach to care, but we need to find the right language to explain why it is essential to real daily life. Now is the time to put it beyond a shadow of doubt that, as a nation, we really value care work and care workers. Care workers might be low paid, but care work is never low skilled. They deserve so much more than our thanks.

Investment in social care must also be seen as an investment in wellbeing and in our economy, in the same way that the debate on childcare was transformed a few years ago with the recognition that it was key to getting women into work.

We know that the care sector employs more than 200,000 people. If we were to increase the number of people who work in care and increase pay for the work, that would increase employment rates by five percentage points and decrease the gender employment gap by four percentage points. Of course, we cannot talk about care—paid or unpaid—without talking about women.

As I have said before, we need to follow the money forensically in order to know exactly what public money is extracted from the private care sector and to the benefit of whom. Perhaps an early examination of the national care home contract would be helpful in our quest for care before profit.

I see that the Presiding Officer is giving me the nod. As usual, like other members, I feel as though I have just skated over the surface of the issues. All I will say is that we need to grasp that everything has changed—it must change and we must all play a part in that change.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can tell members that interrupting all these wonderful speeches is not a happy task, but I have to do it.



16:22

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** Along with other members, I thank Monica Lennon and the Labour group for bringing the debate to the chamber. There is a consensual feel to the debate, and I would echo many of the remarks from fellow members.

We have heard a lot about those who have dementia or who are in homes because of old age, but—with the Presiding Officer's permission—I would like to move the debate on to talk about other people who are in residential homes. I have spoken about this issue in previous debates. Those who have learning disabilities or physical disabilities have been excluded from being able to see their parents, siblings and other loved ones in their family. Again, I congratulate PAMIS and other third sector organisations on keeping the campaign alive over the past few weeks.

A few weeks ago, I spoke in the chamber about a lady whom I had spoken to who has not seen her son since February this year. She has not physically been able to see him. He is bedridden so he could not come out into the garden for a visit over the summer, and she has had no physical contact with him. Because of his learning difficulties, he is unable to use Zoom or any other social media, and yet he is aware that he has had no contact with his mother for more than six months.

He and others in his position, and their mums and dads and their siblings, are looking for some kind of contact with their loved ones, not just to be able to touch them—although, as the cabinet secretary said, that is important—but for their mental welfare. I think that most of us would find it very hard to have no contact with the chief person in our life. If we add in disability on top of that, it makes it even harder.

I ask the Government, can we not make at least one member of a person's family part of their caring team? As we regularly test carers who are looking after people, can we not add at least one individual per family to that testing regime so that they can go in and have regular contact with their son, daughter, brother or sister? That would not seem to go too far, and it would not seem to be beyond us to put testing in place. It would complement what the carers are doing for those individuals. The carers are doing a fantastic job, and I echo the remarks from almost every member in the chamber about what we owe to them and the work that they do.

However, we need to go a step further and add a family member who can go in on a regular basis with the appropriate testing. As Alex Cole-Hamilton said in his speech, they will look after them, they will obey the rules and they will do the

cleaning, because they know that those things affect their loved ones and other people in the home. I hope that we can make progress on that sooner rather than later.

I will now expand these points slightly to consider those carers who are caring in individual homes, as well as in institutions, and the testing that they require. I have a carer who comes in and helps me in the morning. She then goes on to see probably five or six other people in her day. That is vital work, which allows me to be here to entertain you all on a regular basis. However, I am concerned that she and her colleagues, not just throughout Lothian but throughout Scotland, are not getting the appropriate testing. As we see an increase in the prevalence of the virus, we must consider what we are doing to protect carers, individuals and staff, so that they, too, will get the appropriate testing in the appropriate way.

All of us want the same thing; we just need to move forward as quickly as possible. I ask the cabinet secretary again if she could address the issue around those who are in homes: could one of their mums, dads, brothers or sisters not be made part of the caring team?

16:26

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** I welcome the debate, and I note the importance of 1 October as the international day of older persons.

There will be a vast amount on which we will agree today across the chamber—that has certainly been the case thus far—but I will touch on one point that every politician in the chamber might find a wee bit uncomfortable. We have to be honest with ourselves. I read the helpful briefing from Inclusion Scotland, and one section of it was headed "Postcode Lottery". I know that the phrase "postcode lottery" is not used in the motion or any of the amendments, but it struck me that, when we as politicians use the phrase "postcode lottery"—it has been used thousands of times before, and it will be used thousands of times in the future—we sometimes fail to do so properly; it can just be a soundbite that is used to attack or challenge somebody from a different party without any attention being paid to the various factors affecting the subject concerned.

Alex Cole-Hamilton touched on regional variations, and I agree with him on that point. There will be occasions when, from a national perspective, a postcode lottery is very much the right thing: the regional variation that will happen with service delivery, whatever that service may be, is extremely important.

I move on to my second point. On 15 September, when the Parliament debated

migration and care workers, I quoted a National Records of Scotland demographic and census publication from 2017 that referred to Inverclyde. The report stated:

“Inverclyde is projected to have an ageing population over the next 25 years, with a projected increase of 38% for those aged 65 or over. In contrast, the working age population (aged 16-64 years) is projected to fall by 26% between 2014 and 2039.”

Comparing Inverclyde with Midlothian in terms of the number of households between 2001 and 2019, the figure for my area has decreased by 0.6 per cent, while the figure for Midlothian has increased by 23.9 per cent. Most of those people will be younger and of working age.

I will explain why I am touching on that again. I welcome the fact that the Migration Advisory Committee appears to have done a U-turn yesterday on the issue of the shortage occupation list. When the Migration Advisory Committee spoke to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee on 1 November 2018, it had no concept whatsoever of how important social care is to Scotland. I have two quotes from that meeting. Professor Alan Manning, the committee’s chair, said then that the MAC’s view was that

“there are plenty of domestic workers—current residents—who are capable of working in the social care sector.”

Secondly, he said that

“Social care faces some very serious problems, and the MAC is not convinced that migration is the solution.”—*[Official Report, Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, 1 November 2018; c 7.]*

I wanted to get that on the record again, because of the MAC’s U-turn, and because the chamber is debating the issue again today in a serious way. Whatever happens and no matter what the review recommends, the Parliament must, in the short term, ensure that enough people are working in the social care sector to look after our older population.

Members have spoken about the independent review of adult social care, and I welcome the fact that that is happening. Those facilities are not just a care facility, but somebody’s home—somebody lives there—so it is important that they are well run, well staffed and well funded, because that will reassure family members.

My community is well served by care homes and I rarely receive any complaints about service provision. As other members have done, I pay tribute to all care workers across Scotland and particularly to those in my constituency. It is important, however, that we always strive to improve any service delivery for our older citizens, who deserve it.

The review will be wide ranging and consider whole aspects of the issue, particularly about how the highest standards of support can be achieved for the independence and wellbeing of people who use adult social care support. Its aim is to build on our long-standing commitments to improving adult social care provision and to ensuring that social care is effectively integrated with health services—I could go on, but I am conscious of time.

Since the start of the pandemic, the priority has been to save people’s lives, wherever they are. The scientific advice that was available at the time guided all decisions on the Covid-19 response. The discussion about the future of care homes is crucial and can help to set the example of the ambition that we have for the country and of the type of country that we want to have for our older citizens.

16:32

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** For me, the biggest tragedy of the Covid pandemic—an outrage, in fact, for which we must all account—was the treatment of older people, particularly in the early days of the crisis. In my opinion, in the early days we lost our basic humanity. Do not resuscitate notices were hastily issued; families were so distressed. In the early days, doctors told me personally that over-65s would not be admitted to hospital.

I asked the Minister for Older People and Equalities in committee whether she knew who made those decisions; she said that the honest answer was that she did not know. The guidance did not change.

The minister said that, at the beginning, many thought that the NHS would be overwhelmed. Perhaps she is right, but I hope that we would all agree in looking back that we must account for those decisions and, even if that was the case, we cannot justify having a policy—or any suggestion of a policy—that operates on the basis of the arbitrary age of 65 ever again. We must know how those decisions were made in the early days.

**Jeane Freeman:** I am grateful to the member for taking an intervention because it allows me to clarify again for the record that there was no policy to issue do not resuscitate notices. Those decisions were taken by some individual general practitioner practices and others. When we were advised of that, we made sure, through the chief medical officer at the time, the chief nursing officer, the Royal College of General Practitioners and others, that conversations were had, so that people understood the proper way in which decisions on such matters are reached and which decisions have to involve the individual patient and their family. There was no national policy decision

whatsoever, and there will be no such national policy decision for as long as I am the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald):** Ms McNeill, you will get your time back.

**Pauline McNeill:** Thank you.

It is a really important point. I accept everything that the cabinet secretary says, but I spoke to doctors who believed that they got guidance from somewhere. They did not make those decisions on their own. If the cabinet secretary is saying that the guidance did not change, which I accept, I ask her to tell Parliament at some point whether GPs made those decisions completely on their own. There were too many GPs out there saying that they were advised that the NHS could not cope.

I make the point because I want to make sure that any future Parliament, in any future scenario in which we face making hard decisions—I do not underestimate how difficult that was, particularly in the early days of the pandemic—never allows such a policy from any GP or organisation. If GPs made that decision on their own, that cannot be allowed to happen again. I do not say that for argument's sake; I want to make sure that, looking back, we all agree that that can never be allowed to happen again.

There has been a loss of human and family contact, and families have been shut out due to their necessary removal from healthcare settings. Even at the best of times, when someone is ill, it is important that they have someone advocating for them with doctors and nurses. For many people, by necessity, that could not happen.

From looking on social media, it struck me that a generation of people have lost their parents prematurely, some people have lost both their parents in a short space of time, and many have lost their parents in care homes. Between the start of March and 21 April, nearly 1,500 untested patients were discharged into care homes from hospital, despite concerns that doing so might aid the spread of the virus. Other members have called for an inquiry into that matter, which I think is important.

More than six months on from care homes having to close their facilities to visitors, we examine what can be done at this point to make sure that families can have contact with their loved ones. As we move to the autumn and winter, the continuation of outdoor visiting is not suitable, and alternative solutions need to be found. I wholeheartedly support the Labour motion, and the call of the care home relatives Scotland campaign group that family members be treated as essential carers with the necessary access to PPE and testing, to allow more frequent and closer contact.

As we approach winter, and a potential second wave of Covid-19, it is essential that care homes are protected, and that we learn all the lessons that we can. The Royal College of Nursing has raised particular concerns around access to PPE for staff who are working outside the hospital environment, including in care homes. A report found that social care workers are more than twice as likely to die from Covid-19 than colleagues on the NHS front line.

Care workers need to be given not only better protection but better pay. The 3.3 per cent rise that was offered by the Government in April is not enough to recognise the key work that they do. My union, the GMB, is at the forefront of highlighting poor levels of pay in a predominantly women-run service.

As Angela Constance and Alison Johnstone have highlighted, women are most likely to be the providers of care, both paid and unpaid. Women comprise 85 per cent of the social care workforce in Scotland, and the Covid-19 pandemic underscores society's reliance on women on the front line and at home. Jamie Livingstone, who is head of Oxfam Scotland, pointed out that

"Many carers, and particularly women who deliver most care, were already trapped in poverty before coronavirus and they are telling us that they're facing rising bills for things like food and other essentials."

The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women. We need to make sure that dealing with Covid does not have the unintended consequence of rolling back women's rights.

16:40

**James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** I welcome the international day for older persons, purely for personal reasons, because my younger brother is elderly.

Many of the stories that we have heard today evidence the profound impact that the coronavirus has had on those who are involved in care, whether that is the carers—paid or unpaid—those who visit their loved ones in care homes or other settings, or those who require care. The staff in care homes and sheltered accommodation around my community and the country deserve immense credit for looking after our society's most vulnerable people at the most challenging of times.

In April, I met—outdoors, of course—staff in care homes and sheltered accommodation in my constituency to provide them with top-up pieces of PPE that were kindly donated by local businesses. I was hugely impressed by the users and staff who I met and by the steps that all the homes had taken to adapt to the unprecedented situation. Just this week, my office heard back from some of the

care homes that I had visited, and I was delighted to be informed that, to date, they have reported zero Covid cases. I thank them for all their hard work and dedication and for the care that they have shown throughout the pandemic.

Some of the measures that have already been introduced to prevent outbreaks in care homes—such as weekly staff testing, enhanced infection prevention and control and the provision of PPE—have undoubtedly saved lives, but, sadly, many facilities and families have faced, and continue to face, some of the most heartbreaking situations that we can imagine.

The most recent comprehensive National Records of Scotland Covid-19 report showed that the percentage of coronavirus deaths in care homes was the same as the percentage of Covid deaths in hospital: 46 per cent. Every week of the pandemic until the NRS report on 9 September, care homes have reported Covid deaths. Just as in other countries, the weekly number of deaths in our care homes has begun to increase again.

Worldwide, the death toll of this horrendous virus has reached a milestone that no one wanted to see. Officially, the death toll has now surpassed 1 million people. That figure starkly highlights why we must tread cautiously with any changes to existing guidance and make changes only when it is deemed clinically safe to do so.

I recognise how immensely difficult it is for anybody to see or hear the distress that relatives, families and those working in care homes are experiencing. I have an 86-year-old mother and my partner has a 76-year-old mother, who contracted Covid while receiving treatment for a stroke and was not allowed any visitors while recovering. Thankfully, our mothers are both now at home and living with the restrictions that are in place in Glasgow, but that experience gave us a flavour of what it must be like for those who have loved ones in care.

It is important for care home residents and their loved ones to see each other, and it is obvious that having visitors is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of those who live in such settings. Nonetheless, as we have heard, it is difficult to balance safe visiting with the risks that are posed by this awful virus.

Unfortunately, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and a number of other health boards in the west of Scotland are under more stringent rules than those in the rest of the country and, as part of that, care home visits have been further restricted. They are limited to outdoor visits with a maximum of three people from no more than two households or essential indoor visits.

I am in touch with a constituent whose mother is in a care home. Due to the current rules, she has

been visiting her mother outdoors, which the home has been using marquees to facilitate. Earlier this month during a visit, harsh winds made the marquee structures feel unsafe, causing my constituent and her mother alarm. My constituent is fearful that, should those restrictions remain in place over the winter months, it could become virtually impossible to see her mother, which we all want to avoid happening. However, we should not be under any illusion about the complexity of balancing the need to allow visits to take place safely for everyone with the risk of causing harm through this awful virus. The home in question specialises in the care of those with dementia and Alzheimer's disease, which brings further challenges in itself.

The Scottish Government has worked hard with Scottish Care to find as good a balance as possible between its responsibilities to keep people safe and protect lives and its sincere recognition of the positive benefits of family connection for care home residents. Since the start of the pandemic, the priority has been to save people's lives, wherever they live, and, as part of that priority, the Government has taken firm action to protect care home staff and residents.

The First Minister has said—and I do not for a second doubt her—that

“no decisions”

taken by the Government

“have been more difficult and at times more genuinely upsetting than the range of decisions”

that have been taken

“around care homes”.—[*Official Report*, 17 September 2020; c 12.]

I am grateful that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is ensuring that care home visiting guidance is kept under review, and I appreciate the work that is being undertaken to develop proposals for the next stage of the visiting plan.

I fully support the principle of a national care service. It feels like an idea whose time has come. If there is to be any silver lining from this horrendous virus, it must be that we use the space that it has created to rebuild some of the parts of society that needed change. A national care service sounds like a good place to start.

I hope that my constituents, and others across the country, will be reassured by today's debate, and that the Government will look to open up further visiting options for families, including increased frequency of visits, while continuing to work tirelessly towards keeping people safe and protected during this public health crisis.

16:45

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands)**

**(Con):** This is going to be a hard winter for families and their loved ones who live in care homes. Like many MSPs, I have been asked by a constituent to try to imagine what it would be like to meet your mother, who was suffering from dementia, through a closed window, and then for her to wail and bang on the window as she does not understand why you will not come in; Covid-19 means nothing to her, but she cannot understand why you will not hold her as she wants to hold you.

Many families across Scotland are struggling with that situation. It feels—and is—heartless. That is why some families are questioning whether we have got the balance right. Although positive cases of Covid-19 are on the rise, so is the poor mental health of our elderly and most vulnerable, who feel confused, lonely, unloved and ignored. Worse still, in many cases they feel deserted by their families.

We have a duty to protect people from the threat of the pandemic, but we must not lose sight of what makes us human. We all crave the contact and, often, the physical reassurance of connection that is achieved by visits from family and friends. That is especially important when a loved one is coming to the end of their life and wants nothing more than to reach out and hold hands for the last time.

Family visits are vital to the health of long-term in-patients who also have complex needs, and it is far from ideal that designated family members are so limited in their visits. We need to find a safer way to show that we care. We are all aware of the risks that our care homes face from the threat of Covid-19. That is why we have to take the threat seriously.

However, I want to go back to what happened some time ago and, briefly in passing, to say that transferring Covid-positive patients into care homes was wrong. It must never be allowed to happen again. That is why I say to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport that we need to see the report as soon as possible—not only for us as MSPs to see and understand it but for grieving families, who deserve answers, as do the people who gave the care in those care homes.

As winter approaches and the second wave begins, the Government must do more to protect and support care homes. However, we should not forget home carers. They play a vital role in caring for our elderly and vulnerable, and they need more support from the Scottish Government. Back in April, I was in regular contact with Highland Home Carers, which was in desperate need of PPE for its hard-working staff to carry out home visits. They had been let down. The situation was critical.

Thankfully, I was contacted by a local estate, which donated 100,000 face masks to the Highlands. We got those to where they were needed—to Highland Home Carers, so that the staff could continue their visits. It should not have come to that. The Scottish Government should have reacted far more quickly to the challenge of PPE shortages across Scotland.

Looking to the future, I think that the way in which we care for our elderly population needs to be reviewed. We need to look at the structure of care homes, and at how we pay for them, to ensure that our ageing populations receive the best possible care and that carers can secure jobs with long-term career paths.

It should not be a heated debate about whether public or private care is better. Both models bring value and have a huge role to play in our future care system. There is no doubt that privately run care homes provide great services. When I visited the Parklands care home in Grantown-on-Spey, the Castlehill and Barchester care homes in Inverness, and others too numerous to mention, I saw just how much they do. I want to take a moment to say well done to Parklands Care Homes, which has just been named as the best smaller care group in the national care home awards.

However, that is not the only model of care that we should look to. As I have mentioned, we must also consider care that is provided in people's own homes. Earlier, I mentioned Highland Home Carers, in whose philosophy I have become embedded. It is the second-largest employee-owned company in Scotland. It provides a great level of home care and offers good career options, too. That is important, because the whole care sector is facing huge recruitment challenges, so we need to ensure that such work is made more attractive to people.

Unless we provide carers with a career path, people will not be attracted to that vocation. If there are not enough home carers, more people will have to choose the care home option, which is expensive and can mean that people have to live further away from their loved ones. That is a key issue in remote areas such as the Highlands, where there is a need for more home carers and more rural care homes. Work must begin today on reforming Scotland's care sector. Difficult choices lie ahead if we are to ensure that it is fit for the future.

The Scottish Government also has hard choices to make when it comes to family visits to care homes during the pandemic. Many families are seriously questioning whether the right balance has been found on that. Disease transmission must be prevented, but so must isolation. No one wants to lose a loved one to the pandemic, but

neither do they want their mother, father or grandparent to feel so isolated that they lose the very will to live. That balance is a difficult and delicate one. It is up to the Government to listen to all members who have spoken in the debate, to address the issue and to make a judgment. Frankly, Presiding Officer, I do not believe that it has got that balance right at the moment.

16:52

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, because health and social care has long been my focus both in my time as a councillor and now in my time as a member of the Scottish Parliament. I would go so far as to say that it is my duty as Paisley's MSP to ensure that my fellow buddies have access to the best possible health and social care system. That has become even more apparent during the past seven months. It goes without saying that we owe a mammoth amount to all those who have worked tirelessly in the care sector during the biggest global challenge that we have faced since wartime.

Monica Lennon's motion is an important one. Tomorrow will be the international day of older persons, so it is important that we highlight, tackle and deal with the issues that our older constituents face and the additional worries and complications that the past few months have brought them. It is also important that we place people at the top of all our agendas, and the debate has been a perfect example of that approach. We must ensure that elderly members of our community are treated with dignity and respect.

With that in mind, I stress my belief that the Scottish Government does not underestimate the profound impact that the coronavirus has had on so many people. That includes those who want to visit their loved ones in care homes as well as the residents themselves, who are undoubtedly missing visits from their families and friends.

There are a good number of care homes in my constituency and, over the years, I have become close to quite a few constituents who are now struggling with having been separated from their husbands, wives, siblings, parents and friends. It has been difficult for me to see and hear the distress that they face, and I know that all members across the chamber will also find that extremely difficult. However, we must remember that decisions affecting care homes have not been taken lightly and that the restrictions have been put in place to help us to protect their residents and, ultimately, to save lives.

We must continue to recognise the additional risks that communal living presents for people who are more vulnerable to the effects of exposure to

Covid-19, and to continue to mitigate such risks as best we can while the prevalence of the virus across all our communities is increasing again.

As the First Minister has said on numerous occasions,

"no decisions have been more difficult"

or

"genuinely upsetting than the ... decisions that we have had to take around care homes",—[*Official Report*, 17 September 2020; c 12.],

but the Government continues to make such decisions with the best of intentions.

As is the case for Anas Sarwar, whose contribution I heard earlier, my older family members do not live in care homes, but I feel his pain about being unable to meet family members. My in-laws live in their own home, close to me and my wife Stacey, but because of restrictions, we cannot see them either. I understand the need for that but it is not easy for anyone—do not tell them, Presiding Officer, but I kind of miss them as well; I will never hear the end of it once they get hold of that.

Although these decisions are necessary in the here and now, they are constantly under review. We must continue to remember the human aspect in this whole debate. If Anas Sarwar and I are upset about not being able to meet and spend quality time with our family members, how do those people who have family members in a care home feel?

As I said earlier, constituents have told me their stories and they are difficult to listen to. It is difficult for me, as a parliamentarian, to have to say to my local community, "You have to stop seeing each other for your own safety, and the safety of your family and your community." That is difficult for us all.

Can the cabinet secretary say in summing up whether she has the power to ask private care homes to change their visiting arrangements? I know that she can give advice, but can she ask them to make those changes? It is a genuine question, as that has been one of the major points of the debate.

Keeping our care homes safe and functioning at optimum levels has been a key priority since the beginning of the pandemic. Alongside keeping carers safe and secure in their workplaces, it is just as important that we continue to value those working in health and social care. They do a remarkable job.

That brings me to the idea of the national care service. This year's programme for government has a commitment to an independent review of the idea of a national care service in Scotland, which

will aim to ensure consistently excellent support for people who use those services as well as their carers and their families, with care being accessible and provided to all. The review is set to consider previous and on-going work, including the programme for social care reform that is currently being taken forward by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Work is being undertaken by the Care Inspectorate to consider opportunities for improving adult social care provision and work is being undertaken by wider partners, including the third sector, to understand people's experience of care and how support could be improved.

I, for one, see that we have an opportunity here to change things for the better. We need to look at the positives all the time and at what we can do to further improve on the care that we provide to everyone in Scotland—that is extremely important.

There is no denying that this year has been incredibly hard, but now is the time for us all to come together, as we have done today, to ensure that our front-line workers, along with residents and their families, are heard. I look forward to seeing what we can achieve with everyone's voices coming together in collaboration, both in and out of the chamber, as that is when the magic happens and positive change can become a reality.

16:58

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** I declare an interest, as my mum is a care home resident.

What I am about to say is no criticism of any social care or health staff; I have nothing but admiration and support for them and will do all that I can to help to deliver their call for fair pay and conditions and dignity at work. What is needed is a fundamental change in how the sector operates. Now that the clapping has fallen silent, they need politicians to deliver—no more warm words, please.

Many of the things that have happened and the decisions that have been made during the Covid crisis have been right, but many have left me and many of my constituents depressed, sad, frustrated and, at times, angry. I think of the lack of preparation and planning when we were warned of the impending crisis; the failure to follow World Health Organization advice; the wholly inadequate testing regime—which is still wholly inadequate; the mixed messages on school closures and the wearing of masks; PPE shortages; the exams fiasco; and the current universities situation. However, it is the treatment of our older people—our mums and dads, grandparents, neighbours and friends—that, for me, is the low point to date.

Let us reflect on what has happened over the past seven months before we look at the current situation. Prior to lockdown, we had record numbers of delayed discharges. Professor David Bell says that 78 per cent of those cases involved people who were stuck in hospital waiting for assessments, the setting up of care arrangements, the arrangement of funding or the availability of places. Around 47,500 bed days were lost, which was up 8 per cent in a year. That is 47,500 days and nights of people stuck in hospital unnecessarily, at a cost of £4,000 a week. Those patients and their families were told that the delay was because they were waiting for an assessment, a place or a care package.

Then, miraculously, in April, 53 per cent of the number disappeared. We have been told repeatedly that that was down to sharing of best practice and joint working. What on earth was going on if people were not sharing best practice and joint working prior to that date? That is a cover, and it is utter rubbish. We all know that the reality is that those places became available due to money being released. All those excuses for the delays and the stays in hospital were a convenient smokescreen, and they were accepted by families whose respect for and deference to the medical profession led most of them, including me, not to question it.

Then we had the mass exodus overnight to care homes. Residents were shipped out and tested, and we know that some were discharged while Covid positive, which endangered their lives and the lives of staff and their fellow residents. To me, that was negligence, because those actions were taken knowingly—those people were knowingly discharged. Then, when those residents became ill, many were not admitted to hospital, and others were pressured into agreeing to do not resuscitate notices, or had those completed without their family's knowledge. It is completely and utterly wrong to say that that was done by a few general practitioners or practices, because it happened across the country. I am absolutely certain that it happened in the constituencies of almost every member who is in the chamber. In my village, it happened via text message. People were texted about DNR notices.

Ministers' standard defence is, "Those were clinical decisions, so it was nowt to do with us." Alternatively, they say, "If only we knew then what we know now, we might have acted differently." That is no defence for bad or wrong policy decisions that in my view have contributed to the deaths of far too many of our citizens.

Given all that, is it any wonder that the virus has caused so much misery in our care home sector? The situation now for our loved ones is one of frustration, isolation, loneliness and declining

health and wellbeing. We are heading towards 200 days of no or limited access to family, friends and loved ones, which means 200 days with little contact and limited stimulation.

When visits started, they were with one member of the family for half an hour outside each week. Then, the First Minister announced that three people from two households could visit from the following Monday, only for that to fall through, as risk assessments had not been done. In NHS Lothian's case, care homes would not even receive the paperwork for another five days.

We now have one half-hour visit a week by three people from two households, which is an improvement, but it is very unsatisfactory. It is dispiriting and frustrating for everyone involved, including the staff. The visits take place outside, and often in makeshift shelters. It is regularly cold and windy, and older people need piles of clothes and blankets around them to keep warm. It is not credible, humane or dignified for that to continue into the winter. We need safe, warm, sheltered and comforting space where people can share intimate moments, chat, discuss family matters and laugh, cry and hug. We need a place to reconnect and rebuild weakened relationships, to meet children and grandchildren, friends and former colleagues—the social circle of people who care and love one another the most.

I hear a lot of earnest talk about co-production, patient-centred care and human and patient rights. The Covid crisis has exposed those words as often vacuous buzzwords that have no bearing on the reality of the life that people live at the moment. Where was the patient-centred care when thousands were kept in hospital unnecessarily and misled about the reason? What about the human rights of those who were denied hospitalisation or who were pressured into agreeing to DNR notices? Where was the co-production when the mass exodus from hospital to care homes took place? Where is the residents' right to choose to meet those whom they love and who love them in a safe setting?

I have to say that we need a revolution—I use the word advisedly—in social care. We cannot claim to be a civilised society when we tolerate some of the most vulnerable people and those who look after them being treated in that way. The Covid crisis must result in our ending a system that is based on a privatised model in which profit generation comes on the back of low pay and exploitation.

17:05

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** The point has already been made that visiting is a fundamental part of the

health and wellbeing of those who live in care homes, particularly in the case of people who are living with dementia, but it is also fundamental for their loved ones, who, in normal circumstances, would be used to spending time with their families. It is such an important conversation that we are having today, the day before the international day of older persons. Many families from my constituency have got in contact with me over the past few months to highlight the impact that coronavirus and the visiting restrictions are having on them. Therefore, I thank the Labour Party for bringing the subject to the chamber for debate and allowing such concerns to be raised.

One family, who have given me permission to talk of their situation, have been unable to comfort their 80-year-old relative for six months, as she resides in a care home. She lives with severe dementia and has a hearing impairment. Although her care in the home is satisfactory and she is safe, I cannot begin to imagine how difficult it is not to be able to hold your mother's hand or give her a hug when she is in distress.

Just this week, I have had contact with another family, who tell me that they were refused more extensive and flexible indoor visiting with their mother during her end-of-life care. They reported that she was in her own room and that they had all the appropriate PPE. Only after some robust discussions with the manager did they manage to secure some additional visiting for their mother's final days. My thoughts are with all the family, but, to make matters worse, the lady, who sadly died, had a sister in the care home, and I have been told today that she has not had any indoor visits at a time when she and her family are still grieving.

We can all agree that that is an immensely tough situation for anyone to be in. As those families and many others have pointed out, garden visits were more suitable in the summer months when the Scottish weather can be a lot kinder, but we have now entered the months when the temperature drops and rain, hail or snow can come at any given minute. I am sure that we all agree that visiting the elderly outside in such conditions is unsuitable and that the restrictions should be reviewed in the light of the coming winter months.

We all know that care home residents and loved ones must be able to see one another. Visiting is a fundamental part of the health and wellbeing of those who live in care homes; as I said, it is particularly important for people who are living with dementia. Our Government has already done so much to tackle loneliness. That is a policy that we can be proud of, and we need to keep it front and centre as we move into what will, it seems, be a difficult winter and a second wave of Covid.



On the other side of the horrendous dilemma that we face is the fact that care homes have been hit particularly hard by this ruthless virus, and it is immensely difficult to strike the balance between protecting those who live in care homes and ensuring that they can be supported by family and friends at a time that is isolating for all of us, but particularly for our elderly relatives.

I am pleased to learn that the clinical and professional advisory group is looking again at what more can be done as we enter winter to strike a balance between, on the one hand, allowing family and visitor contact to take place, activities to be run and healthcare services to be provided for residents and, on the other, protecting residents from the virus being introduced into their homes. I was also reassured to hear that the health secretary met representatives from the care home relatives Scotland group on 18 September and discussed a range of proposals by the group. I am eager to hear about the results of that meeting so that I can get back to my constituents on that.

I also welcome the independent review of adult social care, which is due to report in January. I feel assured that it will work towards ensuring that Scotland provides unfailingly outstanding support for people who use adult social care services, as well as their carers and families. We know that the review will consider changes that are required to achieve the highest standards of support for the independence and wellbeing of people who use adult social care services, and I believe that it will ensure that social care is effectively integrated with health services.

Turning to a point that Angela Constance touched on, I believe that, as elected representatives and leaders in our communities, we need to do what we can. I know that many colleagues will—as I do—have a good working relationship with many of our care homes. That is why, several months ago, I took the decision to write an open letter to all those who use care homes in my constituency—residents, families, staff and owners. It was not a blaming letter but one in which I offered help and support with any queries. It has been very well received, and I would encourage any colleagues who have not taken such an approach to consider doing so, because it is incumbent on us all to work together collaboratively.

Like George Adam and Anas Sarwar, I do not have any family members in a care home, and I can only begin to appreciate how hard it is for people to be separated from family and loved ones for such long periods. We have all had to make sacrifices to ensure the safety of the wider population in the past six months. However, as we have heard today, we are still—sadly—living with

the pandemic and we need to do all that we can to keep our loved ones safe.

I have faith that, as we move into the winter, the Government will continue to take stock, reassess and find more balanced judgments to keep people safe while preserving quality of life and relationships. I thank all residents, families and care givers across the country, but particularly those in my Coatbridge and Chryston constituency, for sticking with it. I know that, together, we will get there.

17:11

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** I am pleased to contribute to the debate. It is always right to mark the international day of older persons, but this year, in particular, it takes on extra poignancy. This has been a year like no other for our older people and those who care for them. It has illustrated the fundamental importance of the role of those who give up their own time to look after a loved one in the face of incredibly challenging circumstances.

Most of our older people have, at best, been confined to their homes for most of the year. Some, in care homes, have been at heightened risk of infection, with many having lost their lives. During the early stages of lockdown, the role of family members in providing care was essential. We will all know of people who were unable to get slots for shopping to be delivered, which prompted children and grandchildren to pick up that burden on their behalf.

In severe circumstances, relatives have taken on more responsibilities—attending to health and wellbeing needs as well as providing crucial social contact for elderly relatives who might not have spoken to another person for days. When we think of family care givers, it should be to value the contributions of those who have stepped in to do whatever is necessary for a loved one, regardless of whether that has been easy for them.

However, for families with relatives in care homes, the story is vastly different. It is a matter of record that 1,500 untested patients were, irrespective of the risk at the time, transferred from hospitals to care homes before testing for Covid was mandatory. In March and April, at least 37 patients who tested positive were not kept in hospital as they should have been, but were sent to care homes. It is not difficult to see how that could have contributed to the 2,000 deaths in care homes up and down the country, which represents almost half the national total.

Now, Public Health Scotland tells us that the report that ministers promised for today at the latest will be delayed for another month because of concerns about data quality. Care home staff

have put themselves at great risk over the past few months, and have shown dedication that makes us all proud. If we want to show care staff our gratitude, it is vital that we take the necessary steps to make their workplaces safer. The report is key to doing that; the delay is not good enough.

We must remember that at the heart of this are the people whom we serve and those whom they hold dearest. Recently, I received a really difficult email from a Glasgow student, Lucy Challoner, who is desperately concerned about the situation in care homes. Her mother and grandmother have been in separate homes on either side of the country since March. Lucy told me:

“I’m not sure when or if they will ever see each other again in person. That’s a mum and a daughter being kept away from each other. They miss each other dearly. Visits for half an hour are simply not long enough. The time goes by so fast and my mum and Grandma get very upset when I have to leave at the end of the visit and so do I. I feel very guilty for leaving them. My Grandma has had to be wheeled away in her wheelchair while crying her eyes out at the end of the visit. It is very distressing for both of us.”

Lucy asked me to raise that today because she has emailed the health secretary but has not yet received a response.

I understand that there is an obvious need to suppress the virus, especially in places where older people are present, but it does not take a genius to figure out that the right balance has not yet been struck. In order to know how to improve care home access for families as safely as possible, we must know the underlying reasons why the Scottish Government got its strategy so wrong in the first place. That is why it is so important that we get the best information and data in short order. It is unacceptable that its vital publication has been delayed because the work cannot be completed on time.

The ordeal that care homes have gone through has been one of the most significant failings during the crisis. Families such as Lucy’s have pleaded for the problems to be fixed, so I hope that ministers will, as winter approaches, act to resolve them at a quicker pace than we have seen from them so far.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Emma Harper will be the last speaker in the open debate.

17:16

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** At the outset of my speech, I acknowledge, as my colleagues have done, the profound impact that Covid-19 has had on so many people across Scotland and the world. Covid has affected young people, including those in education; it has affected the working-age population, including people who are now working from home; and it has affected people who have been shielding. It

has also, of course, affected those whom we have been discussing today: our older people—both in care homes and in their own homes.

We have all had to adapt to a new normal and to make difficult sacrifices in the interests of promoting and protecting the public health of people in Scotland. Obviously, we must remember that we want to keep all our loved ones safe. I thank everyone across Scotland for their commitment to following the route map: we are all doing our bit to protect Scotland from Covid-19 and to reduce the spread of this virulent virus.

We have learned a lot in the past eight months and we will continue to learn and adapt—sometimes more rapidly than we want to. I know that more debates will take place. Clinicians are now learning from Covid care. Hydrocortisone, dexamethasone and cytokine storm are all words with which clinicians are now familiar. We are now discussing post-Covid exposure complications, which has been termed “long Covid”. It is important that we acknowledge that everything is moving and evolving as we learn about this virulent and deadly virus.

I turn to the Labour motion. Of course, I acknowledge the impact that Covid-19 has had on care homes, people who wish to visit family members in care homes, carers and those who receive care. After I left school, my first job was in a care home, and it prepared me for my career in nursing. For people in care homes, particularly those with dementia, visits from family members are a fundamental part of their health and wellbeing. I know from my casework the difficulty that many families are facing at this time, and I absolutely agree with Alex Cole-Hamilton’s comment that it must be very disconcerting for people in care to be met with face-mask wearers in their homes or care homes.

The issues that we face are really difficult. It is important to note the complexity in striking a balance between allowing people to continue life as normal—for example, through undertaking care home and family visits—and protecting people from the real and serious implications of the virus. The mortality figures that the cabinet secretary described—one in six older people who is exposed to the virus succumbs—are really quite sobering. I welcome the Scottish Government’s work on trying to strike a good balance between its responsibility to keep people as safe as possible and the positive benefits, which it sincerely recognises, of family visits and allowing people, as far as possible, to continue as normal.

The Scottish Government has, with care home owners and providers, supported care home visits going ahead, where they are appropriate. Indeed, the Government’s aim is to allow people to visit their loved ones, but visiting must be done safely

and must be based on the best available scientific evidence and medical advice.

Limited outdoor and indoor visiting may now take place, provided that strict criteria are considered and met and plans are signed off by local directors of public health. Other members have noted that winter is coming. Outdoor visits may therefore be a real challenge, as we move forward. The guidance has been, and will continue to be, developed by the care homes clinical and professional advisory group, which is made up of clinicians and family members.

Labour's motion refers to the need for a national care service. The Scottish Government is already looking at that. There is, absolutely, a need for a rethink of social care in Scotland—how we value it, how we deliver it, and how our citizens who need it most should be looked after.

I agree with the Labour motion that all our carers deserve to be treated as professionals and to be paid fairly for the invaluable work that they do day in and day out. To that end, I welcome the independent review of adult social care, which aims to ensure that Scotland provides consistently excellent support for people who use those services, as well as for their carers and their families. The review, which is a programme for government commitment, will consider what changes are required in order to achieve the highest standards of support for the independence and wellbeing of people who use adult social care support. It is important that it will take a human-rights-based approach, with a focus on the views of people with lived experience. The independent review will report by January 2021. I look forward to its recommendations.

Concurrently, the Health and Sport Committee, which I am a member of, is about to commence a social care inquiry. I also look forward to the evidence that we will hear in that.

The safety, protection and wellbeing of residents and staff in our care home sector have always been top priorities for the Scottish Government, and that will continue to be its approach. I hope that all members will welcome that. Since March, more than 124 million items of PPE from the national stock have been delivered to social care providers in more than 1,000 locations, including care homes. That provision is over and above the social care providers' normal supply chains. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has supported the PPE producer Alpha Solway, in Annan. That has helped to protect the PPE supplies that we might need this winter.

In conclusion, I welcome the Scottish Government's work to best protect and help Scotland's carers and those who are cared for in care homes and their own homes during the

pandemic. I urge members across the chamber and the country to continue to follow the advice that aims to protect the population and reduce the spread of Covid—to protect Scotland's people.

17:23

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I thank the Labour Party for bringing the debate to the chamber and for allowing us the time to debate what is obviously an extremely important and ongoing issue. That has been brought home to me—as I am sure it has to all members—by members of the public who have spoken to us, written to us and emailed us to ask us for help in gaining some sort of access to their loved ones. Such access was taken for granted prior to Covid, but it has been and still is being rationed or even denied in some cases. Who would have thought that we would have to deal with a Government-imposed limitation on access to our families?

Edward Mountain powerfully told his constituent's story about their mother. The same issue was starkly highlighted to me when a friend of mine approached me and told me about his mother passing away and the family being unable to gain access to the father, who resided in a care home, to tell him the sad news. The situation was further complicated because his father has dementia. I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for her intervention after I raised that case at First Minister's question time and for facilitating a meeting. Subsequently, the family have been able to visit the father for 30 minutes a week. That is outside, however, and it will become increasingly difficult as the weather turns, so even those 30 minutes are becoming increasingly unlikely. My friend says that he is watching his father disappear week by week. That begs the question: do we really understand fully what exactly we are protecting that elderly gentleman from?

Jeremy Balfour made a powerful speech calling for at least one family member to be part of an individuals' caring community and to be given regular access to them, which is a very good call.

Anas Sarwar mentioned the potential breaching of human rights by isolating care home residents for an extended period of time without access to their families. That is really what we must consider.

We are six months into the pandemic. Surely, it is not outwith the wit of the Scottish Government to have care homes and carers supported to develop Covid-secure visiting inside care homes. Some are managing that very well, whereas others have made little progress. The truth is that, by now, we should be able to protect the vulnerable, whether that be from Covid or from the effects of lockdown. The rest of us should be

behaving with a bit of common sense and following the simple rules around cleanliness, social distancing and wearing masks where appropriate.

The effects of lockdown have been felt the most by those in care homes and those who are most vulnerable. However, care givers and family members have somehow been forgotten, although their anxieties and grief are just as real.

Looking at decisions that are made and making comments in hindsight is a favourite pastime of politicians. In this case, decisions have been thrust on Governments the world over that none of us would relish. We will, no doubt, get to rake over the coals of the Covid crisis at our leisure when, I hope, we are at the other side of it. We would prefer that to be sooner rather than later, so that, as we are asked to continue to support the Government's approach, we understand the scientific reasons for those decisions.

One thing that has constantly nagged at me is how the Scottish Government watched the virus spread from the far east across Europe, seeing the devastation in countries such as Italy and Spain and how it attacked the most vulnerable, the elderly and those with other medical conditions, and did not make different choices. The cabinet secretary replied to the question on that issue that I put to her in the chamber a few weeks ago with the answer that we did the same as every other country. I think that that is kind of the point.

Alison Johnstone and Monica Lennon mentioned that mistakes will be made—but, although wise people learn from their mistakes, wiser people learn from the mistakes of others. Time will tell whether the Scottish Government has managed to do either, which is why we urgently need a public inquiry.

Donald Cameron highlighted that, although Covid may have shone a light on how we look after the most vulnerable in our society, the issue has been there for far longer than Covid. I would hope that every person in the chamber recognises that those in our public services who care for our most vulnerable are not supported in the way that they should be.

The Labour Party's motion calls for the delivery of pay that reflects the value and professionalism of our care workers. How could anybody disagree with that? I would add that we should look not only at how our care workers are remunerated but at the conditions in which they are being asked to work. The Conservative Party has long called for a system that looks after those who look after us.

As we look at the process, we must also deliver a long-term, sustainable solution and not just a hike in value that cannot be maintained. It is clear to me that the direction of travel that we are on

with our health and social care delivery is unsustainable. We must always invest what we can invest—of course we should. However, if the percentage of spend on health and social care continues to rise, it must eventually reach a top line. We often talk about saving money in our health services, but what actually happens is that any saving in one area is distributed to another—the same money just gets moved around.

The impact that health has on our economy is undeniable. I have said before that we are an unhealthy nation. We need to accept that and actively pursue policies that reverse that trend. To date, the Scottish Government has been tinkering around the edges. We need a fundamental change in how we look at health and social care and all the elements that make up our health and wellbeing. The long-term reward is a reduction in the cost to the public purse of preventable conditions. That is where long-term investment in how we care for the most vulnerable and those who care for them will come from.

I said in my first speech in Parliament that we must be prepared to pursue long-term policies that we will not get the credit for. One of the fundamental flaws of this place is that politicians cannot see past the next election. The Labour Party's motion calls for the establishment of a national care service. Is that the right way to go? I do not know, but I definitely think that it is worth considering. If we can learn anything from the crisis that we are navigating and from its impact on our care homes and care services, it is the conclusion that it is time for change.

17:30

**The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey):** I add my thanks to members across the chamber for their contributions to this extremely important debate. I also thank those who have been in touch with us ahead of today. That includes Inclusion Scotland, Engender and Close the Gap, but, most importantly, it includes the families and friends of loved ones who have shared their experiences with me, as a Scottish minister and as a constituency MSP.

It is clear from the debate that we all agree that visiting is a fundamental part of the health and wellbeing of those who live in care homes. As has been illustrated by members today and by others, the lack of connection with loved ones has had a profound impact on people—those in our care homes as well as their friends and families. I am sure that each of us has heard accounts like the ones that have been shared in the debate from our constituents and families who have loved ones in care homes. Those accounts have been heartfelt, like the personal experiences that we have now heard about from across the chamber.

Being able to pop in on a daily basis to see your mum or dad, or your husband or wife, has not been possible. When visits do take place, they are often outside, for a short period, with distancing taking place. That is not what any of us is used to, and I recognise that, for those with dementia, who might have limited ability to understand the restrictions that are in place, it must be particularly hard.

We know that, when restrictions have been put in place, they have been necessary to safeguard people. The virus has had devastating consequences across the world. We also know that the pandemic is still with us, so we need to do all that we can to continue to protect people. However, we need to balance that with the need to protect people from the harms of a lack of connection with loved ones.

The guidance that we have published sets a staged approach to reintroducing visiting. As the health secretary has confirmed, we are looking at what more we can do to strike a better balance between family and visitor contact and protecting people. We recognise the need for proportionality in how we do that, but we are committed to opening up further opportunities for people to see their loved ones.

That calls for collaboration, but it is achievable. Supporting safe visiting requires the efforts of all partners. We cannot ignore the harms that are posed by not supporting connection with loved ones. Every day counts, and we need to work together to promote visiting where it is safe to do so.

The health secretary has valued the opportunity to meet families from care home relatives Scotland—which we have heard about in several speeches—and to hear their experiences and views. She has committed to meet them again this week and to continue that very important dialogue. The experiences and views that they have expressed have illustrated that families and carers are essential partners in providing care and supporting the wellbeing of people in care homes. As we have heard in the debate, they are not just visitors. Families and friends play an essential role in a person's care, whether it is in supporting eating and drinking, in communicating wishes or in providing emotional care and connection with the outside world.

The Scottish Government is working with partners to develop a national Covid-19 dementia transition and resilience plan, and we will work with national and local partners across all sectors to support its implementation. Key to the transition plan will be how we support those with dementia and their carers in a world with Covid-19.

The debate has also focused on the provision of care and support. We all recognise that care and support services have had to adapt during the Covid-19 pandemic. I want to make clear our commitment to do all that we can to support the provision of high-quality care and support for people.

I turn to some of the points that members have raised. Monica Lennon talked about the additional investment that the cabinet secretary announced yesterday. That money is additional to the money that was already provided to integration joint boards and local authorities for PPE and testing.

George Adam talked about the Scottish Government providing guidance, and he asked whether we can ensure its implementation. We can provide guidance and promote its implementation, but it must be remembered that a huge part of the care home sector is predominantly in private ownership. We will, however, continue to work with partners as best we can.

**Brian Whittle:** The fact that the care home sector is private has been discussed quite a lot. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that, just as the NHS and the Government were not prepared for the pandemic, neither was the care home sector, so we must work together to get through it just the same?

**Clare Haughey:** Of course, we will continue to work with all partners who provide care across the country. Mr Whittle needs to remember that the virus emerged in January this year, and none of us could have predicted what would happen in the months following that. We will continue to work with care home providers, but it must be remembered that we cannot instruct them in the way that some people seem to think we should be able to do. We can provide guidance and we can promote its implementation.

Mr Balfour talked about also testing in other care settings. As testing capacity increases in the NHS and regional hubs, we will look at the issue while following clinical advice, and we will do that where it is appropriate.

Pauline McNeill talked about “do not attempt CPR” guidance, and I reiterate the fact that there was no national guidance on that. When the issue was raised, the chief medical officer and the chief nursing officer intervened to clarify the situation that appeared to be emerging. The cabinet secretary has committed to writing to Pauline McNeill about the issue after the debate.

I would like to talk about one other point that came up in the debate. Angela Constance said that care work is never low skilled. We have heard that many times in the Parliament, including during contributions from the Tory members. Perhaps

they could take that message back to the immigration minister at Westminster when they are looking at who they think is skilled enough to migrate to the UK.

The Scottish Government will provide the necessary funding across health and care services to meet the additional costs of responding to Covid-19 and to support service remobilisation. Yesterday, the health secretary announced funding of £1.1 billion across NHS boards and integration authorities to meet costs arising from the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. That will provide NHS boards and integration authorities with funding to meet expenditure to date, as well as providing for future months. We will continue to work closely with boards and integration authorities during the coming months to review and further revise financial assessments. We will shortly publish an adult social care winter plan for 2020-21.

We can all agree that we need work as safely as possible to open up care home visiting and return to normal care home life so that family and loved ones can visit as they did previously, and so that care homes can continue to flourish as part of their local communities. The Government will work with the care home community and families to do just that.

17:38

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I join with other members by thanking all those in caring roles, whether paid or unpaid. They have faced the toughest of times this year and, as Anas Sarwar said, much has changed. We should all recognise that the work that they do is vital in keeping vulnerable people safe and supported during uncertain times.

Our care homes have been at the centre of the pandemic and staff and residents have suffered as a consequence. It has been nothing short of a tragedy and scandal. From removing older people from hospitals and putting them into care homes without testing them, to the denial by care homes such as HCI in Dumbarton that there was even a problem, the shortage of personal protective equipment in the early critical weeks, with reports of supplies being rationed and locked in cupboards, the “Do not resuscitate” notices that Pauline McNeill raised, the delays in testing, and now the delays in getting results, it has been one thing after another.

As we approach a second wave of Covid-19, we need to be so much smarter about what we do, so I welcome the new-found support for a national care service. Forgive me for pointing out that I suggested one 10 years ago, but Nicola Sturgeon, who was health minister at the time, rejected it.

However, I welcome all converts, no matter how late.

That suggestion was a direct result of the experience with *Clostridium difficile* that took the lives of people in the Vale of Leven hospital and across Scotland. It was not simply confined to hospitals but affected care homes too. It was a different disease from Covid, but it had the same issues of hospital to care home transfer and the need for barrier nursing, PPE and testing. Had a national care service been put in place then, we might have avoided the scale of deaths that we have witnessed during the Covid pandemic. I wish the review group every success and hope that it will make progress, offering any help that it wishes, because we have had reviews before and nothing has happened. We need to get that right.

I welcome the cabinet secretary’s praise for social care staff and note the GMB union’s campaign to value those staff not just with applause but with a £2 per hour pay rise. I hope that she will deliver on that and provide more than warm words.

We have now had more than 200 days of lockdown and isolation for all those people in residential facilities in the social care sector, from young adults with additional needs in supported accommodation to older people in care homes. Their mental health and wellbeing are at breaking point. We have heard numerous examples from members across the chamber about the suffering of care home residents and their families who have been unable to visit. Let me offer two illustrations of my own.

First, there was a survey of people with Alzheimer’s and dementia and their carers during the pandemic. Of those with dementia, 82 per cent were reported to have had a deterioration in their condition and there was a profound impact on 95 per cent of carers, who experienced a negative impact on their mental health. In part, that was due to a lack of visiting allowed in care homes, but it was also due to the closure of day centres that provided families with so much important support. Those people are feeling abandoned during the pandemic and their mental health and wellbeing are suffering. I am grateful to the minister for recognising that.

My second example concerns people with complex learning disabilities. I have been working with organisations such as PAMIS and individual families, who have told me about the nightmare that they are going through in trying to maintain contact with their adult children who are living in supported accommodation or care homes. Family members are central to the care that those adults receive—they are part of the care team—but they are fighting to be allowed to continue to provide the care that they provided pre-Covid. That care is

central to ensuring the wellbeing and protecting the physical and mental health of their loved ones with severe learning disabilities. Anyone who has a family member or loved one with complex needs will tell you how important structure and continuity are to help those people to stay calm and functioning. They will tell you how the smallest changes to daily routine can result in huge distress and trauma. Just imagine the effect that removing family carers from the care of those adults for six months is having on them.

Since March, the essential contribution that parents make as part of the care team has been completely disregarded. All they have been allowed to do is visit their loved one through a window, unable to hug, care for or even touch their family member. The same is true of older people in care homes. The removal of much-needed social interaction is having a negative impact on their mental and physical health.

We need to find a way to encourage safe contact that balances the concerns about increasing the spread of the virus. Let me make some positive suggestions to the Scottish Government. I sense from the minister's comments that we may be pushing at an open door and hope that that is the case.

First, let us recognise family care givers as front-line care staff. As Jeremy Balfour said, make them part of the care team, test them, give them PPE and, under controlled conditions, let them help with the care and wellbeing of their loved one. I am struck by just how much we rely on unpaid carers. As Alison Johnstone pointed out, 61 per cent of the more than 1 million unpaid carers in Scotland are women. We need to pay them much more than lip service.

Secondly, we must ensure that the guidance that is issued is specific to the group. Those with complex learning disabilities who are living in supported accommodation are different from older people in care homes. Grouping them together makes as much sense as issuing the same guidance for nurseries and universities.

**Clare Haughey:** Jackie Baillie may well be aware of the guidance that the cabinet secretary issued on 4 September, which recognises that the needs of older adults in care homes are different from the needs of younger adults who are living in care, and which allows for the safe reopening of communal activities and areas and for community and social outings.

**Jackie Baillie:** That guidance is very welcome, but it is not currently being implemented on the ground. People are being quite risk averse with regard to ensuring that the guidance that the cabinet secretary has provided can actually work.

Thirdly, I suggest that providers make more use of risk assessments. The guidance provides for that but, again, social care organisations would rather not follow it, defaulting instead to no-contact restrictions. That is the experience of people on the ground. We are pleading with the cabinet secretary to ensure that the guidance is followed and that those risk assessments are shared with families.

**Jeane Freeman:** I would plead with myself to do that, but I cannot make private or third sector providers do what I want them to do. Trust me—I so wish that I could, but I cannot. I can give guidance and support, ensure that the proper training is there and give providers wraparound care from primary care. There are many things that I can do, and I do them, but I cannot force private providers, in whatever residential facility they are providing care in, to do what I am asking them to do. Indeed, some providers have become so risk averse that they are withdrawing outdoor visiting, far less enabling indoor visiting. I will do my very best, but I cannot make that happen.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That must be the final intervention.

**Jackie Baillie:** Thank you, Presiding Officer—I have great faith in the Scottish Government, and in the cabinet secretary in particular, to make that happen. The cabinet secretary can use monitoring, and she can use the Care Inspectorate and local authorities on the ground. All those things can be done, and I think that she can do it. There is the challenge.

I know that the Scottish Government plans to address that issue, and I am grateful to Clare Haughey for her support. However, before any plan is published, it is vital that input is given by family care givers, who are most acutely aware of the changes that need to be made. Those family care givers are in fact front-line workers, and it is vital, both for them and for those whom they care for, that they are officially recognised as such.

I will close by mentioning the Ontario bill. Bill 203, the More Than a Visitor Act, sums up the situation perfectly. Family care givers are more than simply visitors, and it is now more important than ever that that is recognised. The Ontario bill seeks to support and promote the rights of those in care settings, and I strongly encourage the Scottish Government to learn from that approach. It does not necessarily need to introduce legislation, but it needs to do something now to address the mental health and wellbeing of carers and those who are cared for.

## Agriculture Bill

17:49

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of legislative consent motion S5M-22889, on the Agriculture Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that any provisions in the UK Agriculture Bill, introduced into the House of Commons on 16 January 2020, related to the effect of section 3 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and the provision of financial assistance in respect of continuing EU programmes, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, be considered by the UK Parliament.—  
[*Fergus Ewing.*]

## Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of legislative consent motion S5M-22887, on the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill.

17:49

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** On 18 September, the United Kingdom Government made a formal request that Scottish ministers give in-principle agreement to the inclusion of provisions in a UK bill relating to the uprating of industrial death benefit in Scotland. Given the disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic to average earnings this year, UK ministers believe that legislation may be necessary to avoid a freeze of state pensions and other benefits that are uprated in line with average earnings. Legislation sets out that those benefits can be increased only when there has been an increase in earnings. Although that primarily relates to reserved benefits, it also impacts on industrial death benefit, for which the Scottish Government has had executive competence since 1 April 2020.

Industrial death benefit is paid to the widow, widower or dependents of someone who died from an industrial accident or disease before 1988. It is now abolished for new claims, and we estimate there to be only around 300 people in Scotland currently in receipt of the benefit. My priority is to ensure that the rate at which they are paid remains consistent with the rate applying to those in receipt of the benefit in England and Wales.

As a means of delivering that, UK ministers offered to include provision in their bill to give Scottish ministers the necessary powers to deliver uprating legislation consistently with the UK Government's approach. A legislative consent motion was therefore lodged on 24 September. The UK Government has strongly requested completion of the passage of the LCM by 30 September to allow for the bill's second reading in the House of Commons on 1 October.

The alternative to a legislative consent motion would be equivalent Scottish primary legislation. That would mean seeking to have Scottish primary legislation in force by mid-November, with truncated development time, truncated scrutiny and the need to request truncated royal assent. Given the pressures on the Parliament's time and the fact that the LCM affects only one benefit, I do not consider that a viable option.



For those reasons, this action is necessary and appropriate in order to protect the incomes of recipients of industrial death benefit and to maintain that benefit at the same rate as that applying in the rest of the UK. I propose that the Parliament agrees to the provisions.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 23 September, relating to Industrial Death Benefit, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, or executive competence of Scottish Ministers should be considered by the UK Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** We will consider the motion at decision time.

## Business Motions

17:51

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-22878, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 6 October 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Assessment of SQA National Qualifications in 2020-21

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Delayed UK Budget: Implications for Scottish Budget

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Report on Coronavirus Legislation

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: COVID-19: Review of Scottish Government's Approach to International Development

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 7 October 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Question Time: Rural Economy and Tourism; Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Legislative Consent to the Internal Market Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 8 October 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: Justice and the Law Officers

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Shaping Scotland's Economy: Scotland's Inward Investment Plan

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: NHS remobilisation

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Miners' Strike Review

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Scotland's Response to the Mental Health Challenge of Covid-19

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

4.55 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 27 October 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions

*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 28 October 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions

*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 29 October 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

*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 05 October 2020, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Graeme Dey*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item is consideration of business motion S5M-22879, also

in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the stage 1 timetable for a bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 20 November 2020.—[*Graeme Dey*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:52

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I call Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S5M-22880 to S5M-22882, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 13) Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/274) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 14) Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/280) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) (Scottish Inshore Region) Amendment Order 2020 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

**The Presiding Officer:** The questions on those motions will be taken at decision time.

## Decision Time

17:52

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The first question is, that amendment S5M-22860.2, in the name of Jeane Freeman, which seeks to amend motion S5M-22860, in the name of Monica Lennon, on recognising the importance of family care givers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. We will suspend business for a few moments to allow all members, both in the chamber and online, to access the voting platform.

17:53

*Meeting suspended.*

18:00

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you colleagues. We move to the division. This will be a one-minute division, after which there will be a pause to ensure that everyone has registered their vote. Members should vote now.

I believe that everybody in the chamber voted correctly, but, unfortunately, we had some connectivity problems, so I ask for points of order.

**Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I vote yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I will instruct the clerks to formally note that you voted in favour of the amendment.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was not able to register my vote, but I vote yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I will instruct the clerks to note that you voted in favour of the amendment.

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I vote no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. I will inform the clerks that you voted against the amendment.

Those three votes will be added to the register before we announce the result.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinrossshire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 92, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-22860.1, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S5M-22860, in the name of Monica Lennon, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a one-minute division, after which there will be a pause.

### For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)

Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)

Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the vote is: For 27, Against 92, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-22860, in the name of Monica Lennon, on recognising the importance of family care givers, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed, but there will be a short pause to allow any members who have not recorded a vote to let us know that in the BlueJeans chat function.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**Against**

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 90, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament observes that 1 October is International Day of Older Persons; notes that more than 200 days have passed since care homes began locking down in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; further notes with great sadness the scale of the pandemic in Scotland's care homes and the tragic loss of life that has occurred; believes quality social care to be essential to the health and wellbeing of people across Scotland and concludes that it is time for a National Care Service, which will deliver pay for social care workers that reflects their value and professionalism; is concerned that limited or no contact with family caregivers is having a negative impact not only on the health and wellbeing of

care home residents, including those with Alzheimer's disease and dementia, but also on children, young people and other adults affected by restrictions on their caregivers; agrees that receiving care and support from one or more designated caregivers is important for the health and wellbeing of individuals, and that testing should be available to everyone involved in providing care; commends Bill 203: More Than A Visitor Act (Caregiving in Congregate Care Settings), 2020, which is currently progressing through the Legislative Assembly of Ontario; calls on Ministers to adopt a similar approach; notes that the Scottish Government will soon be setting out winter plans for the NHS and social care to ensure that they are as protected as possible during the winter; welcomes that the independent review of social care is examining how adult social care can be most effectively reformed to deliver a national approach to care and support services, including a National Care Service; recognises that everyone has a part to play in ensuring that transmission of COVID-19 is curtailed in order to protect the most vulnerable people in society, and further recognises that, while some restrictions on care home visiting may be required to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to and within care homes, these should be removed, mitigated and amended as soon as it is clinically safe to do so in order that care home residents can safely see their loved ones.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-22889, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on the Agriculture Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that any provisions in the UK Agriculture Bill, introduced into the House of Commons on 16 January 2020, related to the effect of section 3 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, and the provision of financial assistance in respect of continuing EU programmes, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, be considered by the UK Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-22887, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill, which is UK legislation, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 23 September, relating to Industrial Death Benefit, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, or executive competence of Scottish Ministers should be considered by the UK Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on the three Parliamentary Bureau motions unless there are any objections. There are no objections, so the question is, that motions S5M-22880, S5M-22881 and S5M-22882, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 13) Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/274) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 14) Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/280) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) (Scottish Inshore Region) Amendment Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

We will move shortly to members' business, but first we will pause for a few moments to allow members and ministers to change seats.

## Albion Rovers FC (Mark Millar Donation)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-22644, in the name of Fulton MacGregor, on Mark Millar's donation to Albion Rovers Football Club, in relation to Covid-19. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament commends the Coatbridge-born international comic writer, Mark Millar, for donating £18,000 to Albion Rovers FC to invest in the Pixellot streaming system at Cliftonhill Stadium in Coatbridge; understands that this is a first in Scottish football and believes that, with help from the football authorities, other clubs are due to follow this lead; notes that the first competitive game to be streamed is set to be against Stenhousemuir FC, which was also involved in the launch; acknowledges that this initiative will allow clubs in the lower professional leagues of Scottish football to continue to generate an income and fans to take in live games while restrictions are still in place and in light of the potential for these to continue for some time as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; thanks Mark for his initiative that has the potential to bring positives to fans, clubs and local communities, and wishes him well in this and future endeavours.

18:12

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** It gives me great pleasure to open the debate. I thank all members who signed the motion for the cross-party support that it has received. I declare an interest as a relatively recent member of the board of the Albion Rovers communities trust and I am also the convener of the cross-party group on the future of football in Scotland.

There will be two main strands to my contribution. First, I will highlight the amazing gesture from Coatbridge lad, Mark Millar, to his local team and all the work that has gone into making the live streaming happen; secondly, I will consider the wider implications and benefits of live streaming for Scottish football in the Covid-19 environment.

As the motion highlights, after some hinting tweets earlier this month, the big announcement was made that Mark Millar had donated money to Albion Rovers to invest in the Pixellot streaming system at Cliftonhill stadium. Many members know who Mark Millar is. He comes from Coatbridge and is now an international comic book writer and Hollywood director; his works include "Ultimate X-Men", "Wanted" and "Kick-Ass". Despite his fame, Mark has never forgotten his Coatbridge roots and is often involved in community initiatives, particularly in the Townhead area, where he was raised. He and his wife, Lucy Millar, have set up

the Millar Foundation charity to help redevelop and regenerate the Townhead area.

When Covid-19 hit, like so many of us across the country, Mark started to think about the plight of his local club, which, in his case, is Albion Rovers. Local football teams are a lot more than the game that they play on a Saturday. They are often the lifeblood of our communities and offer so much to so many people and it is vital that such issues are debated in the chamber. The Rovers is no different and I can testify to the supporters trust's on-going work with schools, the memories group for older fans, festive activities and the buddy group.

Ronnie Boyd, a previous Rovers chairman, reminded me today how widely accepted it is that Scottish teams rely on gate money more than any other teams in Europe.

In March and April, Mark linked with Stenhousemuir chairman and all-round good guy in Scottish football, Iain McMenemy, to talk about ways for clubs to generate revenue through these hard and difficult times. Iain told me that Stenhousemuir did not want to sit back, helpless, in the lower professional leagues, so went about developing an idea to stream games live, using the Pixellot system. Twenty-four clubs have now adopted that system and a few others have identified other ways to stream. Mark was keen that Albion Rovers were at the front and centre of that, so he made the donation to the club and linked with its stalwarts, Eddie Hagerty, Ronnie Boyd and the director, Alison McGowan, to get the ball rolling.

Liam Nugent, the chief executive officer of we.soccer, also became involved after Mark Millar alerted him to the developing situation. We.soccer is an app and website software product that was created in Scotland, with the ambition to modernise match coverage in Scotland and beyond by capturing and publishing reference level data for all grass-roots football matches across the world. It is currently used by Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust, which covers 300 schools in the north-east of Scotland, and by the English Independent Schools Football Association. It was also being trialled with referees in the Scottish Women's Football League until the forced break in play that Covid-19 caused.

Albion Rovers and Stenhousemuir are using the app in tandem with the Pixellot camera systems to support social distancing in match administration. By using the software, teams can submit their team line-ups to the referee remotely and without using paper copies.

Pixellot and we.soccer are a great example of innovation during the public health crisis. I thank those who have trained to use the software; there



are too many to mention but I give a shout out to Daniel Mossie and Ben Kearney at Albion Rovers. Again, that demonstrates that, as we know, volunteers will make it work.

What does all that mean for the longer-term sustainability of the game? There has been a lot of talk about the future of the game and, although we need fans to come back, we need to be realistic at this time. Covid-19 cases are on the rise again, and the indications are that we are in for a tough winter. I hope that we will avoid a full lockdown of the sort that we had earlier in the year, but it is reasonable to guess that, in the coming weeks and months, restrictions are more likely to be tightened than eased. For Scottish football teams at lower professional and grass-roots level, that could mean a large chunk of the season with no, or a limited number of fans. Without intervention, that will be disastrous for the clubs.

When I spoke to Paul McNeill from the Scottish Football Association, he made it clear that the situation is dire. He talked about the impact that no funding will have, not just on the teams' players and management, but on their community involvement. He told me that some clubs are having to look at redundancies or reducing the delivery of community projects, such as community teams, mental health groups, walking football and so on.

Clubs have been relying on efforts such as fundraisers to get them through. Jordan Campbell, who is a fan, set up a great fundraiser for Albion Rovers, but that situation is not sustainable. The things that I have described demonstrate that football is more than a game and means so much to communities, so sustainable solutions must be found.

Is live streaming that solution? It would be income for the moment and, importantly, it would help fans to get through these tough times. It would also be an income for the longer term, because it would allow fans who live away from the area or country a chance to support the team in a practical sense.

Along with Paul McNeill from the SFA, we have a meeting with the minister scheduled for next week, so that we can take forward issues that were raised at the most recent cross-party group meeting. At this stage, I have two main asks of the minister and Government: to give serious consideration to supporting clubs, in a practical sense, to do live streaming; and to consider a funding pot or other resources that clubs in the professional and grass-roots game can access to help them survive.

The beauty of funding something like that is that it is sustainable. Helping clubs to take care of themselves will ensure that they and all grass-

roots clubs are there at the end of the crisis. We need them to be there, because they are our communities. Many helped out at the start of the Covid-19 crisis and now they need our help. Football will evolve; although I do not want to sound like a "Jurassic Park" quote, it will find a way, but we need to help clubs to reach that goal. Future generations depend on what we do in the middle of this pandemic, which is the biggest challenge of our times.

Mark Millar, a boy from Coatbridge, has given us a springboard and potential solution to get our clubs through the crisis and revolutionise football in Scotland for the future. Let us come together, grasp the opportunity and ensure that Covid-19 will not break those integral institutions within our communities but make them stronger.

18:19

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I thank Fulton MacGregor for bringing the debate to the chamber. As he said in his speech, it is a debate about not just our national sport of football, but how our community teams can thrive and survive in this worldwide pandemic. As a football fan and self-confessed comic-book geek, I welcome Mark Millar investing money in Albion Rovers. However, not every team in Scotland has a Mark Millar who can provide that level of funding.

Football is an important part of my life. We have to remember at this time that football is an important part of our community life and of Scotland—for all the good and the bad, football identifies who we are and mirrors the country. Bill Shankly's great quote,

"Football is not just a matter of life and death: it's much more important than that",

seems shallow in these times of Covid-19. We need to worry about that because football without fans is a sad place; it is a sad world when you cannot go to watch your team on a Saturday afternoon, shout, moan and possibly drown your sorrows after the game because your team had a difficult yin.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** Especially this Saturday.

**George Adam:** My team played Kilmarnock on Saturday and that is why we have just heard from Mr Coffey—they beat us.

We have to deal with the here and now. Fans will not be at a game of football for a while yet—possibly not even this season. If there is a return of fans to football, we will have to think about how that can be done in a safe manner. At the moment, we cannot guarantee that. How do clubs continue and ensure that they have revenue? In Scotland, unlike in England, 70 per cent of club

revenue comes from bums on seats in the stadiums. Football needs to address and deal with that problem.

We need to support the clubs, too. Streaming the games, as Fulton MacGregor's motion suggests, is the way forward. That can be the income stream. I am the convener of St Mirren fans' trust, which is the biggest shareholder in St Mirren Football Club. We played a midweek game against Celtic and, had that game been in the stadium full of fans, we would probably have made about £10,000 to £12,000 less than we did. Streaming it at £12.50 a shot made us more money than it would otherwise have done—I cannot give you the figures. Not everyone will be playing Celtic or Rangers every day of the week, but we can make it work.

Everything is relative. Albion Rovers' finances and budget is relative to the league it plays in. I see that David Torrance is here—Raith Rovers' budget will be relevant to the league that that team plays in, as is Kilmarnock's and St Mirren's in the premier league. If the clubs can find a way to make it work, they can generate the revenue. I agree with Fulton MacGregor that there needs to be something along the lines of a Government loan scheme at least, or some form of grant at best, for the smaller clubs to get investment to set that up. Then they could start earning the funds that would make the difference. The money is not there to do it in the championship and leagues one and two, but we can give them the opportunity to do it.

Let us not forget the importance of football teams in our communities and the work that they have done during the Covid crisis. St Mirren FC got players to phone up fans to ask whether they were okay during lockdown. Other clubs did the same. They have been an important resource as we have gone through this difficult time.

Football without fans is not normal, but this is the new normal. We need to ensure that the clubs get an opportunity to create funds and generate the money that they need to move forward. We have to ensure that there is some way for us to support our football teams. They are important to our communities and to the people who elect us to the Parliament and they will not be playing in stadiums soon. We need to ensure that ideas such as streaming football are supported and that clubs are able to do all that they possibly can. Football teams and the Government must work together and say that we know that our national game is important to us. We must ensure that, come the other side, our football clubs, which have served our communities for more than a hundred years, are still there.

18:25

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):**

As a native of Coatbridge, I have particular pleasure in congratulating Fulton MacGregor on lodging an encouraging motion for debate.

The generous donation of £18,000 to Albion Rovers Football Club from Coatbridge-born international comic book writer Mark Millar has, without doubt, helped to provide financial security for the club, as it moves forward.

This is a challenging and worrying time for Scottish football, with Covid-19 causing complete disruption to every aspect of our lives. Football is our national sport, and it plays a huge role in people's lives here in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom. The restrictions on attendance at football matches have therefore been a heavy blow to football supporters and the clubs that they support.

Who would have believed, when Albion Rovers Football Club and its loyal fan base celebrated the centenary of its Cliftonhill stadium with a photography exhibition at Coatbridge's Summerlee museum, that one year later the ability of those same supporters to enjoy and attend home matches would cease completely, as the result of a global pandemic?

Despite our having come out of lockdown and the lifting of other restrictions, there are still no fans to spend money on tickets at stadiums, to travel to away games and to use the hospitality facilities. Sadly, that equates to a vast cut in funds for football clubs across Scottish leagues. Smaller clubs such as Albion Rovers have been hit particularly hard, because they do not have access to the same funding as the teams in the higher leagues of professional Scottish football.

As a consequence of the pandemic, new technology is now a central part of our lives—for work, study, keeping in touch with family and friends and, notably, to continue to enjoy watching sport. The funding from Mark Millar has allowed Albion Rovers to access and start using Pixellot technology, which many organisations use to stream good-quality coverage of a range of sports, live and on demand. The technology will help to earn the club much-needed income, while allowing fans to watch the club's games when it is not possible for them to be physically present in stadiums.

Other funding successes have included the club's application for a fixed grant of £50,000 distributed by the Scottish Professional Football League Trust, which has been funded to the tune of £3 million by Edinburgh businessman James Anderson. The funding was put in place to help Scotland's clubs to cope with the adverse consequences of the pandemic. Albion Rovers

has used the funding to improve disabled access. That will, crucially, help more fans to attend in person, in due course, and will thus boost the club's income. In addition, as recently as last Saturday the supporters club's application for a licence to run the online Wee Rovers lotto was granted, which is great news.

There is clearly huge good will towards Albion Rovers. However, what the club really needs is to sustain its long-term viability by translating that goodwill into getting more supporters through the door to boost return from tickets and spending in the hospitality facilities. I hope that the debate will go a considerable way towards raising awareness of that, and I again congratulate Fulton MacGregor on bringing the debate to the chamber.

I conclude by wishing Albion Rovers the best of luck in their match against Stenhousemuir Football Club on 17 October, when the new Pixellot technology, financed by Mark Millar's much-appreciated donation, will be put to very good use.

18:29

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on securing the debate, and I congratulate Albion Rovers on having received funding support from Mark Millar and securing its new Pixellot streaming system at Cliftonhill, in Coatbridge. I also pass on my best wishes to my football club, Kilmarnock Football Club, after hearing today's news that three staff—possibly players—have tested positive for coronavirus. I wish them a speedy recovery.

All sports worldwide, from the small youth clubs to multimillion-pound establishments, have suffered during the pandemic. As football fans, we have found ourselves at a loss, wondering when we will ever be able to properly see our teams in action again.

It is great to hear about cutting-edge digital technology such as the Pixellot system, through which high-quality sports coverage can be streamed into our homes. I have seen the Pixellot system on YouTube, and it looks really impressive. The company has more than 8,000 installations in more than 30 countries worldwide. The system can be used in a variety of ways, including as a broadcast platform for us to watch a game at home, and by coaches, who can use it for tactical analysis. The software also allows real-time zooming in and panning of the action, so that we can all check for ourselves whether the referee got decisions right. Who needs a video assistant referee when we have Pixellot?

One of the other keys features of Pixellot is that clubs can overlay advertising graphics to help them to generate more revenue. My goodness—football needs all the help that it can get at the

moment. All in all, Pixellot looks like a great system, so well done to Mark Millar and Albion Rovers for establishing it for the fans.

I contrast the Pixellot system with the Scottish premiership solution of using the Stream Digital platform, which I have used to watch a number of Kilmarnock games. Most of the premiership clubs have provided their television broadcasts to their fans as a "Thank you" for their support in purchasing season tickets. I have also purchased some away-game teams' pay-per-view sessions, although I usually have to mute the biased commentators.

However, it is interesting that the service seems to be restricted in terms of how many fans can buy a subscription for a given match. I understand that when a match is broadcast live, a limit is applied to the numbers who are allowed to buy it on the Stream Digital platform—there can be no more than the number of the club's season-ticket subscribers for that season. If that is true, I hope that the broadcaster will reconsider, because we need as many people as possible logging in and buying match subscriptions. Surely, it is better to find ways to get more fans watching football than to place restrictions on them to keep them out. With the prospect of supporters not being able to get back into the grounds soon, any mechanism to get more cash into our football clubs could be a life saver.

I understand that Falkirk Football Club also operates Pixellot, so I am hopeful that I will be able to experience the system in real time when Kilmarnock plays Falkirk next Tuesday in the Betfred cup. No offence to my Falkirk friends, but I am hoping for a rerun of our 1997 Scottish cup clash, and a win for Kilmarnock.

Through the pandemic, and for the foreseeable future, it is imperative that those of us who love the beautiful game can continue to support our football teams as much as possible in order to protect not only their history, but local jobs and the local economy. Digital technology could be a life saver for many Scottish football clubs by helping them to survive.

Once again, I congratulate Fulton MacGregor and Mark Millar, and I wish Albion Rovers all the very best, not only in this venture, but in the difficult future that lies ahead.

18:33

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on securing the debate.

Mark Millar's donation during these difficult times will be a great help to Albion Rovers. By helping clubs to receive regular income at a time

when financial restraints are so great, the state-of-the-art Pixellot streaming system will not only allow loyal fans to watch their team play from the comfort of their home, but will give the Wee Rovers, Stenhousemuir and the other clubs that have signed up the opportunity to lead the way in an exciting project that could even change how people watch football for years to come.

As Mark Millar mentioned when he introduced it, an important point of the project is that fans will be able to watch their team play at an affordable price. For a sport that seems to be losing touch with the working class that played such a huge role in giving it the platform that it has today, it is encouraging to hear that prices will be affordable, and that the system will be available to fans across the world. That means that those who cannot watch Albion Rovers in person can now do so on the high-definition streaming system.

That will be very good news for my godfather, John Logan, who moved with his wife Eileen and family to the States many years ago, and currently lives in Maryland. John was a professional footballer, latterly with Dunfermline under manager Jock Stein—another Lanarkshire lad who played for Albion Rovers and who, of course, managed Celtic's 1967 European champions team, the Lisbon Lions. John fondly recalls as a boy taking his wee brothers, Joe and Terry, to Albion Rovers games—with money that had been given by his mum to take them to the pictures—then marching down Coatbridge Main Street behind the brass band after the games.

Sadly, the current Covid restrictions mean that supporters of football teams in lower divisions have not seen their teams play in six months. On that point, I hope that members will support Richard Leonard's call for an emergency fund to be set up to help grass-roots and lower league football teams to compensate for lost income.

For many people, watching organised sport is not just a hobby; it is where they meet friends. Losing that social connection has undoubtedly impacted on people's mental health. Mark Millar should receive our gratitude for what I believe will be a positive change that will bring people closer to their beloved teams, even if, for now, it will not be in the environment of a football stadium.

Mark Millar has had a wider impact on the Coatbridge community with previous endeavours, and he has been a comrade of mine for many years. Although Mark has been very successful in the film industry, we see from the investment in our local football team that he has not forgotten his Coatbridge roots and that he is committed to tackling the poverty and injustice that many people in our community face. Another example is the Rainbow family cafe, which Mark set up in Townhead last year. Every penny that is made

there is reinvested in the community to help children and young people in Townhead to access facilities and resources such as are enjoyed in more affluent areas.

Yet another Coatbridge project with a Mark Millar connection was the upgrading of the Monkland canal, which was a vital community asset during the Covid lockdown. In 2009, I invited Steve Dunlop, the then chief executive of what is now Scottish Canals, to Coatbridge to see how we could improve the canal as a community asset. That led to the Monkland canal steering group and a substantial commitment by North Lanarkshire Council to redevelop the canal basin. The canal towpath along to Bargeddie was also improved to allow access for leisure activities. The work was completed in 2011, and the Blair bridge gateway—which was made by another acclaimed Scottish artist, Andy Scott—pays homage to Mark Millar's comic book work, with designs that were taken from a project with local pupils at Mark's former school, St Ambrose high school.

When I helped to unveil the gate and canal upgrade at the opening ceremony with Mark Millar and Councillor Jim Brooks, I could not have imagined that, nearly a decade later, that very walk would help my health and wellbeing during the lockdown. I have been in touch with the new chief executive of Scottish Canals, Catherine Topley, to discuss much-needed improvements to the canal that I noticed during my walks.

Just last year, Mark Millar bought 200 tickets for a screening of "Toy Story 4" in the local Showcase cinema, and every ticket was given to young people in the very scheme in Townhead where Mark grew up. My uncle John Logan would have been able to go to the pictures and access the Rovers game if someone like Mark Millar had been around then.

I again congratulate Fulton MacGregor on securing the debate. Mark Millar's service and commitment to the Coatbridge community are clear. His recent pandemic-inspired investment in Albion Rovers Football Club only adds to that. I am delighted that Parliament has been able to debate tonight the important contribution that Mark has made, and continues to make, to our town of Coatbridge. I am pleased that I have been able to contribute to the debate.

18:38

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on securing this important debate, and I congratulate Albion Rovers and Mark Millar on such an innovative project. In 2017, when I did the pipeathon around all the senior football clubs in Scotland, I was struck by the sense of community

in every club, and not just between clubs in certain areas—there was a whole sense of community. The clubs realise that they are all in this together in Scottish football, irrespective of whether they are small or large. The projects that we are debating will be hugely beneficial for Albion Rovers and will safeguard the club's future as an on-going entity.

I will touch on a couple of brief points. The debate is extremely useful and helpful, and I hope that it will lead to a wider debate in the chamber about the future of Scottish football. It is clear that Covid has had a hugely negative effect on football, as well as on every other aspect of society. I raised a question about football with the First Minister last week. We would all accept that there is no big pot of gold that the Scottish Government is sitting on that can be put into Scottish football clubs—it is just not there. The actions of the Scottish Government, which is putting pressure on the UK Government to establish a fund to try and help clubs, are hugely important.

I want to highlight one of the confusing elements that comes up when we talk about football. Looking at the folk who are in the chamber, we all support smaller teams—I say that advisedly to my colleagues whose teams are in the Scottish Premiership. None of us here supports either of the old firm teams or the teams from Edinburgh, or Aberdeen. We understand how important every single pound is for our clubs. When there are deals taking place that may involve a player being purchased for £20 million or £15 million—or even more, depending on the club or the league—many people in society will wonder, “What are these folk talking about?”, because they believe that there is plenty of money in football.

**George Adam:** It pains me, as a St Mirren fan, to say this, but is it not the case that the community work done by Greenock Morton is among the best in the country at the moment and that, if that was not in place, there would be issues for Stuart McMillan's community?

**Stuart McMillan:** I absolutely agree with my friend from Paisley, the St Mirren supporter. That is both you and me finished now, George.

The issue of the importance of community clubs is there for anyone to see, in particular for people who support the smaller teams. However, that message about the clubs as community assets still has to get through. It is not just about the economy; there is a social ethos—those clubs bring a social thing to their communities.

Not every club has the same amount of money as Manchester City, Barcelona or Inter Milan. Clubs in Scotland do not have that money. Projects such as the one that is happening at Albion Rovers are hugely important. It is not about

allowing a club to thrive; it is about allowing a club to survive through the Covid pandemic, which is clearly going to last for quite some time.

**Fulton MacGregor:** The member mentioned Rangers and Celtic. Does he recognise that a late chairman of Albion Rovers, Gordon Dishington, said that we have to accept that most people in local towns support the bigger teams, but he always hoped that they would lend their secondary support to their local team? Will the live streaming of games present an opportunity for that to happen, so that a Rangers, Celtic or Man United supporter might sometimes say, “You know what? I'm going to watch my local team this week.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please be brief, Mr McMillan. The minister and I would like to get home before bedtime, if that is okay.

**Stuart McMillan:** I whole-heartedly agree with my colleague Fulton MacGregor.

I will wrap up now, Presiding Officer. Once again, I congratulate Fulton MacGregor on securing the debate and enabling us to have this discussion in the chamber.

18:43

**The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick):** I thank Fulton MacGregor for bringing the debate to the Parliament, and I thank members for their contributions from across the chamber. I am delighted to close for the Scottish Government. I look forward to meeting Fulton MacGregor and Paul McNeill next week to discuss some of the issues that Fulton has raised today; I know that he has a few other issues that he would also like to discuss.

The impacts of Covid-19 have been felt by everyone and by every sector across Scotland. The sport and physical activity sectors have been hit particularly hard, and football, our national sport, is sadly not immune. Along with my ministerial colleagues, I fully appreciate that the restrictions that have been introduced to minimise the spread of the virus have had a major impact.

Although life should not feel normal at the moment, I know that it is painful not to be able to see loved ones in person or to take part in activities that we all enjoy. Football is one of those activities that countless people in all our constituencies enjoy playing and watching. The SPFL Premiership has resumed behind closed doors, and a couple of successful test events involving a limited number of supporters have been held, ahead of a possible wider return. However, because of the recent resurgence in positive tests, we have had to pause the easing of restrictions.

The First Minister has expressed her thanks to everyone who has played their part in restricting the spread of the virus, and I echo those remarks in thanking everyone in sport, in football and more widely who is following the changes. Please stick with it.

Together with sportscotland, the Scottish Government is continuing to work with partners to understand the pressures that people are under and how we can help them. I know that football at all levels is suffering, and I know at first hand that football is not just an activity that involves 22 players for 90 minutes on a Saturday afternoon. Clubs of all sizes across Scotland play an important part in their community. As George Adam and Stuart McMillan said, they deliver a range of activities for all ages, whether through the football fans in training project—I am pleased that we have been able to further support that—employability and education programmes, or lunch and breakfast clubs. The breadth and depth of activity is amazing. Over recent months, football has continued to inspire and help those who are most in need in communities across Scotland.

Because football grounds are closed or there are no supporters at games, clubs are experiencing a significant loss of income. I know that football in Scotland is more dependent on supporters. It has the highest level of attendance per capita in Europe, with gate receipts accounting for 43 per cent of revenue, which is almost three times higher than the European average. I made that point—which Fulton MacGregor and others echoed—to Iain Stewart, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, when I met him in the course of the past week. That is why I have written to the UK Government to seek an urgent discussion about a financial recovery package for football and other sports. I am pleased that, today, the UK Government has made a positive announcement, and I look forward to discussing the matter further with Nigel Huddleston, the UK Government's sports minister, when I meet him in due course.

It is important to remember football at all levels, including our grass-roots clubs and our women's game. It is also important to recognise that other sports, such as netball, basketball, rugby and other spectator sports have been severely impacted. The Scottish Government will continue to work closely with the governing bodies of football and other sports to ensure that we can maintain their long-term sustainability. I will discuss that with the Scottish FA and the SPFL again when I meet them in the very near future.

**Stuart McMillan:** The vast majority of clubs in Scotland are smaller clubs. Has the Government considered allowing a small number of fans to go into the stadiums of smaller clubs? For example,

the capacity of Morton Football Club's ground is 11,000 but, usually, only about 1,800 fans would go to a match. Even a capacity of 10 per cent of the usual maximum would be useful in helping clubs to survive through the Covid period.

**Joe FitzPatrick:** I can confirm that my officials are continuing to work to find a way of getting fans back through the gates but, obviously, we can allow that to happen only when it is safe to do so. We are considering a range of mechanisms that might give us the confidence to allow some fans to attend football matches in safety. I am absolutely mindful of the pressures on clubs at all levels.

We also recognise that fans not being able to support their local team will have a significant impact on them, and I am delighted to recognise the initiative that is being undertaken by Albion Rovers FC through the support of the renowned Scottish comic book creator Mark Millar. As Fulton MacGregor and Margaret Mitchell said, the installation of the Pixellot streaming system is a significant step forward in using technology to allow fans to watch their favourite team play from the comfort of their own homes.

Elaine Smith's points about affordability were very well made. Streaming matches is becoming more popular; previously it required expensive equipment and trained staff, which meant that it was a non-starter for smaller clubs such as Albion Rovers. The new system allows games to be played while state of the art cameras cover the action from all angles. Not only will that allow clubs to generate some income by charging fans to stream matches—I am told that, in some cases, that is quite significant for the income that clubs can bring in—but it will provide a useful tool for coaches, who will be able to use the footage to analyse their teams' performance.

I note the points that Willie Coffey made about restrictions in that system on the number of streaming tickets that can be sold being limited to season ticket holders. That will have a different impact on different clubs; some clubs have very large season-ticket fan bases, while for others that is less significant. I will take that issue away and explore it at the meeting with the SFA and SPFL that I will have soon. I thank Mr Coffey for raising that point.

Before the recent increase in positive coronavirus cases, it was envisaged that spectators would be allowed back into grounds with an indicative date of 5 October. However, that has had to be put on hold and the First Minister will provide an update on that tomorrow. I realise that that is hugely frustrating and disappointing Margaret Mitchell called it a "heavy blow", and it will have a significant financial impact on clubs and local economies. However, public health will continue to be our top priority. As I said to Stuart

McMillan, we will continue to look at options for how we can get fans back through the gates safely when it is safe to do so.

Across the country, coaches, personal trainers and clubs have been using a variety of online platforms to host training sessions and fitness classes, allowing athletes to practise their skills at home and enabling clubs to engage with each other. The streaming platform will provide another opportunity for clubs to engage with their supporters.

It will not be much of a surprise to anyone that, as a proud Dundonian, I will not lose any sleep over the result of the Albion Rovers v Stenhousemuir match, but I will be very interested to hear how the streaming went and how supporters reacted to it. That reminds me of when I joined Stuart McMillan at both Dundee United and Dundee FC when he did his pipeathon. That showed the real sense of community from both those clubs, which is echoed across Scotland.

I am sure that the SFA, the SPFL and clubs will be interested to hear how this innovative project will progress and I am sure that both clubs would welcome the opportunity to share their experience of piloting the new and exciting technology.

I have gone over time. I thank members for the debate as well as Albion Rovers and Mr Millar for making the initiative happen. I wish both teams good luck in the kick-off when it comes around.

*Meeting closed at 18:52.*





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