



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Thursday 18 March 2021

Session 5



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 18 March 2021

*[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 12:30]*

## First Minister's Question Time

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Good afternoon, colleagues. We will begin with First Minister's question time but, before we turn to questions, I invite the First Minister to update the Parliament on the Government's response to the pandemic.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Yesterday, 624 new Covid cases were reported, which is 2.7 per cent of all the tests that were carried out yesterday. The overall number of confirmed cases now stands at 211,854. There are 405 people in hospital, which is 17 fewer than yesterday, and 38 people are currently receiving intensive care, which is the same number as yesterday.

I regret to report that, in the past 24 hours, a further seven deaths have been registered. The number of deaths under the daily measurement is therefore now 7,536. However, the latest National Records of Scotland data, published yesterday, shows that the total number of deaths related to Covid is now closer to 10,000.

On Tuesday, the first anniversary of lockdown, we will commemorate with a minute's silence all those who have lost their lives, but today I again send my condolences to everyone who has lost a loved one.

Later today, we will publish the latest estimate of the R number. We expect it to show that the R number is around or just below 1.

I can also provide an update on the vaccination programme. I am pleased to confirm that, as of 8.30 this morning, more than 2 million people have now received the first dose of the vaccine, and 41,184 people received a first dose yesterday, bringing the total number of first doses to 2,023,002. In addition, 192,100 people have had a second dose, which is an increase of 10,221 since yesterday. That means that a total of 51,405 people received vaccinations yesterday. Virtually all over-65-year-olds have now had a first dose; so, too, have 74 per cent of 60 to 64-year-olds, 44 per cent of 55 to 59-year-olds and 35 per cent of 50 to 54-year-olds.

Many members will have heard reports over the past 24 hours that, across the United Kingdom, supplies of vaccine will be lower than expected. I have had discussions in the past two days with

representatives of both Pfizer and AstraZeneca. At present, we expect that, over the next month, we will have approximately 500,000 fewer doses than we had previously anticipated. For that reason, there may be periods in April when we need to prioritise second doses. I want to be clear, however, that as things stand, we still expect to offer a first dose of the vaccine to the remaining priority groups as set out by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation by the middle of next month, as planned. To remind people, that includes everyone over the age of 50, unpaid carers and all adults with particular underlying health conditions. We also still expect to have offered a first dose to all adults in the population by the end of July. When you are invited for an appointment, please accept it.

We have always known that supplies will be subject to some volatility, but the roll-out of the programme overall continues to be really encouraging, and it gives us real cause for optimism now about the months ahead. Because of that, we have been able to provide more details about our plans for easing restrictions, and we have some reason to hope for a return to a more normal life over the course of the summer.

However, all of that depends on the continued suppression of the virus. For now, it is vital that everyone continues to follow the stay-at-home rule. It is important that, when we are out and about, we should follow the FACTS guidance. If we all continue to do that, as we vaccinate more and more people, we can expect a steady progression out of lockdown and a return to greater normality over the summer.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, First Minister. Ruth Davidson will ask the first question.

### Court Proceedings (Legal Documents)

**1. Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):** I add my condolences to the loved ones of those who have died.

This week, we have heard more allegations about the scandal engulfing Nicola Sturgeon's Government. At her press conference yesterday, the First Minister refused to address their substance, but claimed to refute the allegations. It has been a while since I was a journalist but, back then, "to refute" meant to prove a statement wrong, and I do not think that its meaning has changed since then. I will therefore ask the same question that the journalist asked yesterday and which the First Minister refused to answer; maybe she can properly refute it now.

It has been alleged that a legal document had been deliberately withdrawn—in other words, suppressed—from being handed over to a court by Government officials. Is that something that the

First Minister knows happened, and is that not a summary dismissal offence?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** It did not happen. I will come back to that point in a minute. I am quite astounded that Ruth Davidson has not seen the position that has now been narrated about that.

First, however, having David Davis, a Tory MP, reading out in the House of Commons, under the protection of parliamentary privilege, his old pal Alex Salmond's conspiracy theories about the sexual harassment allegations against him must be the very epitome of the old boys club. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Order, please.

**The First Minister:** Holding this Government to account is vital, but anyone who chooses to cheer that on should not pretend to have the interests of the women concerned at heart.

On the specific question about the withheld document, as the Government confirmed yesterday, that claim is factually inaccurate. David Davis claimed that a document was withheld. Once we tracked down exactly what document was being talked about, we discovered that it was not withheld; it was handed over to the court on 21 November 2018 as production number 7.79. That is the answer to Ruth Davidson's question.

I end by saying that, although parliamentary privilege might confer all sorts of protection, unfortunately for Mr Davis, it does not turn falsehood into fact.

**Ruth Davidson:** I do not deal in conspiracies. I deal in facts—[*Interruption.*] It is a fact that her own lawyers said that it was

“unexplained, and frankly inexplicable”

that information had been kept from them. Although that is ground that we have tread before, there is something that she has not been asked about, because it was released to the Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints only on Monday. That is a document dated 4 November 2018, which has not been reported yet and which could have been released the whole time, but instead has been sneaked out in the dog days of the inquiry's time.

We do not know who the note's author is, because that is redacted, but we know that it was sent to the very top of Government and discusses whether officials really do have to comply with their duty of candour. I will quote directly from it:

“... they ... felt it better, more credible and less shifty-looking if we proceed as proposed.”

It goes on:

“it will probably all end up being out there anyway ... and better to face it transparently than having this dragged out reluctantly and portrayed as a failed attempt at a cover up.”

Why did the Government go ahead with the attempt at the cover-up anyway?

**The First Minister:** I think that everybody watching will have noticed just how quickly Ruth Davidson moved on from the first question that she asked. She stood up and suggested—as did David Davis in the House of Commons earlier this week—that a document had been withheld. I pointed out to her that that was factually inaccurate and gave her the production number of the document as it was handed over to the court on 21 November 2018, and she has the nerve to stand up and say that she deals in facts. I think that people will see for themselves that that could not be further from the truth.

What she has just quoted is counsel saying to Government, “Here are things we should hand over, and we should hand them over rather than have any suggestion that we are trying to cover up”—although I think that they were actually saying that we should amend pleadings. I will be corrected if I am wrong on that. What did we do? We amended the pleadings. All of that is, of course, out there for people to see. The thing is that people do not have to take Ruth Davidson's word or the word of the old boys club in the House of Commons for these things any more. They can go on to the website of the Scottish Government and of this Parliament's Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints and read it all for themselves and make up their own minds.

The fact of the matter is that David Davis made serious and specific allegations in the House of Commons this week and they have completely fallen apart, which I think he should be apologising for. He has been tweeting this morning no longer even trying to defend the specific allegations, but shifting the goal posts. “Shifty” is definitely a word that I would use today, but in relation to David Davis and Ruth Davidson.

**Ruth Davidson:** The First Minister says that there is no cover-up, but six weeks after the note that I read out, her own lawyers said that the Government had not complied with what the court told it to do. We know that the First Minister attended a meeting on 13 November 2018 with legal counsel, and all records of that meeting have either vanished or been destroyed. It is beyond anyone's imagination that no notes were taken when the First Minister, her chief of staff, the permanent secretary, and Queen's counsel met. Is Nicola Sturgeon seriously trying to tell us that this is not a cover-up when, six weeks before key documents were finally dragged out of the Government, her own officials warned that it would

look like a failed attempt at a cover-up; when her own lawyers, under her instruction, made false statements before a judge because a key email was withheld, despite emails around it in the same chain having been disclosed; and when all this would have stayed secret from the inquiry that is investigating it, but for the threat of John Swinney losing his job?

**The First Minister:** Ruth Davidson gets more and more desperate on the issue every single week that passes. As one conspiracy theory after another is demolished and falls away, she just dredges the bottom of the barrel.

The fact of the matter is that this Government made a serious mistake, and I have said so on a number of occasions. It is a serious mistake, which I regret deeply. A point that should not be lost is that it is a mistake that was made in the course of the Government trying to do the right thing. In the world of the old boys club, that mistake would never have been made, because the allegations would never have been investigated, and would have been swept under the carpet instead. Ruth Davidson will see that old boys club a lot more closely when she joins the House of Lords, in just a few weeks' time.

The fact is that scrutiny of the Government on all such matters is vital and important. As I have said, people can go and read the documentation for themselves. However, every time that it crosses over into buying into Alex Salmond's conspiracy theories, politicians have a choice to make. They are entitled to make that choice, but they should not pretend that, in doing so, they are standing up for the women at the heart of the issue. The women were let down. I have apologised for that, and I am determined to learn the lessons of it and make sure that the Government learns the lessons of it.

**Ruth Davidson:** Day by day, week by week, and drip by drip, more evidence comes to light over how the matter has been mishandled by the First Minister and her Government. There have been allegations of legal documents being deliberately concealed, and the lawyers who acted for the Scottish Government were furious at making false statements to court because key evidence was withheld even from them. Now it is claimed that the First Minister's own chief of staff intervened in the scandal. However, we only know that because the evidence was published not in this Parliament, but in another Parliament altogether.

The evidence mounts up, as do the Government's excuses. However, nothing can excuse the way in which the women at the heart of the matter were failed, nor the taxpayers' money that was wasted. The one thing that has not happened is anyone in this Government taking the

responsibility that they should take. The circumstances demand that someone loses their job over the matter. It could be the permanent secretary, the First Minister's chief of staff, or the First Minister herself, but, really, should it not be them all?

**The First Minister:** In just a few weeks' time, I will put myself before the verdict of the Scottish people. That is the ultimate accountability, from which Ruth Davidson is running away. Never let us forget that.

Ruth Davidson has stood up here again and mouthed another of the conspiracy theories regarding my chief of staff. Yesterday, we heard a complainer who had asked for my chief of staff's help say categorically that what was being suggested by David Davis was

"fundamentally untrue and ... deliberately misrepresented".

Week after week, Ruth Davidson stands up here and claims that, for her, it is all about the women. If that is true, I suggest to her that it is about time that she started listening a bit more to the women at the heart of it, and a bit less to Alex Salmond and his cronies.

The fact of the matter is that Ruth Davidson and the Tories are not interested in the evidence. The day before I gave evidence to the Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints, Ruth Davidson and her colleagues said, in terms, that they were not interested in anything that I had to say, because they had made up their minds.

At the heart of it is the fact that Ruth Davidson and the Conservatives are not interested in the women, nor in the evidence. They are interested only in using the situation as a political tool—because, frankly, they have nothing positive to put before the Scottish people. That is the reality.

## Mental Health Services

**2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** My thoughts are with all those who have lost a loved one to Covid. I also want to thank our amazing national health service staff, who continue to go above and beyond.

We know that the pandemic has had a devastating impact on the mental health of people across Scotland. Last month, a report from the Government showed that more than one in eight of our fellow Scots had reported suicidal thoughts. Among people with a pre-existing mental health condition, the number was more than one in three. According to the latest available figures, there were 833 suicide deaths in one year, and, according to early data, that number is, tragically, expected to rise.

During the pandemic, in-person mental health support has been more limited, and the Government has encouraged people to use the NHS 24 mental health crisis support line. The First Minister has said that her Government takes the issue of mental health very seriously. Will she tell us how many calls to the NHS 24 mental health hub have gone unanswered over the course of the pandemic?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I do not have that figure with me, but I am sure that Anas Sarwar is about to give it—if not, I am happy to look into that and to provide it.

That any such call goes unanswered is, I think, not acceptable. Having said that, people who are working across our mental health services, including in NHS 24, do an outstanding job in very difficult circumstances. It is important that we recognise that. There is no doubt that the impact of the pandemic on mental health has been severe and significant. The obligation on the Government and on the health service to respond to that in the months and, probably, the years to come is also very significant.

On 15 March, we published the third annual progress report on our mental health strategy, which contained updates on the progress towards some of the central commitments that we have made. We have already achieved our target of investing £60 million to give every secondary school access to counselling services, and we are on course to provide counsellors in further and higher education, to recruit additional school nurses and to expand the distress brief intervention programme to include people under 18. We are also taking a whole host of other actions, including the recruitment of additional mental health staff in the community.

We still have a lot of work to do, but a lot of work is under way to make sure that we are responding appropriately to people who need mental health support now and in the future.

**Anas Sarwar:** The First Minister has followed the script; however, the answer is 24,947. That is almost 25,000 mental health crisis calls during the pandemic whereby individuals have built up the courage to pick up the phone and call for help but those calls have been ignored.

Today, Labour is publishing data that shows the steady increase in waiting times and in the number of abandoned calls to the mental health hub during the pandemic. In March of last year—at the start of the pandemic—133 calls went unanswered. In the latest month of this year for which data is available, that number is 5,452, which is 40 times higher. Those people are in crisis.

The story is the same for young people who reach out for help. One in four children and young

people who are referred to child and adolescent mental health services is still rejected. Those who are successfully referred are supposed to be seen within 18 weeks, but when was the last time that the Government met that 18-week standard?

**The First Minister:** The figure for missed or unanswered calls is not acceptable. Anas Sarwar will recognise that many more people are getting access to a whole range of services; nevertheless, it is not acceptable that anybody who reaches out for mental health support does not get that support. We take seriously our responsibility to ensure that that need is met, which is why the range of investments that I have narrated, and the many others that we are making, are so important.

On child and adolescent mental health services, we recognised before the pandemic that waiting times for specialist services are too long. That is why we have embarked on a significant programme of investment and reform, to make sure that we focus on early intervention and prevention—for example, school counsellors, counselling advice services in further education and the extension of distress brief interventions to people under 18. That is all part of the programme of work to make sure that fewer young people need access to specialist services because they get services earlier on.

Long waits are always unacceptable, but there has been an improvement in CAMHS waiting times figures in this quarter compared with the previous quarter, which shows that the work to recover services is under way and is making progress. We continue to invest in that work and to undertake the necessary reforms. It is a key area of work that whoever is in a position of responsibility after the election will require to continue to prioritise for some time to come.

**Anas Sarwar:** The answer that the First Minister was looking for is “never”. This Government and this First Minister have never met their mental health standard for children or adults. Failures have consequences—in this case, devastating ones—yet 1,500 children and young people have been waiting for more than a year for support in the midst of a pandemic.

Actions, not promises, save people’s lives. The issue did not start with Covid, but it has got worse as a consequence of it. Those 1,500 children and the people who made those 25,000 unanswered calls need a Parliament that is focused on a recovery plan for our NHS that includes mental health services. After 14 years of this Government and after seven years as First Minister, does the First Minister ever wonder what Scotland could have achieved for those young people if we had focused on what unites us and not what divides us?



**The First Minister:** I focus on such issues every single day. I agree with Anas Sarwar that it is about actions. It is perfectly legitimate for Anas Sarwar—who is in opposition—to question a First Minister and talk about the problems. I recognise the challenges that we face on mental health, but, unlike me, Anas Sarwar has not outlined, a few weeks before the election, a single positive solution. I have set out the investments that we are making, and I am setting out the reforms that we are undertaking to increase preventative early intervention services for young people, yet not a single positive solution has come forward from the Labour Party. In fact, just a week or so ago, we set out a budget in which, working with other parties, we increased the investment in mental health services, and the Labour Party failed to back it.

I agree very much with Anas Sarwar that it is about not just words but actions and commitment, which are what this Government demonstrates every day. That will be the programme and record that we put before the people of Scotland in a few weeks' time.

### **Green Recovery (Oil and Gas Exploration Licenses)**

**3. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I join other members in offering my condolences to all those who have lost a loved one because of Covid or who have been affected by the pandemic.

In just eight months' time, the nations of the world will descend on Glasgow to discuss what to do next to tackle the climate breakdown. Our future depends on it. The Greens have successfully pushed the Scottish Government to commit more investment to green recovery, and I was delighted to see Green councillors in Glasgow securing more funds for a green recovery for the city and a legacy for the climate talks. However, the climate emergency demands more of us than that: fundamentally, it means that we need to leave fossil fuels in the ground.

This week, even Boris Johnson appeared to accept that, and he is reviewing licences for the oil and gas industry, including the option of giving no more permissions for new exploration. The Scottish Greens have called for that for years, but the first Minister has resisted supporting that vital move to protect our planet. Will the First Minister finally reconsider and join the Greens in calling for an immediate end to new exploration licences in the North Sea, for undeveloped licences to be revoked and for fossil fuel subsidies and tax breaks to be redirected to renewables?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I agree with the sentiments behind Patrick Harvie's question, but, of course, many of those issues are reserved to the United Kingdom Government and

those powers do not lie with us—in particular, those around offshore exploration and licensing.

We have to achieve a just transition in the interests of people whose jobs depend on certain sectors. I want to see that transition away from fossil fuels towards renewable sources of energy, and Scotland's transition in that respect is well under way, but we need to do it in a way that supports people into new employment instead of leaving them unemployed and that does not substitute our energy for increased imports that add to our carbon footprint.

There is no disagreement about what we need to do, but how we do it matters for the jobs, livelihoods and living standards of many people across Scotland—and, in this case, many people across the north-east of Scotland. There will be no disagreement between me and Patrick Harvie about the moral obligation on our shoulders to get to net zero within the timescale that we have set out or about the hard actions that are required in order to achieve that. Again, those have this Government's complete focus.

**Patrick Harvie:** A just transition means transition, and it is not compatible with continuing to go looking for more fossil fuels when we already know that we have more available to us in existing reserves than we can ever afford to burn. The Scottish Government is failing to meet its climate targets, especially in areas such as transport, where those hard decisions that the First Minister is talking about are not being seen.

Last week, we pointed out that the First Minister's Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity was unwilling to give up his support for climate-busting road expansions, a policy that has barely changed in decades. This week, we learned that another of her ministers, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity, was lobbying the transport secretary for even more road expansions. That is hardly surprising from the rural economy secretary when it comes to the environment, because he is the same minister who failed to record private meetings with fish-farming giants and said that he would "deal with" their "detractors"; who lobbied for fox hunting on public land; who supported the destruction of ancient woodland in the Cairngorms national park; and who told Parliament that he would take no lessons from the Climate Change Committee. When the First Minister says that we will do all that we can to play our part ahead of the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—why are members of her cabinet doing exactly the opposite?

**The First Minister:** The minister whom Patrick Harvie is talking about has also presided over 80 per cent of all tree planting in the whole of the

United Kingdom, which is one of the really important things that we need to do as part of our climate change ambitions.

The transition that Patrick Harvie talks about is well under way, and, in many respects, Scotland is leading the way in a global sense. With regard to oil and gas, we have already set up the £62 million energy transition fund, and the oil and gas transition leadership group is driving progress on decarbonisation. In transport, for example, we have what I believe is a world-leading ambition to reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030. That was in our climate change plan. This week, we published our housing 2040 strategy and the heat and buildings strategy, alongside plans to invest £1.6 billion over the next five years to transform how we heat our homes and buildings. We are taking those actions right now. Many other countries across the world are looking to Scotland for leadership, because they recognise the leadership that Scotland is showing.

As we go further down the road to 2030 and 2045, the decisions get harder and more challenging. That is when we often see other Opposition parties—not, I hasten to add, Patrick Harvie—shy away from those difficult decisions. As we go into a new parliamentary session, there are big things that we have to confront and face up to, but the leadership that Scotland is already showing is something that should give all of us pride as we prepare for COP26, in November.

### Teachers (Permanent Contracts)

**4. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** This week, I met teachers who are employed on casual, short-term and zero-hours contracts. The numbers that are employed in that way have mushroomed in recent years. The group I met speaks for thousands of teachers who are desperate for certainty and permanent work. John Swinney met the teachers last July. He promised:

“I will give you a full and proper response once I have thought through all of the implications.”

They are still waiting. They saw the Government adverts and dreamed of nurturing young minds, but they have been stuck on short-term and zero-hours contracts for years and now they are thinking of leaving the profession. Does the First Minister believe that that is treating teachers with respect?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** No, I do not, and I do not see why any teacher should be in that position. The Government does not directly employ teachers—we supply the funding for local authorities to employ teachers. There has now been almost five years of pupil equity funding made available to schools to support the employment of teachers. As a result of the

pandemic, in summer 2020 we provided additional funding, which has supported the recruitment of more than 1,400 additional teachers in our schools and more than 200 support staff.

In January 2021, we announced a further £45 million of new funding for education recovery. That funding allows local authorities to deploy more support to schools and families as the crisis continues. They are able to use that money to recruit further staff if they believe that that is the most appropriate way to use the funding.

I am happy to look into specific cases that Willie Rennie raises, but, given that we have record numbers of teachers, I do not think that there is any reason for the situation that he outlines.

**Willie Rennie:** It is always someone else’s fault. It is not a small number of cases—it is thousands and thousands of teachers who were attracted to the profession by the Government. John Swinney is chuntering from his seat and shaking his head, but the Educational Institute of Scotland calls them zero-hours contracts.

The group of teachers told John Swinney that he had turned his back on them. One teacher works in a supermarket to make ends meet and another works in a cafe. One said:

“I have worked hard for six years, but it is impossible to secure a permanent post”.

Another said:

“I have been made temporary for a third year in a row”.

We must create new, permanent teaching posts to get rid of the growth of zero-hours contracts and the casualisation of the teaching workforce under the SNP Government. Thousands of pupils have missed out on learning due to the pandemic. Will the First Minister stand up and guarantee a job for those teachers to help the education recovery?

**The First Minister:** There is no reason why any teacher should be in that position. Willie Rennie says that that is shifting the blame, but it is just a statement of fact. The Scottish Government does not employ teachers directly—the employers of teachers are local authorities. Any time that a minister in the Government suggests that we take responsibility for things that lie with local government, people like Willie Rennie accuse us of centralisation.

He talks about having more permanent teachers. Since July 2020, we have seen the recruitment of more than 1,400 additional teachers and more than 200 support staff. Those should be permanent additional staff—that is what the funding is there to support. We have a higher number of teachers in our classrooms now than at any time since 2008. That is because we are

providing the funding to local authorities to employ more teachers.

I encourage local authorities to give teachers permanent jobs because we are going to need more teachers in our schools for a long time to come as we continue the work of improving education for all.

### **Brexit (Commercial Activity)**

**5. Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is regarding the impact on Scotland of reported figures indicating that the barriers and uncertainty created by Brexit have had an impact on commercial activity between the United Kingdom and Europe. (S5F-04912)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The recent UK trade figures from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs are a stark illustration of the unfolding costs of Brexit and the catastrophic impact of the UK deal on Scotland's businesses. They confirm what exporters and stakeholders have been telling us since January, which is that what they are experiencing is not just teething troubles. The deal has created permanent new barriers to trade and places Scotland's exporters in particular at a permanent competitive disadvantage. It is causing long-lasting damage to the economy.

The unilateral announcement last week to extend the grace period for customs and other checks on imports from the European Union effectively told our exporters that they no longer matter to the UK Government. Let me be clear: they matter to us and we will continue to do all that we can to help businesses to adapt to those unprecedented challenges.

The UK Government needs to re-engage in good faith with the EU to try to address all the barriers that are adding costs and causing exports to fall. To do nothing is not acceptable. Scotland's export businesses deserve so much better.

**Dr Allan:** Recently, I was contacted by a salmon smoker in my constituency who exports to the European Union via air freight, with items retailing at £150 on average. Post-Brexit, they have found that delivery and customs charges are now coming to about £100. That figure does not include additional costs relating to health certificates, the significant amount of time that they now devote to administrative work, or the fact that their deliveries are getting stuck in customs. Does the First Minister agree that, having recklessly placed Scottish food and drink businesses at a competitive disadvantage, the UK Government should now ensure that those businesses get the urgent support and compensation that they deserve?

**The First Minister:** I very much agree. Alasdair Allan has narrated a sadly all-too-common example of the devastating real-world consequences of Brexit, particularly for our smaller food and drink producers. The Tory Government is currently refusing to get back round the table with the EU. When giving one of the UK Government's many empty promises, Michael Gove said that it would pull out all the stops to help businesses, but it has completely failed to do that. The UK Government also promised that it would meet all the Brexit costs, and it is failing to do that, too.

Right now, just as many people predicted, Brexit is failing Scotland's economy. Boris Johnson's Government is refusing to even try to fix things, and our food and drink businesses and our rural and island communities are paying a heavy price. That is one more of the many reasons why the sooner Scotland is in charge of our own future, the better that is for everyone.

### **Airline Sector (Revitalisation)**

**6. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Government has to revitalise the airline sector. (S5F-04902)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We recognise that, not just in the United Kingdom but globally, the aviation industry faces one of the longest recovery periods, given the impact of Covid on route networks. That is why we have extended 100 per cent non-domestic rates relief for the aviation sector for another year. We have also provided training development support to help to provide training for staff in the sector.

We are working closely with airports to rebuild connectivity for business and inbound tourism once we are able to safely lift travel restrictions. Transport Scotland, VisitScotland and Scottish Development International are working to help our airports to recover routes that have been lost and to secure new ones. Now more than ever, it is essential that we are well connected to the rest of Europe and to the rest of the world, so we want to help airports to restore levels of connectivity as quickly as possible, but it is vital that that is done safely in order that we do not reverse our progress on Covid.

**Graham Simpson:** The First Minister promised a lockdown exit strategy based on data, not dates. So far, the aviation sector has had neither. Airports are telling us that they will not be able to sustain losses for much longer. Airlines are already considering moving aircraft and jobs out of Scotland to places from which they have certainty of flying. We risk turning the clock back decades.

This week, there was a hastily convened Scottish Government working group, which heard

from officials that there might be restrictions on flying for the rest of the year. Is that the First Minister's position? Those in the sector have said that they urgently need an aviation recovery plan. Will the First Minister provide one?

**The First Minister:** Graham Simpson talks about "certainty". I would love nothing more than to give people—including those in the aviation sector—certainty, but we are in a global pandemic, with an infectious virus, and it is not possible to do that.

Other parts of the UK are often described as having given certainty, but I do not think that they have given it, either. Last night, I took part in a four-nations call that was chaired by Michael Gove, who was at pains to say that the 17 May date for the UK Government was not set in stone and that it would depend on the state of the virus. That is the reality of the situation that we face.

The situation that we face right now is that we are suppressing the virus domestically, although we are not complacent about that, given the trends in the past week, and we are rolling out a vaccination programme, which is going really well, although we are not complacent about that either, given the recent indications about interruptions to supply.

One of the biggest risks that we face is importation of the virus from overseas—in particular, importation of new variants that might undermine the effectiveness of our vaccines. Graham Simpson might think that I should simply ignore that, but it would not be responsible to do so. We are investing in all sorts of processes to try to mitigate those risks in other ways. Yesterday, I announced funding for a new genomic sequencing centre in Scotland, which will give us much faster access to sequencing of viral strains so that we know whether new variants are coming into the country.

However, there is no quick fix or magic-wand solution to the situation. Frankly, anybody who suggests that there is is being deeply irresponsible and doing a great disservice not only to people generally but to the aviation sector, too.

### Scottish Mesh Survivors Charter

**7. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will adopt the Scottish mesh survivors charter. (S5F-04901)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I have seen the charter and we are certainly committed to meeting its aims. We want to offer people an appointment as quickly as we can—sorry; I have to find the right question. My apologies—this issue is really important and I want to ensure that I am reading the right information.

We have already taken decisive action to improve services for women who suffer mesh complications and we are working towards meeting all the outcomes that the charter seeks. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport halted use of transvaginal mesh in 2018 and we are committed to keeping that halt in place. We have established a mesh fund and the health secretary has asked that the necessary steps be taken to extend its remit to allow reimbursement for past mesh removal surgery. A comprehensive service for mesh complications and removal is now in place, which will continue to develop in consultation with affected women.

NHS Scotland has already started a tender process for mesh removal surgery, which would be provided outside the national health service for those who feel unable to accept treatment in the NHS. Tenders will be accepted from the United Kingdom and overseas. Finally, we are committed to establishing a patient safety commissioner, as the Cumberlege report recommended.

**Neil Findlay:** The First Minister might want to look back at the script that she eventually found and correct the record, because frankly some of those points bear no relevance to reality. It took eight years for mesh-injured women to secure a meeting with the First Minister. They have had to fight and scrap for every small advance that they have made, and they have now been told in a letter from the cabinet secretary that they cannot get treatment from a surgeon of their choice—someone whom they trust and who they know has the required skills to remove the poison that has destroyed their lives.

The Government talks about putting the patient at the centre and person-centred care, but we will not find a single mesh-injured woman who believes that that is not just corporate sales patter. All leaders of the parties in the Parliament have signed the mesh charter. Why has the First Minister not signed it?

**The First Minister:** I am happy to give my support to the mesh charter. What I was trying to do, and to do accurately, was set out the ways in which we are already taking forward the aims of that charter. Neil Findlay, who, with others in the chamber, has rightly championed the interests of women who have been badly let down, says that there is more to do. We are making progress on all the key asks of the charter; on the asks on which we are not yet making progress, the health secretary has already given instructions—for example, on our finding a way of reimbursing the cost of mesh removal surgery, probably through an extension of the remit of the fund that has been set up.

The use of mesh has been halted—there is absolutely no intention to go back on that. The

mesh fund, which we established after I had met with affected women, has been set up, and we are looking to extend its remit.

On the surgery issue, the comprehensive service has now been put in place, but we recognise that not all women will want to accept treatment in Scotland, which is why we are looking to establish a service, and are tendering for a service that could be outside Scotland, and taking steps to appoint a patient safety commissioner.

We are determined that all the things that the women who were let down want are progressed and delivered. We will continue to take all the necessary steps to achieve that.

### **Giorgi Kakava**

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I have previously raised the plight of my Springburn constituent Giorgi Kakava—a young man of 13 whose mother tragically passed away in 2018. Giorgi was three when they arrived in Scotland, fleeing danger.

The Home Office granted Giorgi and his grandmother leave to remain in 2018, but that has now expired. Once again, they will have to apply for permission for the right to stay in Scotland. Given the ordeal that Giorgi has already been through, that Glasgow has been his home since he was three years old, that the family's friends are here and that the family is a valued part of the Springburn community, does the First Minister agree that the Home Office should move quickly to end uncertainty over the family's future and confirm the right of Giorgi and his grandmother to stay in Scotland permanently?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I hope that everyone in the chamber would agree that Giorgi is Scottish. This is his home and he should get to stay here with his grandmother for as long as he wants to be here.

Giorgi and his grandmother are among the many families who fall victim to a United Kingdom Government policy that sees family migration as some kind of burden on society. We want to see a different approach. We have set out our own policies for a far more compassionate and flexible approach to cases, particularly those involving young people. Children who were born in Scotland or who have spent their formative years here should have the opportunity to stay here with their adult guardians. That is a fundamental and simple principle, based on what is right. It is also in our interests: we need to encourage people to come here and make a contribution to our society and economy. We should be making it easier for people such as Giorgi to stay here, not more difficult.

That is another of the many reasons why we need to be in charge of these things ourselves, so that Scotland can have a compassionate and humane immigration policy that is not only right in terms of the values that underpin it, but in the best interests of our economy and society.

### **Hotel Quarantine (Exemption)**

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** My question also deals with flexibility in immigration. I have a constituent who is in the third trimester of her pregnancy and will soon no longer be allowed to fly. She is returning to Scotland next week from Hong Kong and urgently needs to know whether she and her 18-month-old child will be exempt from hotel quarantine.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** If the member sends me the details of his constituent's case, we will have it looked at today and will get back to him as soon as possible.

### **Care Packages (Withdrawal)**

**Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab):** As Scotland emerged from the first lockdown, I highlighted to the First Minister my concern that care packages, which had been withdrawn as the virus took hold, had been reduced or ended—effectively, that is a cut to assessed support under the cover of the Covid crisis.

I have a constituent whose support of £5,000 a year was withdrawn. To put that in context, his care for the next 10 years would be less than the cost of coaching some Scottish Government witnesses at the current parliamentary inquiry. My constituent's care was withdrawn, despite the difference that it made to him and to his family member, as it had allowed the family member to sustain full-time work and keep well enough to support him.

Does the First Minister think that that is acceptable? What advice would she give to my constituent? Does she accept that her persistent decisions over the years to cut back funding to local councils has resulted in the basic needs of the most vulnerable people and their families not being met, and that lack of care has now, under Covid, become an unbearable crisis for too many people?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Johann Lamont's characterisation of this Government's support for local authorities is just not the case. We treated local government fairly during the darkest days of austerity. It was not easy, but we made sure that councils got a fair deal. During the pandemic, significant additional resources have been made available to local government.

The health secretary and I have made it clear on many occasions that no local authority should be

using Covid as a cover to cut care packages. Therefore, I do not think that what Johann Lamont has outlined is acceptable. If she writes to the health secretary this afternoon, we will look into the case. I am very clear about that.

However, I am also clear that we all have a responsibility to raise such cases. All through the pandemic, the Government has told members across the chamber to let us know about those cases so that we can help to fix them where we can. That offer is there for Johann Lamont. If it is possible for us to fix that particular case, we will do that.

The general point is that no local authority should be cutting care packages using Covid as an excuse, and there is no reason why they should be doing that.

### Vaccination Appointments (Location)

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** In one recent case, a Borders constituent was asked to take a 140-mile round trip for a vaccination. Another was told to travel from Gorebridge to the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, a journey that requires two buses, when the local vaccination centre is three minutes across the road. After a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, both cases were resolved.

Although I accept that the allocation of appointments depends on vaccine availability, is there any way that appointments could take more account of local vaccination sites?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** With the whole programme, we are trying to be as flexible as possible and get the balance right. We are trying to do this as quickly as possible, which means that, particularly as we get down the age groups to people who are less vulnerable or frail, we have centralised the appointments system. Yes, some people are getting appointments at large-scale vaccination centres that might be further away from where they live, but that is essential if we are to do this as quickly as possible.

If someone gets an appointment that is not convenient, in terms of either the time or the location, there is the provision to rebook it. I would encourage anyone who is in that position to phone up the helpline and rebook their appointment. With older people and frail people in particular, vaccinations have been done through primary care, so people are going to their own general practitioner services.

I appreciate that a lot of people will feel that the location or time of their appointment is not as convenient as they think that it should be. We are trying to get the right balance of not only flexibility

and convenience but the speediest possible vaccination of the largest possible number of people, and we will continue to try to strike that balance as best we can.

### Rubislaw Quarry

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** On Monday, the Scottish Government reporter overturned Aberdeen City Council's unanimous cross-party decision not to build on Rubislaw quarry, despite huge local protests and nearly 1,500 local signatures on my petition. Since May 2019, 10 separate planning applications in Aberdeen have been overturned in that way. Will the First Minister confirm that she endorses the Rubislaw decision? Does she oppose the Scottish Conservative policy to guarantee in law that local authority planning decisions are respected, so that developments are always carried out in conjunction with the wishes of local authorities?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** As a matter of principle, I am always very sceptical about backing Tory policies, because usually they are pretty wrong-headed. On a serious point—*[Interruption.]* Ruth Davidson thinks that she is taunting me from a sedentary position about election results that are forthcoming. Of course, she does not have to worry about election results, because she will be sitting on the red benches of the House of Lords, pursuing a political career at the taxpayer's expense—

**The Presiding Officer:** First Minister, answer the question please.

**The First Minister:** Back to the question. There is a serious point here, which is that we have a statutory planning process, with different levels and stages, and it is important that ministers respect that. I am sure that there are people who think that any decision on planning that a local authority takes should be respected, but I know that many other people—I have had instances of this in my constituency—like the fact that they can appeal against local authority decisions and that there is a process after that. One of the many things that I have learned over my many years in politics is that, on planning in particular, depending on what the planning proposal is, some people will think that the local authority view should always prevail and some will think that it should never prevail. That is why we must have in place a proper, robust, independent process, which we do.

### Seasonal Workers Pilot

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Yesterday, Focus on Labour Exploitation and Fife Migrants Forum published a report on the risk of abuse and exploitation that the seasonal workers pilot presents. The report highlights serious human rights concerns in the horticultural sector in

Scotland and makes recommendations to address concerns across the United Kingdom. Although the scheme is the responsibility of the UK Government—and I support the call in the report to urgently reform the system—the report makes recommendations for the Scottish Government, including calls for regulation of the accommodation sector and the introduction of a helpline. Will the First Minister respond to those recommendations and set out how the work of Government will take them forward?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We will consider fully the recommendations in the report and respond to them. I am not able to give a detailed response to each of the recommendations today, but I will undertake to have the relevant minister write to the member to set out our initial response at this stage. I very much welcome and support the general thrust of the report. Although much of the area is reserved, it is important that the Scottish Government takes forward recommendations for us. I will make sure that more detail is provided as soon as that is possible.

#### Tenement Repair and Maintenance

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** As a nation, we face quite a challenge with repairs and maintenance of tenement property—I should say that I live in such a property. Will the “Housing to 2040” report move us forward in that regard?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Yes, it will. “Housing to 2040”, which we published earlier this week, sets out the first long-term strategy that Scotland has had. As well as setting out the ambition to deliver a further 100,000 affordable homes by 2032, it sets out the intention to introduce a new housing standard, so that everyone can expect the same high standards. The new standard will support the commitment to address common standards in tenements by implementing the recommendations of the Scottish parliamentary working group on tenement maintenance, and it is our attention for the standard to apply to all tenures, including tenements, so that no one is left out of it. If the Scottish National Party is returned to government in May, we are committed to consulting on the new standard later this year.

#### A83 (Rest and Be Thankful)

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Since last summer, the closure of the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful pass has caused misery for Argyll residents who use that lifeline route, with months of disruption. A newly formed campaign group of 1,000 local businesses has expressed its exasperation that Transport Scotland has suggested that a replacement route might take 10 years to fulfil. Can the First Minister

finally commit today to a firm date for completing a permanent solution along the existing A83 corridor, in the light of the on-going frustration and anger that is felt by so many communities that are affected by the closure?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We want to make sure that the matter is resolved definitively, as soon as possible, which is why we committed to progress a long-term solution to the landslide risks at the Rest and Be Thankful. Today, we have announced a preferred corridor for a long-term solution, along with potential route options in that corridor for consultation. Of course, the importance of consultation is one of the reasons why I cannot give a precise timescale right now. We must complete the necessary statutory processes to guarantee delivery of the scheme. However, we absolutely recognise the importance of the issue to people across Argyll and Bute.

There is a determination in relation to the issue. In fact, Mike Russell, as a member whose constituents are affected, has been a champion on the issue in the Government, and we will continue to make sure that we progress the matter with all due priority.

#### Statutory Right to Food

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The First Minister might be aware that, last week, my bill proposal to enshrine the right to food into Scots law received enough cross-party support to proceed and has now been lodged. I take the opportunity to thank the members who supported my proposal. Although the pandemic has highlighted concerns around food insecurity and poverty, food bank usage was already surging before the lockdown. Does the First Minister agree that malnutrition and hunger, and poor wages and conditions among workers in the food industry, are unacceptable in 21st century Scotland? What priority does she place on a statutory right to food?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I agree with much of that. Obviously, we are getting to the point when all parties in the chamber are focusing on our manifestos of what we will do if we are elected in a few weeks. I would expect a statutory right to food to feature in the election campaign. I certainly think that that is an important issue, and I will set out my manifesto in due course.

We have invested heavily in trying to deal with food insecurity but, as a Government—and, of course, we have seen the Parliament take a significant step in this direction in the past few days—we are keen to see a whole spectrum of human rights incorporated into our law, and there are perhaps fewer more basic rights than the right to food.

I hope that that gives Elaine Smith some indication of where my mind is at on the issue. Of course, most of us are about to put our plans before the Scottish people.

### **ScotRail (Public Ownership)**

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome yesterday's announcement that ScotRail will be brought into public ownership in order to provide stability and certainty for passengers. What are the consequences of the serial incompetence on the part of United Kingdom Government ministers, who have so far failed to publish a white paper following the Williams review?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** First, I think that it is very positive news that ScotRail will in effect come into public ownership and that the railways will in effect be nationalised in Scotland. I am proud that it is a Scottish National Party Government that has set out the plans to do exactly that.

One of the frustrations—this is where that question is very important—is that we cannot yet implement our preferred model of an integrated public sector-controlled railway because we are seeing delays in the UK Government's consultations and, of course, Network Rail still lies in the control of the UK Government. I think that we are taking significant steps in the right direction, but completing the powers that this Parliament has over rail, as well as over everything else, would allow us to do so much more and go even further yet.

### **Universities and Colleges (Teaching Schedules)**

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the First Minister when universities and colleges across Scotland will be given sufficient information to allow them to plan their teaching schedules for the next academic year, given that their timetables are normally decided at the end of this month and they cannot wait until after the election.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Through the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, the Government is in regular contact with the university and college sector. On Tuesday I set out some indication, in particular about the college sector and the return of students to in-person teaching as part of the next phase of our exit from lockdown. That is particularly focused on college students who otherwise might be at risk of not completing their courses. As it is safe to do so, as the virus is suppressed and as we vaccinate more people, we want to see, at later stages, more young people coming back to the campuses of universities and colleges. We will continue to be in touch with the

sector on the detail of that, even through the election campaign period.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much. On that note, we will—

**Neil Findlay:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I raise this point in relation to the reply that I received from the First Minister earlier. A number of mesh-injured women went through all stages of the process to seek agreement from the national health service to refunding payments that they had made for mesh removal surgery that they had had in the United States. They had borrowed, crowdfunded or used their life savings to fund that surgery.

Last week, in a letter to Jackson Carlaw, Alex Neil and me, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport confirmed that there is no route for that money to be repaid by the NHS. That completely contradicts the answer that the First Minister gave me earlier. Will she now look at that letter and correct it? Alternatively, will she now correct what she said earlier, because both cannot be true?

**The Presiding Officer:** I appreciate that Mr Findlay disputes the account, but that is just a matter of disputation; it is not a point of order. Mr Findlay has championed the matter, the First Minister has put her views on the record and the letter is there, too. Mr Findlay can pursue the matter in writing with the First Minister if he wishes.

**The First Minister rose—**

**The Presiding Officer:** First Minister, it was a point of order for me in the chair, and I am saying that it is simply a continuation of the debate that we heard earlier.

13:32

*Meeting suspended.*



14:30

*On resuming—***Business Motion**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald):** I remind members about the social distancing measures that are in place in the chamber and across the campus. I encourage members to observe those measures, particularly when entering and exiting the chamber and accessing and leaving their seats.

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-24423, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on committee meeting times. No member wishes to speak against the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Committee on the Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament on Thursday 18 March 2021.—[*Miles Briggs*]

*Motion agreed to.***Portfolio Question Time****Economy, Fair Work and Culture**

14:31

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald):** The next item of business is portfolio questions on economy, fair work and culture. I ask members for succinct questions and answers in order that we can get as many members in as possible.

**Clyde Mission Division**

1. **Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether the Clyde mission division has received any response from outwith the country to the call by the economy secretary for ideas “to make the river an engine of sustainable and inclusive growth for Glasgow, the region and Scotland”. (S5O-05130)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop):** I thank the member for raising awareness of the Clyde mission call for ideas. The call was launched on Monday 1 March and will remain open until 29 March. The Clyde mission aims to use the river and immediate surrounding land as a national strategic asset. It is focused on developing new, green jobs; making use of vacant and derelict land; adapting to climate change; accelerating our progress to net zero; and using the river to create better places for people and communities.

The call for ideas seeks views from those who live, work and do business around the Clyde on what the Clyde mission means to them and what success would look like. We have not yet received any responses from outwith Scotland but would welcome them. I encourage colleagues whose constituencies are adjacent to the river to promote engagement with the call for ideas within their area.

**Gil Paterson:** The initiative is welcome. It is well overdue and I am grateful that it is taking place now; it is a good thing. What is the Government doing to ensure that the public spend on the upcoming loch class ferry replacement is used to attract inward investment and to bring knowledge and skills into Scotland?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Clearly, we are all focusing on achieving net zero emissions by 2045, and there are opportunities for the Scottish supply chain to embrace that goal through the improvement and maintenance of lifeline ferry services. The small vessel replacement programme is part of that green recovery and will strengthen the viability of some of our remotest communities. Scottish shipyards will be able to construct vessels, which

will be an opportunity to support significant upskilling requirements in construction.

I welcome the member's interest in that particular aspect of transport, but I point out that, although it will include some of the Clyde routes, it falls outside my ministerial responsibility for the Clyde mission. I am sure that Paul Wheelhouse, whose portfolio of energy and connectivity in the islands includes responsibility for ferries, will be happy to provide further information.

Gil Paterson has not only been a stalwart of my party; he is a founding member of the Scottish Parliament. He has helped to steer it and devolution for the benefit of not only his constituents but everybody in Scotland. I am sure that everyone will join me in wishing him well and congratulating him on making an excellent speech on the Clydebank blitz last night.

**Gil Paterson:** Thank you very much.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the update on the Clyde mission and send my best wishes to Gil Paterson.

The cabinet secretary is aware that the Fair Work Convention has raised concerns that Scotland is not on track to become a fair work nation by 2025 unless bold action is taken. Will the cabinet secretary explain her aspirations for the contribution that the Clyde mission could make to Scotland becoming a fair work nation?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I recently met the Fair Work Convention. I share its concerns about the momentum required to ensure that we do what we all want to do, which is to become a fair work nation by 2025. The convention's advice and input is welcome.

Public money is going into the Clyde mission to support ideas, but the money should also be supporting new, good, green jobs and creating a workforce with the skills to secure those jobs. Conditionality, and the issues that we are all aware of, will be part of our on-going grants and support, including for the Clyde mission.

### **Jobs Protection (Highlands and Islands)**

**2. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to protect jobs in the Highlands and Islands. (S5O-05131)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop):** Since the start of the pandemic, we have provided more than £330 million to support businesses and protect jobs across the Highlands and Islands.

That is alongside the £58.1 million budget that we provided to support the work of Highlands and Islands Enterprise across the region. During this

financial year, Highlands and Islands Enterprise has supported more than 1,900 jobs, of which 1,125 were safeguarded.

We are also investing £242.5 million in regional growth deals across the Highlands and Islands, as part of a package of measures to ensure longer-term growth and job creation.

**Rhoda Grant:** Next week, Parliament will go into recess ahead of the election. During that period, the Scottish Government cannot make any funding announcements, yet in the Highlands and Islands, and in the rest of Scotland, companies are going to the wall due to a lack of Covid business support. Sadly, many of those companies are in constituencies represented by cabinet secretaries who have the powers and levers to help but who refuse to use them.

Will the Scottish Government therefore give power and funds to local authorities, which stand ready to assist those companies during this period? To those companies, £2,000 of discretionary support is an insult rather than assistance.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I do not accept the premise of the member's question. More than £500 million has been distributed to businesses across Scotland since November and more than £3 billion has been distributed in the past year. Those members who did not support the budget would not support its funding for businesses, but business support is part of the budget provision.

The announcement made by the First Minister this week will see payments made for business support in March, as well as a top-up grant—which Rhoda Grant may not be aware of—of additional support to help businesses restart during April and May. There is extensive support.

The discretionary fund has been increased from £30 million to £120 million. Local authorities have discretion in how to spend that. I agree that £2,000 is not adequate, except for micro-companies, but many companies would benefit from that discretionary fund. I encourage councils to use that fund during April.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** One means of protecting jobs, in the Highlands and Islands and elsewhere, has been the furlough scheme. As I understand it, those who began a job after October do not qualify for that scheme until May. Will the cabinet secretary call on the United Kingdom Government to do something about that?

**Fiona Hyslop:** A number of factors, such as seasonality in the Highlands and Islands snow sport sector, can cause people to start jobs later in the year. Any failure to open the furlough scheme to people who started new jobs since October

leaves a significant and growing number of workers without support.

We have called on the chancellor to revise the cut-off date for entry to the scheme, to provide support to people who have started new jobs since the end of October 2020, who will not be able to access their support until 1 May 2021. The member is correct in saying that that is a way of supporting people, particularly those in new jobs.

We know that the Highlands and Islands region has a distinct number of people of people on furlough because of the nature of its economy.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** Hospitality is one of the hardest-hit sectors of our economy. Against the backdrop of average debt of £80,000 per site, and with much of the sector relying on evening trade, will the Scottish Government review the restrictions on indoor sale of alcohol and opening times, in order to provide a lifeline to the sector and protect jobs?

**Fiona Hyslop:** That is exactly what we did in discussion with the hospitality industry, and I commend the work of the Scottish Tourism Alliance in particular.

Two things are very important to make sure that companies are sustainable. One is to make sure that customers from across Scotland can reach them, so the major change of allowing all of us to travel across Scotland from 26 April is really important. The other thing that is important for viability is opening hours, which is exactly why we listened to the hospitality industry, which has welcomed the changes that we are making. Do some people in the industry, including pub owners, want to be able to sell alcohol much earlier? Yes, but they have said that right throughout the year.

We have to balance health with the economy. We have managed to deliver hope and confidence with the announcement, which has, by and large, been welcomed by business. There is a route map through these difficulties. For the hospitality sector in particular, initially from 26 April and then from 17 May and onwards, it is really important to get the closed economy back open.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** An islands impact assessment of Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd's plans to centralise air traffic services, backed by the Scottish Government, has identified a number of significant economic impacts and no positive impacts at all. In my Orkney Islands constituency, it is estimated that 16 full-time equivalent jobs would go, with the loss of £650,000 in gross salaries. How does the cabinet secretary believe that that is consistent with Scottish Government principles to support jobs in our islands?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Clearly, my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, whose responsibility this is, has to balance the modernisation of the system, working with air traffic controllers, with the local impact of airports on particular economies that the member points out.

I will draw the member's concerns to the attention of Michael Matheson and ensure that he is alert to them—I am sure that he is. Obviously, islands impact assessments are part and parcel of the Scottish Government's approach, and there have to be checks and balances in that. The associated economic benefits of improving the provision of any airport will be essential. Clearly, the Covid implications add another dimension to the impacts that the member is talking about.

### **Adults with Additional Support Needs (Employment)**

3. **Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting adults with additional support needs in the West Scotland region into employment. (S5O-05132)

**The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn):** The Scottish Government is working to ensure that everyone who wishes it has access to fair and sustainable work, with opportunities for progression. Fair start Scotland, our devolved employment service, supports people of all ages who face the greatest challenges in obtaining work by offering personalised one-to-one support that is tailored to individual circumstances. For participants with additional support needs, Fair start Scotland offers specialist support, including individual placement and support and supported employment, where appropriate.

In addition, our no one left behind model, which places people at the centre of design and delivery, provides employability support to individuals of all ages, including adults with additional support needs, and supports their journey towards and into work.

We continue to work with our partners, including the third sector, to understand the impact of Covid-19 on people with additional support needs, and to identify what actions would help to mitigate negative impacts on people who are seeking to enter or sustain employment.

**Mary Fee:** Despite the Government continuing to promise to reduce the gap by at least half, the employment rate for disabled people still sits as low as 47.8 per cent, which compares with 81.3 per cent for those who are not disabled.

The Scottish National Party's "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: employment action plan" sets out an interim target of an employment rate of 60

per cent for disabled people by 2030. To reach that milestone and, ultimately, to halve the gap, the employment rate of disabled people will need to increase by 1 percentage point every year.

Although the Government, having reached 45.6 per cent in 2018, is currently on target, there is concern that the target will be missed because the pandemic has disproportionately affected disabled workers. What further steps will the Government take to ensure that disabled people are supported during Scotland's economic recovery?

**Jamie Hepburn:** If you will indulge me, Presiding Officer, I note that this will be my last exchange with Mary Fee, so I will quickly pay tribute to all the efforts that she has undertaken while in Parliament. On matters such as these in particular, she always addresses them constructively and on a non-partisan basis. I wish her well.

Mary Fee has picked up on an area that is of concern to me. She made the point that we have made progress and that, on the current trajectory, we will meet our target. However, I share her concern that Covid-19 has the potential to put things into reverse. Therefore, the work that we are undertaking through the no one left behind policy, the extension of fair start Scotland and the access to work stakeholder forum—which we have established despite access to work being a reserved responsibility—is important and very much designed to achieve the end that Mary Fee and I both want. That end is that we at least halve the disability employment gap and ensure fairness in our labour market.

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

### Aggreko

**5. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that Aggreko is to become another large-scale Scotland-based listed company that will lose its independence through a takeover. (S5O-05134)

**The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn):** As a company that is seeking to be at the forefront of the green technology challenge, Aggreko exemplifies our ambitions for a low-carbon economy and increasing Scottish innovation.

I note that the company is positive about the role of TDR Capital and I Squared Capital in developing the business further and building on its significant international success. That is to be welcomed, but the Scottish Government will, of course, continue to engage with the company and new investment partners to establish what more

we can do to secure and grow the company's operations in Scotland.

**John Mason:** Does the minister share my frustration that, when companies are taken over in Scotland, we lose the top jobs, the headquarters, the decision making, and the ancillary jobs, such as those in legal, accountancy and hospitality departments? Can the Government do anything to oppose such takeovers?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I am sure that John Mason will understand that, with the powers that we have, the answer to his second question is no. The other perspective that I will articulate is that inward investment has, of course, an important role to play in our economy.

On the broad sweep of John Mason's question, I say that much of that would concern me, so we would seek to act where necessary. However, in the context of the question being about a specific company—people from Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven might be listening; as a son of the rock, I know the area well—it is important to say that there is no indication that that will happen in this case. As I said, will we will continue to engage with Aggreko to make sure that we support the company not just for the benefit of the company, but for the benefit of Scotland and the communities of Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven.

### Real Living Wage (Public Sector Contracts)

**6. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will utilise its public sector procurement to ensure that companies that are in receipt of public sector contracts pay staff the real living wage and provide longer-term employment and training opportunities. (S5O-05135)

**The Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** The Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 already requires public bodies to consider and act on opportunities to improve economic, social and environmental wellbeing through their procurement. That includes addressing fair work and applying community benefit requirements, which are key mechanisms that have been used for many years to secure targeted training and recruitment opportunities.

The Scottish Government is also using other mechanisms to encourage more companies to adopt fair work practices. The green port model is an exemplar of Scotland's values and ambitions. It adapts the United Kingdom Government's free port model by adding Scotland's priorities to it. It requires operators and businesses who benefit from that package of incentives to adopt our fair work first approach, which includes payment of the real living wage, and the Scottish business pledge, which boosts innovation and inclusive growth

within communities, upholds the highest environmental protections and contributes to a net zero economy.

**Sarah Boyack:** It is great that the Scottish Government encourages companies to use the real living wage and to act on environmental priorities, but what monitoring does it carry out to ensure that public procurement actually delivers the real living wage to all employees who are covered by public procurement contracts? Surely it is a straightforward issue to require that in contracts that are signed by the Scottish Government and public sector organisations.

Does the Scottish Government recognise that, in Scotland, women, in particular, are more likely to be earning less than the real living wage? How will the Government target them specifically to enable them to overcome the additional barriers that they face in accessing training opportunities? How will it act on that to change the opportunities that will be available to people as we come out of the pandemic and recover from it?

**Ivan McKee:** On issues related to employment of women, Ms Boyack will be aware that my colleague Jamie Hepburn is overseeing a range of measures to address specific challenges in the labour market, including measures that aim to close the gender pay gap and to ensure that women and all groups in society who are disadvantaged in that regard are able to take full advantage of opportunities.

I turn to Ms Boyack's questions on the real living wage. Some 92 per cent of all suppliers who were delivering live Scottish Government contracts during the past financial year made a commitment to pay it. Although that is encouraging, we continue to strive towards achieving 100 per cent.

As for monitoring, as part of their established annual reporting cycle in annual procurement reports, public bodies are required to report the number of contracts that they have awarded that have included fair work first criteria. Current monitoring arrangements for public bodies check whether a contract has been delivered in line with the agreed terms. In addition, contractors that commit to adopting the fair work first criteria in delivery of a contract are asked to include on their own website a statement highlighting their commitment to advancing those criteria for workers who are engaged on the contract.

A wide range of measures on monitoring is in place. As I have said, 92 per cent of all suppliers are already conforming to the fair work first requirements.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have a supplementary question from Willie Coffey.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** I thank the minister for mentioning green ports as an example of Government support for businesses that pay the real living wage and support fair work first. Is the Scottish Government ready to publish the prospectus to invite bids to establish fair green ports in Scotland? Might that process start before the parliamentary recess?

**Ivan McKee:** Yes, we are ready to publish the applicant prospectus. However, sadly, we cannot make any progress due to the UK Government's inordinate and unacceptable delay in finalising its elements of the work. There is now a real risk that the pre-election period in Scotland will begin without that prospectus having been launched. That is why today I have published a draft version of our applicant prospectus for green ports in Scotland, which sets out the key measures that relate to devolved responsibilities—namely, those on tax and planning. We intend that the reserved elements should align with those in the free port bidding prospectus for England.

However, let me be clear: our requirements that green ports include implementation of fair work first principles and a robust plan for transition to net zero are red lines. We will not support any model that does not include those essential elements, and we will not engage in a race to the bottom.

### **Brexit (Economic Impacts)**

**7. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent engagement it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding managing the economic impacts of Brexit. (S5O-05136)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop):** The Scottish Government is deeply concerned by emerging evidence that Brexit is having a severe impact on the ability of Scottish businesses to trade effectively and competitively with the European Union, with lasting consequences for our economy.

Scottish Government ministers remain in regular contact with UK ministers about the economic impact of Brexit and are pressing for urgent support for businesses that are being adversely impacted. Most recently, together with UK Government ministers, I chaired a meeting of the Scottish business growth group, which heard from business, employer and employee representative organisations about the difficulties that are being caused by new trading arrangements and the need for further assistance.

Indeed, just a few hours ago, I had a similar meeting with Michael Gove and business

organisations as part of the Brexit meeting series. The Scottish Government will continue to work hard to address problems and blockages where it is in our power to do so.

**Stewart Stevenson:** Has the cabinet secretary noted that the Office for Budget Responsibility suggests that there will be a 4 per cent drop in productivity compared with the position if we had stayed in the European Union and a temporary reduction in the first quarter of this year of some 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product? Is it now absolutely vital that the UK Government provides additional funding to the Scottish Government so that we can support the businesses that the cabinet secretary has just referred to and the workers who are employed in them?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Recent funding for seafood exporters and small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK is welcome, but piecemeal funding can at best provide only a temporary sticking-plaster, considering the sheer scale of the costs and losses that are emerging. We are making that very clear to the UK Government. The additional funding cannot address the core problem, which lies in the very thin nature of the deal. It is vital that the UK Government listens and responds to what we are telling it.

We hear that imports from France to the UK are down by 13 per cent, imports from Italy are down by 38 per cent and imports from Germany are down by 30 per cent, while exports from the UK to France are down by 20 per cent and exports from the UK to Italy are down by a staggering 70 per cent. It is clear that the UK Government's trade statistics are, in addition to the statistics that we are hearing from other countries, telling it that there is a problem.

We remain ready to work with the UK Government on solutions. Productive proposals are being put forward. Its refusal to engage ignores the fact that the effects will be long lasting and dangerous for our businesses, our communities and our economy.

Presiding Officer, this is an opportunity for me to say to Stewart Stevenson that he has spoken in the Parliament very sensibly and informatively over many years and in many speeches. He has served his constituents well and has been a real driver for change, particularly on climate change. I thank him and wish him well in his retirement.

### **Covid-19 Recovery Plan (Highlands and Islands)**

**8. Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it has a Covid-19 economic recovery plan for the Highlands and Islands region. (S5O-05137)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop):** We detailed our plans for economic recovery in our response to the advisory group on economic recovery and we have developed them in a number of publications since then. They include our commitment to a model that addresses regional needs and issues and a renewed focus on place-based initiatives. We have committed over £1.2 billion to drive Scotland's economic recovery and, as I said in my answer to Rhoda Grant, significant funding has been and will be invested across the Highlands and Islands to aid recovery and renewal.

At the convention of the Highlands and Islands on Monday, I launched our first population strategy to address the complex demographic challenges for our economy. We will continue to work with partners through the convention to address those and wider economic issues.

**Donald Cameron:** The cabinet secretary will be aware that many small hospitality businesses in the Highlands and Islands have been badly hit during the pandemic. Many have received little or no income since the end of 2019. What further support, specifically, can hospitality businesses in the Highlands and Islands access as Scotland moves out of lockdown?

**Fiona Hyslop:** My colleagues Kate Forbes and Fergus Ewing have been providing business support initiatives particularly for hospitality. Funds are available to help to support smaller businesses in the sector that do not pay council tax. Across the hospitality sector, the announcement of the restart grant support, in addition to two extra weeks of the strategic framework business fund support grants, means that in the period of reopening, from 26 April onwards, there should be resources to help the sector.

I appeal to everybody, when they can do so safely, to support Highlands and Islands hospitality with their patronage—people who live locally and those who will be able to travel there after 26 April.

## Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2021

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24395, in the name of Ivan McKee, on the draft Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2021.

15:00

**The Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** The purpose of today's debate on the draft Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2021 is to seek Parliament's approval for the guaranteed allocations of revenue funding to individual local authorities for 2021-22. We also seek agreement to the allocation of additional funding for 2020-21 that has been identified since the 2020 order was approved around this time last year.

Although this is not included in today's order, I take the opportunity to announce that an additional £40 million of general revenue funding will be allocated to local authorities in 2021-22. Councils will have complete autonomy to allocate the extra money based on local needs and priorities in their communities. Distribution will be discussed and agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and local authorities will be notified of their share as soon as possible.

Returning to the order, under the most challenging of circumstances, the 2021-22 budget delivers a fair settlement for local government. Including the additional £40 million of general uplift, the settlement now provides an additional £375.6 million for vital day-to-day services, which is an increase of 3.5 per cent, and a further £259 million of non-recurring Covid-19 consequentials, which local authorities will have complete autonomy to allocate based on the specific needs and priorities in their communities. That builds on the 2020-21 pre-Covid-19 local government finance settlement, which provided an increase in local government day-to-day spending of £589.4 million, or 5.8 per cent compared with the previous year.

In 2021-22, the Scottish Government will provide councils with a total core funding package worth almost £11.7 billion. That includes revenue funding of almost £11.1 billion and support for capital expenditure of more than £600 million. In addition, councils will receive a further £259 million of non-recurring Covid-19 support.

It is important to note that the total of the funding package is no longer up for debate, following the passing of the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill last week. In today's debate, we seek Parliament's

approval for the distribution of the approved total funding to individual local authorities. We seek approval for the distribution and payment of £10.4 billion out of the revenue total of £11.3 billion, with the balance mainly made up of specific grant funding, which is administered separately. The £10.4 billion is a combination of general grant revenue of almost £8.1 billion, the distributable amount of non-domestic rates income, which has been set at almost £2.1 billion, plus £259 million of non-recurring Covid-19 consequentials.

The settlement not only gives local authorities the resources and flexibility to respond to the challenges that the pandemic has created but, importantly, provides continued fiscal certainty that does not exist in England, through our policy of guaranteeing the combined general revenue grant plus non-domestic rates funding as set out in the order. That means that, unlike the position for councils in England, any loss of non-domestic rates income resulting from the impact of Brexit or Covid-19 will be compensated for by increased general revenue grant, which in effect underwrites that critical revenue stream.

As approved as part of the Scottish budget, the overall funding package for 2021-22 includes £134.8 million of general uplift for vital local services; £59 million of revenue to support the final tranche of increased funding for the expansion of funded early learning and childcare entitlement to 1,140 hours; and £90 million to compensate councils for choosing to freeze council tax levels.

It also includes, in addition to the £100 million that is available this year, a further £72.6 million, which will be transferred from the health portfolio to local authorities in-year for investment in health and social care and mental health services that are delegated to integration authorities. That brings the total that will be transferred from the health portfolio to support health and social care integration to £883.6 million in 2021-22.

The funding package for 2021-22 includes the on-going provision of £88 million to maintain the pupil teacher ratio nationally and to secure a place for all probationers who require one under the teacher induction scheme; continued provision of £156 million in support of teachers' pay and £97 million in support of teachers' pensions; an additional £7.7 million of support for inter-island ferries, which brings the total to £19.2 million; £5.3 million for Barclay implementation costs; and £10 million of additional capital funding for flood risk schemes and £12 million for the maintenance of local bridges.

The Scottish Government included £90 million in the local government finance settlement to compensate local authorities in the event that they chose to freeze their council tax at 2020-21 levels.

All local authorities have now taken the decision to freeze council tax levels, thereby helping to provide stability and certainty at a time when so many households in our communities are under financial pressure.

As part of the process of securing support for the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance confirmed that the £90 million to fund the council tax freeze will be baselined for future years, which will protect vital local services and provide assurance for households that they will not be affected by higher increases in future years.

There remains a further £115 million of revenue funding that will be distributed once the necessary information becomes available, and it will be included for approval in the 2022 order. In addition to the revenue funding for which today's order provides, there is £775.9 million-worth of specific revenue funding that is paid directly by the relevant policy areas under separate legislation.

The 2021 order also seeks approval for £1.3 billion of changes to funding allocations for 2020-21. The full list of changes can be found in the report on the 2021 order. Although all those sums have been announced previously, an unprecedented sum of additional funding is being made available to deal with these unprecedented times. That funding includes more than £1.2 billion to address Covid-19 pressures, including the additional £275 million that was announced on 16 February and the £200 million for the lost income scheme. Taken together with the additional £259 million that will be allocated next year and the additional fiscal flexibilities that were announced on 8 October, that brings the value of the overall Covid-19 support package for councils up to almost £2.1 billion.

In summary, next year, the Scottish Government will provide local government with a total of almost £11.7 billion of funding. The funding proposals reflect the key role that local government will play as we focus on how to rebuild and renew our communities. The Scottish Government will continue to work in partnership with local government to improve outcomes through first-class public services as we move towards a healthier, greener and fairer society.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2021 [draft] be approved.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Bill Bowman to open the debate for the Conservatives. This is Mr Bowman's final speech.

15:08

**Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con):**

This is my last speech here, and I would like to say a few words about my time in the Parliament.

I joined the Parliament following a sad event—the untimely passing of Alex Johnstone—and I leave it following the untimely passing of my wife, Helen, last October. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve here, but I will always have bittersweet memories because of those two events.

When I came to this chamber, I was surprised and disappointed to find that not enough attention was paid by Government to parts of my region such as Dundee, Scotland's fourth-largest city, and Angus, the people of which sometimes feel as though they get only scraps from Holyrood's table, so I have done my best to represent those people in this place. That was made possible only on the back of a strong Conservative vote.

It has been my privilege to raise constituents' issues, which I hope has led to real change for some people. I am sure that all my colleagues will agree that casework runs the gamut from the everyday to vast multiagency efforts that take months to resolve, if they can be resolved at all.

There are a number of things that I am proud to have raised—limited only by my recollection and by the time available. They include the issues surrounding "Do not resuscitate" notices and end-of-life care for people during the pandemic; hospital parking, which is still not resolved in Dundee, despite many claims to the contrary; difficulties faced by the erosion of general practice across my region and the centralisation of local services; a child and adult mental health crisis that emerged long before Covid-19; various wrong-headed moves by Dundee City Council, including the so-called shower tax, if members can believe that, and cuts to municipal swimming lessons; the need for Angus Council to keep its recycling centres open, which I pressed the council on; advocacy for pensioners and the need for there to be an understanding of funeral costs for families who may not be able to rely on savings that some take for granted; and the need to make the Scottish Government treat the spiralling incidence of drug deaths as an emergency—I count my work on that as a positive, although it fills me with sorrow to do so.

In my five years in the Parliament, I served first on the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee, under the convenership of my colleague Gordon Lindhurst. I then moved to the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, convened by Jenny Marra, with stand-in parts for Jackie Baillie and Anas Sarwar when she was on maternity leave.



I also served as deputy convener of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit, a body that is probably not so well known to many. As the Parliament's link to Audit Scotland, the commission gave me an interesting insight into how the body that carries out the work of the Auditor General for Scotland functions.

Finally, I was appointed convener of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee. This is a body that is not a headline grabber, but it fulfils a vital function by examining all the powers in a bill that have been delegated to ministers, ensuring that, where strong powers are delegated, strong scrutiny by the Parliament is included. It does so not by telling others what to do, but by influencing by suggestion. It brought about important changes to the recent Covid legislation, and I encourage my successor, whoever that is, to continue the consensual approach that has been so successful up until now.

Since you are in the chair, Deputy Presiding Officer, I should mention that I was also on the committee chaired by you that considered the Solicitors in the Supreme Courts of Scotland (Amendment) Bill, a private bill, which I actually found very interesting—perhaps not everyone did; I see that John Mason is here.

Getting out and about in the North East region to visit organisations and meet constituents was a very rewarding aspect of the job. That is particularly the case when we can help them with the issues that they raise. Those issues tend to involve health boards or councils and, unfortunately, it can take a member of the Parliament's involvement to find a resolution—but that is now for others to resolve.

The Parliament these days is nothing like the one that I joined. The pandemic has virtually emptied this place. I am concerned about how new members will take to the system if it remains so slimmed down. I am sure that that is being considered by parliamentary authorities, but it means that current members who return will have, in my view, an even greater obligation to help bring new members on board in what is a much more virtual Parliament these days.

I thank all the staff I have worked with: my own staff here in Holyrood, my constituency staff, the staff in the Parliament—those who look after our facilities and security and those who work with us in committees and in the chamber. Thank you.

I will briefly say something about the topic of this debate. Although we are disappointed in the settlement, we will support it. With the Scottish budget last week, the Scottish National Party had the chance to put Scotland's recovery first. Unsurprisingly, however, it chose to prioritise another independence referendum. It had the

chance to agree a fair funding deal for cash-strapped councils, awarding them a set proportion of the Scottish Government budget, which was one of the Scottish Conservatives' demands. Instead, Scotland's councils are set to receive a finance settlement uplift of less than 1.5 per cent in 2021-22—

**Ivan McKee:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Bill Bowman:** Of course. How could I resist one last chance to be corrected by Ivan McKee?

**Ivan McKee:** The member will realise, of course, that the proposal by the Conservatives to give local government a fixed percentage of the budget would have meant not only that health spending would be significantly reduced, in particular, during the current Covid pandemic, but that, in certain years, local government's increase would be lower than it has been.

**Bill Bowman:** No, I do not realise that—but I thank Ivan McKee for letting me know.

The SNP Government's total budget has risen to £44.1 billion in 2021-22. In comparison, the total budget for local government is rising to £11.6 billion. Furthermore, the amount of money that the Government gives to local authorities has fallen by about £270 million in real terms since 2013-14. That is despite the SNP Government's budget from the UK Government increasing by more than £1 billion during the same period. Local councils have been betrayed. The SNP has voted against our plans to create a Barnett-style formula to ensure that Scotland's councils get a fair share of the Scottish Government's budget each year, which would give them greater certainty and the ability to plan ahead.

As a result of the pandemic, Scotland's councils are facing a serious budget shortfall. Despite the promise of some extra funding from the SNP, concerns around the settlement remain. The SNP has failed to heed the warnings of the Scottish Conservatives and COSLA, and, as such, has failed to produce a fair funding deal for cash-strapped councils across Scotland.

Despite those funding issues and the critical and challenging operating environment of the past year, key workers across all Scotland's councils have continued to carry out their jobs. I put on record the gratitude of the Scottish Conservatives to local authority key workers, who have continued to carry out their work during these very challenging times.

It has been an honour to serve as an MSP during this session of Parliament and to give my last speech before I stand down. Thank you.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Bowman. I am thrilled that you mentioned the

Solicitors in the Supreme Courts of Scotland (Amendment) Bill Committee—a highlight for both of us.

15:15

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** I offer Bill Bowman my very best wishes on his retirement from the Parliament.

Yet again, local authorities have a settlement that does not meet their needs. If members do not believe me, they should believe the motion that was drafted by COSLA leaders last Friday, which says:

“Leaders express their deep disappointment with the final local government settlement and note that the increase in public pay sector policy with no additional funding for local government and the reprofiling of capital funding for town centres and bridge maintenance over two years instead of the total being available in 2021-22”

means that

“the financial position of local government has effectively worsened compared with the publication of the initial draft budget.”

In the past days, COSLA leaders have asked for a meeting with the cabinet secretary and ministers to discuss what they believe is a gap in public sector pay policy. I hope that the minister will confirm in closing that ministers will agree to meet COSLA leaders about that concerning gap in pay policy.

Since it came to power, the SNP has moved continually to centralise control of local government budgets over the past eight years, and there has been cumulative underfunding of local government. We need a reset of the relationship between central Government and councils in recognition of that cumulative effect over many years. We must push powers down to councils and allow them to decide local priorities, as they are best placed to do so.

The SNP Government has presided over more than a decade of chronic underfunding of our councils. In fact, councils have faced real-term cuts to their core funding of approaching £1 billion over an eight-year period. That has had a direct effect on their ability to continue to provide essential services and protect public sector jobs.

Scottish local authorities also face a continued squeeze on capital resources from the Government in the form of a reduction in the capital budget. It is extremely worrying that that is set to worsen, because there are no increases planned for the next five years, which represents a real-terms cut to capital income. I find that astonishing. Let me be clear: less capital funding means less investment in key infrastructure such as schools, housing, community renewal and

roads—which, for the general public, that means that their potholes will not be filled.

The Scottish Government must leave local authorities in a financial position that helps communities get back on their feet as we emerge from the pandemic. Local authorities have provided vital services throughout this national crisis, distributing financial support to families and businesses in need. COSLA asked for £770 million in additional funding for 2021-22 to deal with Covid, based on local government expenditure last year. The Scottish Government has announced less than half of that, with £259 million in flexible funding. The Covid shortfall against the COSLA ask is a staggering £511 million.

Social care workers have risked exposure to Covid every day for more than a year to care for people who depend on their support. It is time to give them well above the wage that they earn now. During the budget process, Scottish Labour called on the Government to consider a £12 an hour baseline, proceeding to £15 an hour in the next session of Parliament, which would be transformational in terms of the value that we place on our care workers.

We welcomed the cabinet secretary's concession last week to increase the funding allocation for local authorities. However, set against more than a decade of underfunding, £90 million is a drop in the ocean.

Local authorities need consistent, adequate funding so that they can pay for local services. They must have a fiscal framework that ensures that they are able to do long-term financial planning. That framework must include both capital and revenue spend, and its detail should be determined through discussions between the Scottish Government and local authorities. However, a reset of that relationship is urgently needed now.

Due to the general direction of the Scottish Government's funding policy for local government and the long-term implications of continuing to underfund the revenue and capital budget, Scottish Labour will not vote for the order at decision time today.

15:20

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I congratulate Bill Bowman on his final speech and wish him well for the future.

I ask for your forgiveness, Presiding Officer. As we are overrunning slightly, I might need to leave the chamber a few minutes before the end of the debate in order to reach home in time to connect for decision time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You put that so sweetly that I feel that I must accept.

**Patrick Harvie:** I am grateful, Presiding Officer.

Inevitably in such debates, there are those who ask for perfection, and those who defend imperfection as though there is no imperfection. The reality is that, as with several other local government finance orders in recent years, this order is a significant way short of perfect, but progress has been made. As we can see, the general uplift is significantly higher than the non-recurring Covid expenditure that is given to local government, which should be recognised.

Taken together, the additional funding that was announced before the budget and the extra £40 million that the minister mentioned in his speech mean that the gap relating to the impact of the local government pay settlement that will have to be negotiated has been closed somewhat. It is important that we approve the order to make sure that local government has access to the funds that it needs to be provided with.

I will say something about the future. Even before the pandemic, this parliamentary session has been another period of collective failure to reform a broken system of local government finance. After so many elections in which people, including those in parties that won and became the Government, promised the reform of local government finance and a replacement for the council tax, the Greens made serious efforts to try to improve matters and move the issue forward. We tried to bring people around the table to begin to make progress. If it had not been for the pandemic, we would be expecting the publication of a draft bill for consideration in the next session as a result of those cross-party talks. However, the pandemic stalled all of that.

As the Finance and Constitution Committee's report on the budget makes clear, Parliament in the next session will have to take on a deep re-examination of the whole of Scottish tax policy. As the committee's report at paragraph 177 says, we will have to look at

"the breadth and nature of the tax base ... the impact of economic activity on the size of the tax base",

and

"the relationship between local, Scottish and UK-wide taxes."

If we are serious about having tax policy that will both support services—including services at a local level and local autonomy within that—and help to develop a fairer, more equal and sustainable economy in Scotland, it will not be good enough to have yet another session of the Scottish Parliament during which we fail to grapple the admittedly difficult but urgent issue of local tax

reform. That local government simply has to wait for a handout from central Scottish Government should be every bit as unacceptable as it would be if the Scottish Government had to wait for whatever it gets in a grant from the United Kingdom Government.

Back in the days of the single, simplistic block grant, at least there was a framework that said how that block grant should be calculated. Now, we are in a much more complex scenario, and a wider range of taxes is available to us in Scotland. Therefore, we should be pushing that fiscal power down the chain to local government level. If that can be taken on in the next session of the Scottish Parliament, it will be long overdue.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Harvie. You kept within your time.

15:24

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I knew Bill Bowman's wife, Helen. She was a kind and generous woman, and certainly formidable to anybody who met her. I met her as one of my constituents, and I was truly sad when she passed. I wish Bill well in the future, and I am sure that he will continue to make good use of the services of his MSP in his retirement. He can retire from this place knowing that he did his bit in the service of his country. I wish him well for the future.

I also praise local government staff, who have done an exceptional job during the pandemic. They went above and beyond, as usual. They spent extra hours—all weekend, and extra shifts—making sure that money got out the door for businesses and that services were provided when people needed them. We should all recognise that service.

Scottish Liberal Democrats will vote for the order this afternoon, because we supported the budget, with its additional £300 million of extra support for mental health, education, business support, training for the north-east and funding for councils as well as climate. Some of that money is reflected in the order that is before us today, as the minister set out, including £259 million in non-recurring Covid consequentials—the additional £375.6 million and, of course, the further £40 million that he referred to. We support that, because it is important that councils get that funding for such things as the pupil equity fund supplement and the bounceback support for education in schools, but also because it is important that councils get the £90 million in future years as part of the council funding baseline.

I was pleased to see additional support for Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council, as well as for the City of Edinburgh

Council, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council. I presume that, for Orkney and Shetland, that additional funding has been given in part for internal ferry services—something for which my colleagues Tavish Scott, Beatrice Wishart and Liam McArthur have been advocating for some time.

I am also pleased that, for the first time in some years, all councils are above the 85 per cent floor, so I do not have to give my usual speech berating the Government for failing to meet that threshold. I am pleased that it has been met, because councils in the north-east were underfunded for a number of years, and that floor did not protect them.

We also secured in the budget £15 million of additional training support for the north-east, as part of the transition from oil and gas. That was done partly to reflect the fact that that part of the country has not been adequately supported.

I am not as optimistic as Patrick Harvie clearly was about the ability of the council tax reform group to achieve its goals. All he had to do was to look at the face of the minister's predecessor when that group had to be cancelled because of the pandemic—it was a picture of relief. I do not believe that the Government had any intention of reforming the council tax and was only too happy for the group to be abandoned. However, there will be an opportunity in the next session of Parliament to make that change, because council tax needs to be reformed. It needs to be fairer, and we need to provide the extra levers and dynamics needed to raise the appropriate money and give councils responsibility for raising the majority of the money that they spend. We would support some form of land value taxation as part of that, but we need to make sure that we make progress on that and do not let off the hook whoever is in government next time around.

I will not make my final plea, because I am going to conclude my speech on the dot, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** If your final plea is brief, be my guest.

**Willie Rennie:** No; I would not want to encourage that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are content. That is wonderful.

I call the minister, Ivan McKee, to close the debate.

15:28

**Ivan McKee:** I thank all members who have taken part in the debate, albeit that it has been very short. I thank Bill Bowman for his time in the

Parliament, and I wish him all the best in the future.

I also thank local authorities and their staff for the tremendous efforts that they have made throughout a very difficult and challenging time. It is right that we are here to vote for the order that will give them the finance that they need and deserve.

To pick up on Pauline McNeill's point, the letter from COSLA is under active consideration by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, who will respond on those matters shortly.

The motion seeks parliamentary approval for the guaranteed payment through the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2021 of £10.4 billion in revenue support to Scotland's 32 local authorities, to enable them to provide the people of Scotland with the full range of services and support that they expect and deserve. The order distributes £10.4 billion, but that is not the whole story, as it does not cover the £775.9 million of specific revenue grants, which includes funding for the expansion of early learning and childcare, criminal justice, pupil equity funding and additional support for ferries and Gaelic. That represents real money for vital local services, and it should not be discounted when trying to make funding comparisons. That means that, next year, the Scottish Government will provide local authorities with a total funding package worth almost £11.7 billion, delivering an increase of £375.6 million, or 3.5 per cent, for vital day-to-day services.

Further Scottish Government support of £650 million will be paid outwith the local government finance settlement for the attainment Scotland fund, the schools for the future programme and city deals. That money is paid to local authorities, bringing the Scottish Government's total investment to more than £12.3 billion. That investment in public services underpins the Scottish Government's commitment to supporting our young people to fulfil their potential and ensures that the people of Scotland get the right care and support in the right place and at the right time.

In partnership with local government, the Scottish Government will continue to deal with the current crisis and, more important, ensure that we recover from it as quickly and efficiently as possible. I need not remind Opposition members that failure to approve the order would result in Scotland's local authorities and, as a consequence, all our local communities being deprived of almost £2 billion of additional Scottish Government investment, including £1.5 billion to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and £375.6 million for vital day-to-day services.

I encourage Parliament to support the local government finance order.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

## Drug Deaths and Harms

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24396, in the name of Angela Constance, on a national mission to reduce drug deaths and harms.

15:33

**The Minister for Drugs Policy (Angela Constance):** Following the First Minister's announcement in January of a national mission to save and improve lives, I am pleased that we have secured time for this very important debate before the end of the parliamentary session to update Parliament on the work that is being pursued to address rising drug-related deaths, which is Scotland's other public health emergency and Scotland's national shame.

I have spent much of my first few months in post meeting as many people with lived and living experience as possible, hearing first hand what they think my priorities should be. I am now more than ever convinced that we need to be informed in everything we do by those who have the greatest understanding and experience of the current system.

Many of those discussions have stuck with me, such as the one that I had with a group of women who still have a drug dependency but who are managing to engage with treatment services. The message that came through from that group was one of hopelessness; they felt that they had been forgotten about and that their lives did not matter. Although that is difficult to hear, it is vital that we respond in a way that can restore hope to those who most need it, to show that their lives matter and that they are valued as our fellow citizens.

To help with that, I am going to make sure that people are more involved in the decisions that affect them. Learning from what has worked well in other areas, such as the early years collaborative and social security experience panels, I will ensure that local panels of people with lived and living experience are involved in all local decision making, and that a national forum or collaborative is in place to better inform our national mission.

Recovery communities have provided a voice for lived experience and are an effective movement for change, and they can be assured of this Government's continued support and funding. We need to bring together the voices of living experience—those who are still using substances—to help redesign our services in order to reach out to and support more people into treatment. We know that treatment has a

protective factor and that it helps keep people alive.

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** In appointing people to those panels and forums, it is important that we do not just tick a tokenistic box and that we have people who are willing to challenge, have awkward voices and will be very prickly. Ticking the box that says that we have someone with lived experience does not satisfy everyone.

**Angela Constance:** I appreciate the point that Mr Findlay makes. He might not know it, but I, too, appreciate challenging and prickly voices, and I am determined to hear the widest range of voices and views.

To do that, we will bring together existing organisations to provide that voice of lived and living experience for the first time. I believe that that marks a significant new approach in how we reach those who are in need and deliver for them. Lived and living experience will underpin every action that we take. Alongside that, in the year ahead, we will focus on what we already know works. We know that getting more people into treatment or recovery faster, as well as having a wider range of services available in every part of the country, will save lives.

For some people, the right treatment will be residential rehabilitation. In the past two months, an additional £3 million was allocated to alcohol and drug partnerships, in order to immediately increase and improve access to treatment, particularly residential rehabilitation. Information from alcohol and drug partnerships on how that money was allocated is being published this week, and it will show that it has already led to around 150 additional residential placements being funded, with significant investment in aftercare.

However, there is still more to do to meet people where they are, by providing services that offer treatment, on the same day, that works for—not against—individuals. We need no, or low, barriers to care and treatment.

We know that there are alternatives to methadone, which can help save lives. Long-lasting buprenorphine can offer some people a better quality of life and protect them from overdose; it has been used in prisons for almost a year and has been piloted in some areas in the wider community. We will now work with our partners to make that treatment more widely available.

The Glasgow heroin-assisted treatment service has also shown real success. With additional investment in the next financial year, we will build on that service, to make that life-saving treatment more widely available across the country.

Front-line services deliver vital treatment to save lives and we will increase funding to help them increase their capacity and support their workforce.

Crucially, we know that outreach and community services and grass-roots organisations are often more able to reach people whom statutory services struggle to contact. We will increase funding to community and grass-roots organisations to help get more people into treatment faster.

Going forward, the new medication-assisted treatment—MAT—standards will be the linchpin in how treatment is offered. Following consultation, those standards will be published in May. They will be game changing in the way that individuals can access and receive support, particularly because they will help to ensure that more people receive same-day treatment. They will reinforce a rights-based approach by ensuring that individuals have choice in their treatment and are empowered to access the right support for where they are in their recovery journey. We will ensure that those standards are fully embedded across the country by April 2022 and there will be non-fatal overdose pathways in all areas.

The drug deaths task force has been instrumental in driving several projects. Its focus on the wider distribution of life-saving naloxone kits has led to both the Scottish Ambulance Service and Police Scotland running programmes that allow staff to use and distribute kits. A peer-to-peer supply programme is also under way, ensuring that more kits are in the hands of those who need them. Already, we know that kits distributed by the Ambulance Service have helped to save lives.

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The plan sounds very good, especially for same-day treatment, but it also sounds light years away from where we are today. How will the minister ensure that statutory services actually deliver her plan?

**Angela Constance:** I will come on to how the Government will lead the plans at a national level in more detail and how funding will be used as a lever for change.

To go back to the naloxone training, only last week a police officer was able to use their kit—just two hours after being trained—on someone who had had an overdose, thus helping to keep them alive until paramedics arrived. It is vital that we continue to scale up and support those initiatives that will make a tangible difference.

We will continue to push for some of the options that are currently unavailable to us. We know that overdose prevention facilities are an effective and evidence-led option in our fight to save lives. I am determined to overcome the legal barriers that

currently restrict us from establishing such facilities in Scotland and I have a team of officials working to pull together expertise and options.

The priority for the national mission is to embed our emergency work to save lives in wider work to improve lives. Problem drug use is the symptom of much bigger issues. The complex problems that people face must be recognised and tackled. For instance, we know that at least half of all people with problem drug use are likely to have mental health problems. We need to do more to improve integration between mental health and addiction recovery services.

All the actions and work that I have outlined today will be underpinned by strong leadership and the need to work across Government. It is my job as Minister for Drugs Policy to join the dots and drive delivery to the very highest standards. Nothing less than that will be acceptable. To that end, I will create a new ministerial implementation group, which will bring together relevant ministers from portfolios such as mental health, housing, justice, and children and families, alongside senior representatives from organisations that deliver our strategies and services.

We need to hold one another to account for progress. I am working urgently to establish relevant treatment targets that will show the scale of our ambition. We will engage with front-line staff and those with lived experience on that. I will also continue to work closely with our trusted third sector partners, whose experience of delivering services on the front line is invaluable.

To progress the work to reduce deaths and improve lives, we have committed an additional £50 million per year for the next five years. Today, I am announcing four new funds, totalling £18 million, which will open by May 2021, to improve and accelerate treatment and recovery. The funds will be in place for the next five years, to allow services to plan for the future. They will come with built-in support to help people of all backgrounds and levels of expertise to apply for funding and, for lower funding levels, the application process will be less burdensome.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** The minister is aware of my passion to ensure that the third sector is properly funded. How will she ensure that the funding gets to the front line and third sector organisations, which will be crucial to the implementation of her plan?

**Angela Constance:** That is, indeed, of vital importance, which is why specific funds will be available only to third sector and grass-roots organisations.

The first two funds that I will announce build on those that I announced in February. First, the communities fund will be relaunched with easier

access criteria. It will be for community-based projects and will be designed to support people to access treatment and to support communities in offering wraparound support for people in need as a result of drug harms. There will be £5 million available in 2021-22.

The service improvement fund, which will provide another £5 million, will be available to improve treatment and recovery services, including aftercare, and to increase outreach activity. The fund will include dedicated support for initiatives that improve services for women and younger people. There are too few services for those particular groups.

I am also setting up a £3 million children and families fund to help families who face problems in supporting a relative through treatment. The funding will help families to provide support to their loved ones who need care for problematic drug use. Support from their families is one of the most important things that people often need. The fund will help services to become more family aware, and it will help to reduce the number of women who have to worry about losing links to their children because they are accessing treatment.

Finally, I will establish a £5 million recovery and rehabilitation fund to provide additional residential rehabilitation capacity and to support people financially through residential rehabilitation. We know that, because of the lack of clarity in housing benefit guidance, some local authorities do not allow people to retain tenancies that are funded by housing benefit while they are in rehabilitation. We cannot ask people to make an impossible choice between their tenancy and their recovery journey, so the fund will ensure that people no longer have to make that choice.

As I said in my previous speech to the chamber, we know that there is not just one solution to the crisis; there are many. Everything that we do and say must lead to a better-informed debate that knocks down stigma, knocks down obstacles to change and knocks down barriers to treatment and support. Within and outwith the Parliament, we need to find better ways of working together to deliver on the national mission to save and improve lives.

I look forward to listening to members' contributions this afternoon.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises that almost 3,400 people in Scotland have lost their lives to drug misuse in the last three years; believes that this scale of loss of life is not only a tragedy on the friends and families left behind, but is also a mark of shame on the nation; notes the Scottish Government's proposal to lead a national mission to reduce drug deaths and harms, and to agree that this is a public health emergency requiring partnership working and concerted action at all levels of public life, and welcomes

the announcement of significant increased funding to support this national mission to be invested in a range of areas that will have the biggest impact in getting individuals into treatment and keeping them alive.

15:47

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I will be happy to move the amendment in the name of Brian Whittle, which I support and have signed.

I am grateful to be opening the debate for the Scottish Conservatives on this very important issue. Again, I welcome Angela Constance to her role as the Minister for Drugs Policy. I welcome her engagement with Opposition parties, and I acknowledge that she has met me individually.

The Scottish Conservatives look forward to working with all stakeholders as we continue to address the crisis. It is particularly poignant that this subject matter marks what will probably be my last contribution of this session of Parliament, given that my first question to the First Minister, back in October 2016, was on drug-related hospitalisations. At that point, the data showed that the number of acute general admissions was increasing and that about half of the patients who were admitted lived in the 20 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland.

Fast forward to 2021 and the latest data shows that the number of patients in hospital with drug-related conditions sits at a 20-year high. To put that into perspective, in 1998-99, the number of people who were hospitalised with a drug-related condition was 79 per 100,000. In 2018-19—the most recent year for which data is available—that number sat at 192 per 100,000. That is a staggering increase. It shows not only that Governments of all political stripes have comprehensively failed to address the high number of drug-related conditions, but that the problem has worsened since devolution.

Today, we are debating the way forward in order to reduce not only the number of drug-related hospitalisations but the number of drug deaths in Scotland. In its motion, the Scottish Government acknowledges that the high number of drug deaths in Scotland is

“a mark of shame on the nation”

and is

“a public health emergency requiring partnership working and concerted action at all levels of public life”.

I could not agree more.

Indeed, the number of drug deaths has increased from 455—recorded in 2007, when the Scottish National Party Government first took office—to 1,264 in 2019. Let me be clear: every death as a result of drugs is a tragedy; every

death as a result of drugs is a lost family member; every death as a result of drugs is a loss to society. Although I do not want to make too many political points during the debate, it cannot be overlooked that this is a problem that has occurred mainly under the current Government's watch.

In the year of the highest number of drug deaths in the devolution era, we saw underresourced rehabilitation services, long waiting lists for such services and a failure of public policy to get to grips with the issue. In 2019-20, the Scottish Government funded only 13 per cent of residential rehab places in Scotland; alcohol and drug partnerships, self-funding insurance and other means supported the rest. The Government's own report on residential rehabilitation stated that

“the majority of facilities have a waiting list for their services, ranging from a few days to a year.”

It also stated that residential rehabilitation providers found that navigating ADP funding pathways was difficult and took a long time. More than a year after the former public health minister announced the creation of a drug deaths task force, the chief executive of the campaign group Favor said that

“The drug deaths task force insists on pursuing the same failed options that got us into this mess”

and that it needed

“the UK Government to come to the table to discuss sensible solutions, and ... the Scottish Government to start properly funding rehabilitation and recovery programmes.”

The Scottish Conservatives welcome the commitment from the Government to invest £20 million of funding per year for rehab facilities—we had long called for that investment, with the support of groups such as Favor. We equally agree that more funding is required across a range of areas to prevent drug use, provide more effective treatments and save more lives. I welcome that in the Government's motion, too.

The Home Office has also called for widening the availability of medications such as naloxone, which is used to treat overdoses, and methadone, morphine and fentanyl. I know that the task force has made that call as well. We believe that we need to go further and explore and investigate other forms of treatment, including non-pharmaceutical and abstinence-based treatments, and that we should be open-minded about treatments that have been seen to be effective in other countries but might not be available in Scotland—neuroelectric therapy, for example.

We also need to take a radical approach to talking about drugs with young people and children so that we can tackle early drug use. I recently spoke to one Scottish business to provide interactive drug smell education cards to police forces across England and I have been eager to



pilot those in Scotland too. It is clear that we need to be more broad-minded in our approach, given that current initiatives are simply not having the desired outcome. It is also evident that, where possible, we need a UK-wide approach to tackling the supply of drugs that come into the country. More needs to be invested in policing so that we can properly tackle the source of drug consumption.

I welcome the fact that, last year at the UK-wide drugs deaths summit in Glasgow, the UK Government brought together drug recovery experts, health professionals, Government ministers and senior police officers from across the UK, with the intention of boosting collaboration between all levels of Government. We need more, not less, of that cross-Government collaboration. I hope that the Scottish Government reconsiders whether it will sign up to project ADDER—which stands for addiction, diversion, disruption, enforcement and recovery—the UK-wide initiative to find extra resources to dismantle organised criminal gangs and tackle the supply of drugs, while investing money into drug treatment and recovery programmes. I hope that the Scottish Government will join the scheme as part of its wider domestic measures to tackle the drugs crisis.

To further reduce drug deaths in Scotland, we also need to consider how we reduce drug-related harms, too. According to the Hepatitis C Trust, 21,000 Scots are estimated to be chronically infected with hepatitis C, and around 90 per cent of new hepatitis C infections occur through sharing contaminated drug-injecting equipment, which is also partly responsible for the transmission of other blood-borne viruses. Again, we believe that early intervention can reduce transmission, and it is important that the Scottish Government works closely with charities such as the Hepatitis C Trust when developing effective policy.

This is a vital debate, and it is one that must continue into the next session of Parliament. As Neil Findlay said, we need robust and challenging voices when it comes to lived experience, rather than voices that just tick boxes. We need voices such as Neil Findlay's—he is someone who has always challenged orthodoxy and whose voice will be much missed in the chamber. There are no short-term solutions to the drugs crisis that is gripping Scotland, and we must work collectively as one Parliament to tackle the problem head-on and save lives. It is clear that we need greater investment in prevention and treatment and braver and bolder policy that tackles the core causes of drug use.

Politicians from across the spectrum have failed to meet that challenge, as the figures starkly show. We have an opportunity to take Scotland in a new

direction. Let us grasp that opportunity so that, in another 20 years' time, we can look back and say that we all started a conversation, took action and led Scotland out of this crisis.

I move amendment S5M-24396.1, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the Scottish Government's acknowledgement that more should have been done sooner to tackle Scotland's tragic rate of drug deaths; notes the Scottish Government's change in stance towards funding for residential rehabilitation and welcomes the additional £20 million of funding per year for facilities, which the Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly requested; believes that there needs to be more focus on long-term recovery programmes, including non-pharmaceutical and abstinence-based treatments, and calls for easier access to services and cross-portfolio working towards future prevention measures.”

15:54

**James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** There can be no doubt about the devastating scale of the crisis when there were 1,264 drug deaths in the last reported year. The Government is right to acknowledge in its motion that that is a mark of shame. It is a national disgrace and a failure of the devolution era that comes from a number of Administrations, not only the current one.

Victims' families, and those who are affected by the drugs crisis, do not want warm words and platitudes from politicians; they are looking for frank speaking and practical solutions.

I acknowledge that, as justice spokesperson for Scottish Labour in 2009, I endorsed and supported the road to recovery strategy that was introduced by the Government and supported across the Parliament. Sadly, that approach failed. Since then, we have moved to a greater focus on treating drug abuse as a health issue.

In our amendment, Scottish Labour has tried to outline the practical steps that could be taken to address the crisis and to help vulnerable drug users. I note what the minister said about safe consumption rooms, which may offer a positive way forward. Without safe consumption rooms, vulnerable drug users take to the streets, where they use unsafe equipment and are at risk of overdose. That is a dangerous situation when contrasted with a safe facility that is clean and monitored and where people can receive appropriate counselling.

Some of our recent debate about this has become bogged down in constitutional issues. There must be a will on all sides to find solutions so that we can move forward and provide facilities that ultimately save lives.

It is right that we have developed a health approach to the problem in recent years. However, we must also acknowledge the issues with how

the criminal justice system treats vulnerable drug users. The focus is all wrong. A vulnerable drug user does not need to appear in court before a sheriff; they need help from dedicated NHS professionals. The resources and policies of our prosecution service should be examined to ensure that people are not being taken through the criminal justice system if that will adversely affect their lives and their potential outcomes.

However, that approach should not exempt drug dealers from prosecution. Dealers heap misery on communities and cause many of the problems that we have seen. The police and prosecutors should continue to rigorously pursue dealers.

I welcome the minister's announcement of funding for rehabilitation and treatment. That is essential. We should extend the use of drug treatment and testing orders and there should be appropriate support for rehabilitation and aftercare services.

It is important to give proper financial and practical support for same-day prescribing of medication-assisted therapies, so that those in need of them can get them immediately and start to try to benefit from them. As the minister said, more than half of drug users suffer from mental health problems, so there need to be stronger ties between mental health services and support for those who suffer from substance abuse.

The other important point that I would make is about how all this moves forward in relation to not just the development of policy but its implementation. The minister said that there will now be a cross-cutting approach that involves different portfolios. It is absolutely essential, as Neil Findlay acknowledged, that those with proper experience and those who will ask tough questions are involved. There is a lot of expertise there.

There are issues around the timescale. One of the issues in recent years has been that the Government has been too slow to react. There is a lot of good in the minister's announcement, but we need to take these issues forward at pace.

On the Labour side of the chamber, both Neil Findlay and Jenny Marra will make their final contributions today, after 10 years as MSPs. They have contributed significantly to the Parliament on a range of issues, and they have both been powerful voices in the drugs debate. Although this is their final debate, I am sure that they will continue to contribute on this issue. The Government would do well to draw on their expertise.

It is essential that we have practical solutions and funding—we have heard about some of that today—but we also need timelines for how the issue will be taken forward. The scale of the crisis

means that it has affected so many people, and the Government and the Parliament have let so many people down. We need urgent action, and I welcome the fact that there is support for that from all parties.

I move amendment S5M-24396.3, to insert at end:

“; acknowledges that additional resources are necessary after years of funding cuts to services; supports the use of public health interventions such as safe consumption facilities to prevent overdoses and save lives; considers that the resources of the police and criminal justice system should be focused on preventing supply of harmful drugs in Scotland's communities and ensuring that vulnerable drug users are not exposed to unnecessary court action; notes that the scale of drugs deaths in Scotland is the highest in the UK, and believes that, as well as preventing deaths, there is a need to deliver improvements in treatment options and the availability of same-day treatment for those who seek help with substance misuse.”

16:02

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I will start where James Kelly concluded and acknowledge the contribution that Jenny Marra and Neil Findlay have made to the debate. I very much look forward to hearing their speeches in due course.

As James Kelly's amendment reminds us, we entered this parliamentary session with a 22 per cent cut to drug and alcohol partnership budgets. Services and expertise that people relied on were surrendered.

The narrative and perspective at the outset of the session were damaging, too. There was a fatalism. It was often said that these were not well people; that deaths were the legacy of aging drug users, as though there was nothing that could be done; and that this was the so-called “Trainspotting” generation, proving hard to reach. The cruel reality is that many of those dying were not even born when “Trainspotting” came out.

Now, in the last days of the session, there is an opportunity to reflect and try to set the Parliament on a better course in the next session. The motion is candid, but there can be no other conclusion. The past five years has been a collective failure. The official records tell of 4,253 lives lost since 2016—the final toll is likely to be greater still. The pain that will be felt by families and friends will remain very raw, and I add my condolences to those expressed by colleagues. People are dying preventable deaths three, four, five and sometimes even six decades before their time. We owe it to all of them to drop any lingering excuses—there are none—and to do everything possible to turn the situation around. “Everything possible” will need to include some things that we are still told are impossible.

I think that Peter Krykant has helped to prove that—one man, going out, day after day, determined to save lives. He did not care about the consequences that he might face by doing that; he cared about the consequences for others if he did not.

If my amendment sounds familiar to members, it is because it is virtually word for word the one that Alex Cole-Hamilton lodged 14 months ago. On that day, it gathered the support of only the Liberal Democrats and Labour colleagues. I am returning to Parliament hopeful of a different outcome this time round.

We have asked the new Minister for Drugs Policy to look afresh at all our proposals, and I hope that she will see their merits. Indeed, in January, the First Minister announced that additional funding would be made immediately available to make heroin-assisted treatment services more widely accessible across the country. The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh is calling for such services to be made available in all major centres. There are people across Scotland who cannot afford to wait.

Turning to the second part of my amendment, I am asking for Parliament to agree to what I believe is an important principle: that people in possession of drugs for personal use should be diverted into treatment and that prison is not the place for vulnerable people whose crime is to be gripped by addiction. We could not secure agreement for that on 30 January 2020. From what we could tell, the Government was nervous about the precise wording, keen not to step on the Lord Advocate's toes. Please forgive us for being slightly surprised when, only five days later, the Government was arguably doing just that in the *Daily Record*.

Scottish Liberal Democrats have been highlighting the pilots in Durham and Thames Valley for some time—schemes that have been badged as “de facto decriminalisation”. However, in the article, the minister was quoted as saying:

“I think the Lord Advocate will be influenced by the evidence”.

I welcome the work of the *Daily Record*. It has campaigned hard for changes to our drug policies, to target the dealers and get people into treatment. Putting aside disagreements over how it is done, Parliament could at least agree to that decriminalisation principle today.

The police are asking for change. Assistant Chief Constable Steve Johnson gave devastating evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee in July 2019. He told MPs:

“It is just a matter of time: they come through the custody door, they get processed through the criminal justice process, they go in through the Sheriff Court, they go into

prison. Of those people that come out of prison, 11% of them will die within the first month of having been released ... the police officers get used to this carousel, this sense of hopelessness and helplessness. The first duty of every police officer is to preserve life and when people do not come back through the doors with that alarming frequency, it is probably because the person is dead. It is not because there has been a successful intervention through the criminal justice process. That is a sense of foreboding within law enforcement.”

Members can understand why the assistant chief constable was urging “courage”.

During this debate, we are all looking at what can be salvaged from, frankly, five terrible years. It will always be for the incoming Government to progress its agenda, but such a statement in favour of decriminalisation from the outgoing Parliament would be difficult to ignore.

I move amendment S5M-24396.2, to insert at end

“; calls on the next Scottish administration to coordinate a plan for a Scotland-wide network of heroin-assisted treatment facilities, and agrees to work towards diverting people caught in possession of drugs for personal use into treatment and ceasing imprisonment in these cases, helping save lives.”

16:08

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I confirm the Scottish Greens' support for the Government motion, with its frank admission of failure with regard to drug deaths. That is, indeed, “a mark of shame” on our nation. It is vital that we build consensus around a national commitment to deal with drug deaths. We are in an emergency. In that spirit, we will support the Labour and Lib Dem amendments, too.

However, I must underline clearly the views of the Scottish Green Party. In 2016, we stood on a manifesto that said:

“We believe that the criminalisation of drug use creates more harm than having managed and regulated supplies. It ties up much police time”

and it is clear that

“decades of effort have failed to eradicate drug use from society.”

Although I, too, welcome increased investment in rehabilitation, we cannot support the Conservative amendment, which may even unintentionally stigmatise important pharmaceutical interventions.

As colleagues have noted, 1,264 people lost their lives to a preventable fatal drug overdose in 2019. I express my condolences to everyone who has lost a loved one to drug use.

The Scottish Greens have always been clear that this is a public health emergency. We cannot arrest our way out of the drug deaths crisis; we

need to help people to manage their drug use rather than punish them for it. The punitive approach has led to stigma. People who use drugs may be subject to multiple stigmas, including those associated with HIV status, homelessness and mental health conditions. We have a long way to go before public services and wider society are inclusive of people who use drugs, especially while the trauma of criminalisation is still being inflicted on them. I have previously spoken in the chamber about the pejorative language that too often—and flippantly—is used to describe people who are still marginalised and neglected by wider society. Language matters. Drug users are members of our society and part of our communities, so we must value them as such.

Locally, great work is being done to reduce stigma, including around the illnesses that are frequently associated with drug use. I again highlight the excellent work of the Edinburgh access practice, which provides care for people who experience difficulty in accessing primary healthcare, including drug users. It is estimated that around 21,000 people in Scotland are chronically infected with hepatitis C and that around 90 per cent of new infections occur through sharing contaminated drug-injecting equipment. We have the opportunity to eliminate hepatitis C in a matter of years. However, despite a dramatic increase in the numbers of those completing treatment for such an infection, one in five people in Scotland who inject drugs has hepatitis C. We therefore need a focus on evidence-based harm reduction services such as needle and syringe programmes if we are to achieve elimination.

Other countries have shifted their focus to harm reduction. In Portugal, authorities have adopted a social inclusion model. Those who are referred to the programme are offered integrated out-patient treatment that addresses the individual's physical, psychological and social needs. People who are dependent on drugs are encouraged to seek treatment, but they are rarely sanctioned if they choose not to. In Portugal, decriminalisation is not promoted as the sole response; it is complemented by the allocation of greater resources across the drugs field, and the expansion and improvement of prevention treatment, harm reduction and social reintegration programmes. The introduction of such measures coincided with an expansion of the Portuguese welfare state, including the establishment of a guaranteed minimum income. Although anyone can be affected by drug use, there is a clear link between it and deprivation. In 2019, more than half the deaths of homeless people in Scotland were drug related. We must address that if we are to take a preventative approach.

My colleagues Patrick Harvie and John Finnie have previously written to the Lord Advocate to urge him to use his authority to exempt from prosecution life-saving services such as safe drug consumption rooms. In the past, Lord Advocates have used their discretion to ensure that prosecutions are not brought on issues when doing so would clearly be at odds with the public interest. Such discretion was used in the recent past when homosexual sex was still criminalised. The current Lord Advocate has published prosecuting guidelines in relation to the use of naloxone. However, in his reply to my colleagues he said that that

“is quite different from providing a statement of prosecution policy of general application”.

That is disappointing, as establishing safe consumption facilities could play a significant role in reducing drug-related deaths and other serious harms such as the transmission of disease. The Lord Advocate has the power to act now, and I urge him to use his public interest discretion to ensure that no health professional would face prosecution for providing life-saving health interventions.

I appreciate what colleagues have said on this issue, too, and I look forward to working with them to push it forward. Access to treatment must be improved. Scotland has a low rate of people in treatment: only 35 to 45 per cent of people who could be protected from death and other harms by being in treatment are actually in it, compared with a figure of 60 per cent in England. We are also poor at keeping people in treatment.

Presiding Officer, I appreciate that I am over my time. I, too, am very much looking forward to the contributions of Jenny Marra and Neil Findlay on this issue. As others have noted, these will be their final contributions, so it is fitting that they, too, are taking part in the debate.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Thank you, Ms Johnstone. Yes, that is fitting. I am conscious that this might be Maureen Watt's final speech, too. I call her now.

16:14

**Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. When I put my name forward to speak in the debate, I did not think that this might be my last speech in the chamber. As a member of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, I have been fully involved in helping my friend Emma Harper to get her bill on worrying of livestock through, and I thought that I might speak in the stage 3 debate on it next week, but we will see. I will have some valedictory remarks to make at the end of my speech.

**The Presiding Officer:** Ms Watt, will you lift your microphone up, please? I think that it is bent down.

**Maureen Watt:** Yes. I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer. I hope that you heard that first bit.

It struck me, when I was preparing for this debate, that my first speech in Parliament, which I gave in committee room 2 because a beam had come down in the chamber, was on drug harm. It is a real coincidence that I am finishing by speaking on the same subject.

We have made some significant changes and progress since then, not least in that drug harm was still a justice issue back then. Now, it is a health issue. It is really important that we have made that change, because all the other devolved Administrations and the Republic of Ireland have done so, too. At meetings of the British-Irish Council that I have attended, it has struck me that the UK Government at Westminster is the only one that is living in the past and still regards the subject as a justice issue.

As other members have said, the number of drug-related deaths in Scotland is totally unacceptable, and it brings an equivalent unacceptable level of sadness and pain to families and friends. However, if the solutions that will reduce the toll were easy, they would have been introduced by now. The issue is so wrapped up with people's living conditions, their poverty, their lack of ambition and their inability to see any way out of the conditions that they are in. In order to find the solutions, we need to understand the situation of every drug addict and know what has led to every drug death that occurs. Nevertheless, I have been heartened by reading the briefing from the Scottish drug deaths task force, because it is clear that it recognises that. It focuses on emergency responses.

I am pleased to have worked with families in the north-east who have seen the benefits of naloxone use and have been vocal in spreading the message about its worth. Every addict and their family and friends should have naloxone to hand and should know how to use it.

On the subject of reducing risks, I cannot for the life of me understand why the UK Government prevents us from introducing safe injecting centres. The opposition to them is ideologically driven and shows how we can and must do better with our own powers. The existence of such centres has been proved to work in other countries, so, with our having such a problem here, we need that tool, too.

In that first debate that I spoke in, as now, everyone recognised that residential facilities can provide a way off drugs, but that they must be

shown to work in the longer term by enabling people to develop the resilience and resistance that they need in order to cope when they are back in their communities.

Early intervention and prevention are also key, as is education from an early age on the dangers of substance misuse. It is important that children who live in households where there is substance misuse are identified early and given the necessary support.

There are third sector organisations that do excellent work in the area, and they need financial stability to continue their work. Organisations such as Alcohol & Drugs Action in Aberdeen play a key role in being available to provide immediate pathways when addicts need and feel that they are ready to ask for help.

As James Kelly and others have said, many people who suffer with drug addiction also have mental health problems, and their issues must be tackled in tandem at all levels, including in primary care.

In my speech in that earlier debate, I drew on my experience as a prison visitor. As a former criminal justice social worker, the minister also knows how vital it is that people who enter prison with an addiction are not released without ongoing support in which accommodation and training opportunities are mapped out. The cases of prisoners being released and finding the doors of temporary accommodation shut are just not acceptable.

I have the utmost respect for workers in drug action. Their expertise and importance needs better recognition by all, including local health and social care partnerships. Not least among those workers are peer support workers who, having experience of addiction, have the respect and confidence of those who are now trying to escape that scourge. I hope that some of the extra funds might be channelled in their direction.

It has been the privilege and joy of my life to be able to represent, first, the people of the whole north-east and, latterly, from 2011, the wonderful folk of Aberdeen South and North Kincardine. It is a very diverse constituency that includes many people who are involved in the oil and gas industry, as I was previously. I am delighted to have been a co-convenor of the cross-party group on oil and gas and to have promoted the contribution of that vital industry. People in the industry can lead Scotland past peak oil and into the new era of alternative energy. The workforce have the skills and ingenuity to transition to green energy and to make Aberdeen the all-energy capital of Europe.

It was beyond my wildest imagination that five of my 15 years in the Parliament would involve

-serving in a ministerial capacity. Having raised the profile of Doric on my first day, I was able to embed in curriculum for excellence the use of all Scotland's languages in the school curriculum. As Minister for Public Health, I set up Food Standards Scotland, with its headquarters in Aberdeen, introduced the duty of candour into the health service and launched the out-of-hospital cardiac arrest strategy, which has resulted in more than half a million of our population being trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and able to save so many lives.

Finally, I was the first-ever dedicated Minister for Mental Health, which was so novel that the World Health Organization's mental health forum held one of its few meetings outside the US here, in Scotland, to see what we were doing in the field of mental health. The approach involved prioritising parity of esteem between physical and mental health and the need to look at the whole person, which is as important in relation to reducing drugs harm as it is anywhere else.

None of that work would have been possible without my teams of staff over the years, five of whom—well, four plus a son—have gone on to elected office, either in the Scottish Parliament or at Westminster. Unfortunately, they are all men, but that is changing. I helped to encourage Gillian Martin to stand to become a member, and she and I are mentoring women who, I hope, will be here in the next session of Parliament.

I thank the ministerial office staff and other civil servants, who display the utmost dedication to their ministers and to their work. I also thank the clerking teams and all the other Parliament staff who make the work here run smoothly and effectively.

I thank my totally supportive but long-suffering family, and I look forward to seeing them in London and Paris with my husband, when I am able to do so. I do not like the word, but I have lots to do in retirement, although I will miss the camaraderie of colleagues from across the chamber.

During the past session more than ever, I have been struck by how fragile democracy is here, in the United Kingdom, and not just in other countries throughout the world. It ill behoves people who come and sit as members in this place to be prepared, at the same time, to rubbish devolution and to diminish and demean the Parliament by their behaviour. It is important that, as well as new members learning from the induction that is given by the Parliament, political parties induct and mentor their new members on policies and procedure, and on the behaviour that is expected in this place. That is what our electors expect, and they deserve no less.

I am totally hopeful that the Parliament and the Government will continue to lead in so many ways and that they will soon soar in an independent Scotland. [*Applause.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much indeed, Ms Watt.

16:24

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** I, too, wish Maureen Watt, Jenny Marra and Neil Findlay all the best for the future.

As this parliamentary session draws to a close, I am reminded that one of my first speeches as an MSP was on drug use in Scotland. Looking out of my window from my home in Springburn, I saw at first hand the impact that the drug deaths crisis had on the victims, their families and the wider community.

Back then, the scale of the emergency was clear, and it demanded immediate action if we were to stem the flow of drug deaths. However, such action was not forthcoming, and the emergency has been allowed to emerge as a full-scale crisis.

It is clear that a comprehensive plan is required to tackle a crisis that, to our country's shame, has robbed people of their lives well before their time. We owe it to the victims of drug deaths to do better. Therefore, although a national plan is necessary, it is long overdue and, in many victims' cases, it has come far too late.

We cannot ignore the fact that the drug deaths crisis has significantly worsened in recent years, nor can we ignore who bears the responsibility for that. The Government has admitted that much more could have been done to prevent Scots from losing their lives to drugs; I welcome that acknowledgement.

The statistics do not lie. They paint a stark picture: the drug deaths rate across Scotland has more than doubled since the SNP came to power in 2007. Let us take the example of my home city of Glasgow. In 2007, 147 drug deaths were recorded in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board area, but if we fast forward to 2019, we find that a staggering 404 such deaths were recorded in that year alone.

Glaswegians always pride ourselves on our city's famous motto, "People make Glasgow". However, the reality is that those words ring hollow for people who are addicted to drugs in Scotland's largest city, because those men and women are being badly let down by the Government's handling of the crisis.

The same story is being repeated time and again across Scotland, as the crisis deepens. How

on earth have we arrived at a point at which the drug deaths rate in Scotland is now three and a half times the rate in the rest of the UK, which is not to mention its being the worst in Europe?

I have always said on drug deaths that actions speak louder than words. My main frustration has been that, even though it has identified problems, the Government has been far too slow to act on them. Residential rehab is a case in point. Conservative members, alongside community groups such as FAVOR—Faces and Voices of Recovery—Scotland, have repeatedly urged the Government to fund rehabilitation and recovery programmes to the hilt. That can hardly be said to have been the case in recent years as, in 2019-20, the SNP Government funded a mere 13 per cent of residential rehab places.

I say to members that rehabilitation services save lives. That is why, last year, the Scottish Conservatives called on the SNP to properly fund residential rehab to the tune of £20 million per year in order to guarantee that those services would be equipped to support users when they most need professional help. Although I was delighted that the First Minister finally listened to our calls by pledging £20 million in January, the announcement was well overdue.

The minister has said that no part of Scotland can be left behind in tackling the drug deaths crisis. As someone who comes from a city where drug deaths have historically been higher than in other areas of Scotland, I agree with her, but I return to my original point: we need action, not promises. As with many other policy areas, I remain concerned that, for members of the SNP Government, their heads and focus remain elsewhere.

With fatalities as high as they are in Scotland, it can be easy to let the people who are at the heart of the crisis become statistics, figures or something to be analysed. We must not forget that each person who tragically loses their life to drugs is someone's parent, child or close friend.

One day it will, we hope, as with the pandemic, be possible for us to look back on the drug deaths crisis as a thing of the past, but if we are to get there, we need a Government that is bold and willing enough to confront the challenge head-on.

16:29

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I offer warm thanks to Maureen Watt. She has been very supportive and helpful to me during this session, including on my Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill, which she mentioned. I wish her well in the future.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate. Each and every drug-related death is a tragedy, and I offer my condolences to the family, friends and loved ones of those who have lost their lives.

I have been working on drug policy and drug deaths in Scotland since my election. As deputy convener of the Health and Sport Committee, I had the opportunity to participate in the Scottish Affairs Committee's 2019 inquiry into drug-related deaths in Scotland. The inquiry heard directly from support agencies, health services, academics, those with lived experience and families. In her opening remarks, the Minister for Drugs Policy highlighted the need to listen to those with lived and living experience.

All the witnesses before the select committee agreed that urgent reform is needed to reduce drug deaths in Scotland and across the UK. The inquiry heard from experts from Portugal, Germany and Canada in order to examine the evidence on taking a progressive public health approach, not a punitive criminal approach, to tackling problem drug use. Maureen Watt spoke about that, too. Drug deaths and addiction in those countries have reduced significantly, including by as much as 40 per cent in Canada.

The inquiry recommended that possession of personal amounts of drugs should be decriminalised and said that the UK Government must urgently introduce legislation to devolve powers in this area to the Scottish Parliament, allowing Scotland to take its own approach to drug addiction, including through the establishment of safe consumption rooms, for which I and others have been campaigning. Safe consumption rooms save lives, yet the UK Government continues to oppose giving Scotland the power to establish them.

Such reforms would prevent people such as Peter Krykant—whom I met outside Parliament before the Christmas recess with my colleague Stuart McMillan—from potentially taking criminal action. Peter wants to support people by giving them a safe environment in which to use substances, so that they cannot be judged when doing so. That could be a first step for addicts in asking for help.

Reform of reserved Westminster legislation is one tool in the toolbox that could be employed to tackle harmful drug use, and I am keen to hear what the minister thinks about that.

Back in 2018, with the organisation's chief executive, Colin Crosbie, I helped to plant a tree to mark the opening of River Garden Auchincruive near Ayr. It is a third sector residential training and development centre for people recovering from drug or alcohol addiction and harmful use. The

River Garden team do amazing work, and the organisation is a great example of what is possible.

However, to defeat drug addiction, we need more than residential rehabilitation. Tackling drug and alcohol addiction requires multimodal work and a toolbox with many different tools designed to meet different needs. The minister has spoken about that today and previously.

I welcome our First Minister's announcement of additional funding of £250 million for drug services, with £5 million available now to support immediate and urgent action.

I also welcome the publication of the drug deaths task force's plan, which builds on six strategies and includes a 2020 to 2022 timeline across three focus areas: emergency response, such as preventing fatal overdose by targeting distribution of naloxone, reducing risk and reducing vulnerability.

When I spoke recently to Grahame Clarke, who is the lead for the alcohol and drug service in Dumfries and Galloway, he described the in-depth work that he and his team are already engaging in. That includes assertive outreach and exploring how they can disrupt street benzodiazepines, which is one of the challenges for our rural area. The team is really keen to see how it can tackle that. I look forward to meeting Grahame and the minister next Tuesday, and I thank the minister for finding time ahead of recess to meet me to consider the challenges for rural parts of Scotland.

Both Colin Crosbie and Grahame Clarke have said that tackling stigma is a huge part of the action that needs to be taken, and I welcome anything that we can do on that.

I welcome the swift action that the First Minister and the Minister for Drugs Policy have taken so far. I ask for a commitment from the minister that the new policy approach will ensure that rural parts of Scotland are absolutely included, considered and listened to.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Neil Findlay, to be followed by Bob Doris. As members have noted, this may be Neil Findlay's last substantive contribution.

16:34

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** He was in Polmont twice: for 10 days at the age of 16, and then for seven months at the age of 17. He got more drugs in prison than he did in the community. He took an allergic reaction in prison—his mouth swelled up, but he was left that way. His lawyer had to write to the governor to ask for better care. He had brittle asthma. At times, due to staff shortages, he was locked up for 23 hours at a

time, with little outside time for fresh air. He needed rehab and treatment instead of being locked up. He died on Tuesday, aged 20, at Carmondean in Livingston, in my and the minister's constituency, having used heroin and benzodiazepine. He was one of the three people to die a preventable death in Scotland that day.

We have the worst drugs death rate in the developed world—worse than that of the US. That is a shameful, damning indictment of 20 years of this institution being in control of justice and health policy. The Government cut the drugs budget and then wondered why the number of deaths rose. Peter Krykant is forced to go out each day in an auld van that he had to buy at his own expense to save lives, while ministers pretend that they are powerless to provide the same services and engage in constitutional games.

The simple fact is that people cannot access the services that they need. The waiting time for an appointment to see a psychologist in Lothian is between 18 and 24 months just now; it is supposed to be 18 weeks. Are we not all ashamed of what is happening on the streets, yards from us, in every one of our constituencies? We bloody well should be.

It was watching Thatcher's class war against communities like mine that sparked my political interest and awakening. Today, in those very same communities, working-class lives are ending unnecessarily because of a failed drugs policy. Think of all the families who have lost a child or a partner, lying in a manky alleyway with a needle in their arm or a fake benzo in their belly—and then think of the footballer, the nurse or the tradesperson that they could have been. Think of that waste of talent—of the deaths of people like me, my family, my pals and my community. That is what drives my campaigning on this. I have said it many times, but if this carnage was happening in the leafy suburbs or commuter villages, it would have been sorted a long time ago.

There will be no political leaders canvassing homeless drug users, and they will not be in here getting canapés and warm wine. But we will walk past them on the way to the train tonight—I will—and the minister and her colleagues will drive past them on their way home in their ministerial cars. We need a revolution in drugs policy: decriminalisation, massive investment in care and treatment, and an all-out attack on the inequalities that feed despair and hopelessness. If we do not have that revolution, the bodies will pile higher and higher and higher.

With your indulgence, Presiding Officer, I will say a wee bit about my time in Parliament. I have to say that no-one was more surprised than me when I made it through the Labour Party vetting process, never mind got elected. People from the



left were not particularly welcome then; I am not sure that they are particularly welcome now. I had been in this building only twice before becoming an MSP, and the only MSP I knew was my pal Elaine Smith, but I made a pledge to have a go, and others can decide whether I succeeded.

I thank my parliamentary team of Caitlin, Mary Theresa, Jordan, Mhari and Tommy—they are wonderful colleagues and friends. I also thank my family and pals, who have kept my feet firmly on the ground, and my wife, Fiona, and daughter, Chloe.

I do not think that it is a surprise to anybody that I have enjoyed myself most when on the back benches, working with, for example, the magnificent Scottish mesh survivors. Together, we secured a suspension and a fund to support injured women.

I also worked with the Scottish miners and secured the independent review and a commitment to a pardon after almost 40 years. I worked with the families of the children who will continue to use the children's ward at St John's because we prevented its downgrading. I worked with the communities that successfully stopped the expansion of Edinburgh airport's flight path. I worked with the blacklisted construction workers—this week, we mourn the loss of Francie Graham, who was a stalwart of the campaign.

I worked with the then political editor of the *Daily Record*, David Clegg, to convince the newspaper to take up the cause of drugs, and to go a step further and call for decriminalisation. I am so pleased that it did so, as it has been very influential.

I have enjoyed every day that I called for well-funded, publicly owned services and an end to the madness of privatisation; every day that I worked with the families of care home residents, exposing the human rights abuse of our older people; every day that I worked with the trade unions; and every day that I represented my constituents on a huge range of issues.

I even enjoyed the 60-odd public meetings at which I spoke during the independence referendum, arguing for devo max. I will continue to argue that that is the best option for Scotland's future.

I enjoyed chairing my friend Jeremy Corbyn's two leadership campaigns in Scotland—by God, how I wish we had won the 2017 election and radically changed our country for the better.

I even enjoyed standing for Labour leader—well, we have all had a go at some point—on a socialist platform. I enjoyed the times that I screwed up by sending my entire budget speech to Derek Mackay minutes before the budget or sending

everybody in the Parliament a reply to a confidential email from Mike Russell. Information technology was never my strong point.

I have a saying that a person cannot be a socialist and a pessimist. I remember using that line in a debate and David McLetchie intervening to ask, "Well, if that is the case, why do you all look so bloody miserable?" I liked debating with McLetchie. However, I am not miserable and I am not pessimistic. More than ever, I believe that socialism is the answer to the biggest questions that we have to deal with: poverty, climate change, hunger, conflict and exploitation. It is because of free-market capitalism that we are here, on the precipice of a disaster for our planet. Those questions can be addressed only by a planned economy, public ownership and international solidarity. Irrespective of our political views, we are all brothers and sisters, and we have as much of a duty to feed and educate a child in war-torn Yemen as we do a child in the school next door, but those principles are alien to anyone who believes in capitalism.

I make a plea to those who follow me: speak up, challenge others and your own party, be awkward, do not accept the line that that is how it has always been done, take up issues, do not be afraid to be rebuffed, and come back again with the same issue until you win. Finally, I say to them, "Enjoy yourself"—I certainly have. [Applause.]

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Findlay. I am glad that I did not pick you up on your bad language in the earlier part of your speech.

16:43

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** Neil Findlay has just demonstrated why he will be a major loss to this place. I hope that we can welcome him back. I hope that he does not mind me saying so, but, despite our different constitutional views, I hope that we can welcome him back to an independent Scottish Parliament. He would be an asset in an independent Parliament, for sure. I wish him good luck in the future.

My friend and colleague Maureen Watt made a wonderful and emotional speech, and she will be a great loss to this place. I thank her for her years of service. I will be in the chamber for Jenny Marra's final speech, which I look forward to. I thank them all for their contributions to our national endeavour.

I want to contribute to the debate because I see it as an opportunity to move the political debate on our drugs death crisis to a place where it will become a national endeavour for us all. The debate is on a national mission to reduce drug

deaths and harms. I do not suggest that, in doing so, we should somehow ease up the scrutiny of the Scottish Government—quite the reverse. It has been acknowledged, rightly, by the First Minister that we should have done more to tackle the drugs death crisis. It is right that we acknowledge that as a mark of shame on the nation, and the way forward for us all would be to plot that way together.

There is now consensus that there needs to be significant additional access to residential rehabilitation across Scotland. I acknowledge that there will be a significant expansion of such beds. I had called for that for some time, as had Opposition parties. It will now happen, and can happen at speed—we heard the minister say that, in just two months, with a £3 million investment, 150 more people have benefited from residential rehabilitation. That is a remarkable achievement in such a small period of time, albeit that it is not anywhere near enough. I am interested in knowing more about the timeline for progress in expanding it further, and about how we will monitor outcomes. By that, I mean the impacts on how we can save lives and improve the quality of life not just of those who are living with addiction, but of their families, given the scarring effects on those families.

I think that the minister said that MAT standards would be embedded around April 2021; I must find out more about them. National standards for accessing a range of supports and treatments—including, of course, residential rehabilitation—would be incredibly welcome.

Some who have been designing and delivering services for some time have not always seen residential rehabilitation as a priority. That is self-evident; why else would ADPs have reduced the commissioning and delivery of such beds so dramatically? However, we have to come together, irrespective of our previous positions, and make things work. ADPs can rise to that challenge. They can embrace a rejuvenated investment in such beds; they can also embrace grass-roots organisations, which have authenticity and lived experience, and help to fund and empower them to do their great work in communities. For example, Sisco—Sustainable Interventions Supporting Change Outside—which the minister has met with me, is a strategic partner of Glasgow's ADP, and I hope that it will secure funding via the Corra Foundation for its excellent work in prisons. Following other funding initiatives that were announced today, I very much hope that it will get additional funds in the future for its work in the community. It advocates for those who are living with or have been scarred by addiction.

Those who are striving for recovery often feel that their treatment choices are simply denied to

them. I am thinking of a constituent who came to me just a few weeks ago with mental health issues. They had been trying to get themselves off methadone by reducing their dose themselves. They were really struggling and wanted prescription benzodiazepines—diazepam—to support and stabilise them. They were refused a prescription for that, so their only option was to increase their dosage. That was not what they wanted. Where were the treatment choice, options and empowerment for that person? We have to empower people along the way in their treatment.

In the brief time that I have left, I will mention a good friend of mine, the Rev Brian Casey, minister of Springburn parish church, who talks about truth and reconciliation and about helping communities. I will very briefly quote him. He talks about South Africa; that is why I mentioned truth and reconciliation. One of the things that helped the healing process to begin there was the truth and reconciliation commission headed by Archbishop Tutu. The families of the murdered and the brutalised came face to face with those in the security forces who had committed the crime.

Testimony, documented evidence and hearing their story repeated can be just as powerful for those who have their lives scarred and destroyed by drug addiction in our communities. Mr Casey thinks that we should be documenting that narrative and capturing those stories. I agree with him. We have to find a way not just for getting those who are living with addiction into recovery, but for the recovery of communities who have been so scarred by addiction.

I know that the minister's diary will not let her meet Mr Casey during this session of Parliament. However, it will not surprise you, Presiding Officer, that I hope that Angela Constance will be in the same post in just a few weeks, and I look forward with hope to meeting her with Mr Casey to talk about his ideas about that national reconciliation—the truth and reconciliation that can help our communities to recover.

16:49

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** I congratulate Maureen Watt on her final speech and on her service to the north-east over many years. She comes from an outstanding political family, which includes her father, Hamish. I wish her well in her retirement and thank her for the kindness that she has shown to members of all parties. It is amazing that, as members stand down, we find nice things to say about each other. I also—he will hate this—praise Neil Findlay. The work that he undertook during his time on the Health and Sport Committee has driven us to this debate. No member of that committee can accept that a single drug death should happen in Scotland.

I pay tribute to Maureen Watt and Neil Findlay for their service to the Parliament, and we will hear Jenny Marra's comments soon. I am sure that they are leaving Parliament to go into politics, and I wish them well.

I add my thoughts and sympathies for all those who have lost their lives to drug addiction in Scotland over many years. In my time today, I want to touch on a number of issues that I believe will be important if the Parliament is genuinely going to take action to reduce drug deaths as a national mission.

Access to new treatments is critical to achieving that. Members across the chamber will have received a documentary called "The Final Fix" by documentary maker Norman Stone. I thank him and pay tribute to him for his relentless work on engaging with decision makers and drawing attention to neuro-electric therapy. I welcome the constructive meetings that I have had with the new minister and I welcome the open mind that she says she has on considering new treatments. I also welcome the signal over the weekend from the minister that funding could be made available for a pilot study in Scotland. That would be a welcome step forward in considering NET.

During my time as a Lothian MSP over the past five years, and while serving on the Health and Sport Committee and as shadow health secretary, I have visited addiction services across Scotland and met service users. In that time, I have had many an open and frank discussion with people living with addictions. I have learned a lot and it has opened my eyes to the many people who live with addictions and the issues that they face, and to what was verging on a breakdown in local services for addicts and their families across Scotland.

One of the most difficult issues that our society must understand and address is that childhood trauma is often the underlying reason that many people abuse drugs. It is often a coping strategy or an escape. I have met and assisted an individual in Edinburgh who was homeless and sleeping in a city graveyard for his safety. He had run away from home at a young age, had suffered severe mental health trauma throughout his life, was a care-experienced individual and could not read or write. I think that it is widely understood that people who are living with addictions across Scotland are the same individuals who often desperately try to access services in a chaotic way that sees them too often slip through the gaps in our public services.

I welcome the ministerial implementation group that was outlined, but it cannot be a talking shop; we need all our public services to actively look at the issue.

The housing first model is incredibly important. I know that the minister has been reaching out to a number of rehab and housing providers across Scotland, including the hugely impressive model, safe as houses, which is run by Alternatives West Dunbartonshire Community Drug Services. If there is one lesson that we need to learn, it is that services should be resourced to be able to respond and should expect drug addicts to fail and relapse but to keep them in services. That is one of the things that has too often failed people.

I strongly believe that a commitment to fund a housing first model could deliver the engagement and support that vulnerable people who are living with addictions need, along with the peer-support programmes that can stop overdose deaths and getting people into long-term sustainable recovery, whatever that looks like for each individual.

We know that for a significant number of addicts the root problem of addiction is sexual abuse as a child. That is a part of the drug deaths scandal that many will not want to directly consider and perhaps as a country is one of the darkest issues that we face. Child abuse is a subject that for too long has not been given the priority that it needs, but we must understand it in the context of addiction and the critical need to improve access to mental health services at the start of treatment. I hope that the health minister, who was here earlier, will take that point on board when looking at the redesign of services and the important role that the third sector has to play in that.

I want to put on record concerns that have been raised with me by family members of people living with addictions. Many families whom I have assisted over the past five years have the same story to tell of being seen as part of the problem and of not being given the support that they need to help a loved one. It is often families and friends who live 24 hours a day, seven days a week with someone with addictions. That relationship can and often does break down over time, but we need investment to support families who are desperately trying to look after a loved one or friend with addictions. I very much welcome the £3 million that the minister outlined today; I have been campaigning for that for a number of years.

If we are genuinely going to see a shift towards making a reduction in drug deaths and harm a national mission, it has to be embedded in all key outcomes and focused on access to treatment and rehab services. The minister spoke about treatment targets. I hope that she can give us more information on them and when they will be published; that will be critical. If person-centred care is going to be at the heart of the mission, co-decision making with the people who access services must also be embedded. Today must be

just the start of that national mission to help save lives.

**The Presiding Officer:** For understandable reasons, we are substantially behind our schedule, although it is not just the members who are making valedictory remarks who are going over time. Therefore, decision time will be quite late today, and we are adding an urgent question at the end of the day.

16:56

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** The number of drug-related deaths in Scotland is unacceptable, and every one of those lives lost is a tragedy. Important lives—of mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters and friends who were loved—have been cut short too soon. The family and friends of those who have lost their lives are in my thoughts as I speak this afternoon.

I commend the Scottish Government for acknowledging and accepting that it should have done more and done it earlier. In moving forward and working to improve the lives of those with problematic drug and alcohol use and prevent those avoidable deaths, I hope that that acknowledgement illustrates, not only to me but, more importantly, to those who are working hard on the ground in the midst of that crisis, that change will happen.

As the minister outlined in her opening speech, the Scottish Government has announced that it will focus on five areas as a priority: fast and appropriate treatment; residential rehabilitation; a more holistic approach; front-line, third sector organisations; and overdose prevention facilities.

I hope that the fast and appropriate access to treatment will include drop-in access and same-day prescribing. The window of someone being ready for treatment can be small, so we need to make sure that the right support is available in our communities at the right time, and that it is tailored towards the needs of each individual and their families.

As the minister said, our services have to catch people where they are and when they are ready and, of course, hang on to them and hold them tight, so barriers to access should be identified and removed. That will be done by centring the needs of the individuals who need help, not the organisations that deliver treatment. I particularly welcome the minister's comments about including lived experience through experience panels.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to ensure that, in every part of the country, residential rehabilitation is available to everyone who wants it—and, importantly, for whom it is deemed clinically appropriate—at the

time when they ask for it. We need to see residential rehab in the context of wider community services and rehabilitation; we also need to consider what happens to people when they return to their community.

Problem drug and alcohol use is a symptom of wider difficulties for an individual. The creation of a more joined-up approach that supports people who are living with drug addiction to address all the underlying challenges that they face—of which, as I said, drug addiction is often just the symptom—and which ensures better support after non-fatal overdoses, is essential.

People do not need just freedom from the physical addiction to survive and thrive; they need somewhere warm and safe to live, access to healthcare, human contact, connection and purpose in their lives. People need hope.

I know that the Government understands the vital role of front-line—often third sector—organisations in our communities. In that regard, we need to make sure that we put our money where our mouths are—actual money. In the past, policy makers and Government have, too often, been fine with praising the work of smaller organisations in our community and holding them up as great examples but, when it comes to funding, they fall through the cracks. That has to end. In particular, where such organisations are taking referrals from statutory services and providing support and where we have confidence in their ability to do the support work that is required, it is not acceptable not to provide funding. With that in mind, I welcome the funding that was announced by the minister this afternoon.

I have focused on the areas that would have greatest impact on the communities that I represent. Overdose prevention facilities are perhaps more urgently required in our cities. Although I appreciate the limits of our current constitutional set-up, I simply urge the Government to be bold and brave—it is about saving lives.

If we meet people where they are, with accessible, people-centred services, and acknowledge and act upon what we know about the needs of those who find themselves vulnerable to harm because of problem drug and alcohol use, while funding good-quality, front-line services in our communities, we can save lives—more than that, we can give people the best chance of living fulfilling lives.

17:01

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** First, I want to pay tribute to Neil Findlay and Jenny Marra, who are also making their final speeches today. I have not always agreed with Mr

Findlay and Ms Marra—that is probably obvious, given that they are in a different party—but, in general, I have respected that they have a different position on a wide variety of issues. They have made a valuable contribution to the Scottish Parliament and to Scotland and I wish them well when they leave the Parliament. I also pay tribute to Bill Bowman, with whom I sat on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee this session; I wish Bill well when he leaves. Finally, Maureen Watt was one of the people, along with Brian Adam, who took me under their wing when I was first elected to the Scottish Parliament in 2007. They treated me as if I were an equal and not just a newbie who had just been elected to the Parliament. I thank Maureen Watt for that, for her friendship and for her sage advice over the years. I wish her well.

I remind members that I am a board member of Moving On Inverclyde, which is a local addiction service. I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's important debate. I also welcome the appointment of the Minister for Drugs Policy. I wrote to the First Minister asking for a dedicated minister in the field. I asked that that could happen in the next session, and I am pleased that Angela Constance has taken on that role for the remainder of the current session and—I hope—beyond.

Almost 3,400 people in Scotland have lost their lives due to drug misuse in the last three years, including 80 who lived in Inverclyde. Each death is a tragedy and I offer my condolences to the families, friends and loved ones of those who have lost their lives. The number of drug-related deaths in Scotland is simply unacceptable, which is why I welcome the First Minister's declaration of a national mission to tackle the crisis that is blighting our communities—some more than others.

The original funding of £250 million over the next parliamentary session is very welcome and the additional £5 million that has been made available immediately to ensure that priority work gets under way as quickly as possible shows that the new minister and the Scottish Government are committed to providing the national mission with the leadership, focus and resources that it needs to turn the situation around and to save lives.

As a board member of Moving On Inverclyde, I know the vital role that third sector organisations play in supporting people living with drug addiction. We heard Ruth Maguire's comments a moment ago and I, too, welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to work across the health and care sector to ensure that no door is the wrong door to help and support. Tackling the crisis also means putting our efforts into improving mental health support, reducing homelessness

and ensuring that we have a humane and responsive justice system.

The statutory services have a hugely important role in keeping people alive, but they can be limited in what they can provide to meet people's wider needs. The third sector can assist in meeting the other needs of service users and helping them to progress through their recovery. Direct funding to third sector organisations would be the most welcome thing that the Scottish Government could provide to allow organisations to focus on planning and delivering the services that people need. I have spoken about the third sector in previous debates about drugs, and Mr Whittle was certainly involved in those debates. I am pleased about today's announcement of the four new funds, which will help in that regard.

I welcome some of the immediate action that the Scottish Government is taking, including the work to make heroin-assisted treatment services more widely accessible across the country, the work to increase the numbers in treatment, the rapid implementation of recently developed treatment standards, the opening of additional residential rehabilitation placements and the extension of outreach initiatives that identify those who are at risk, address immediate health concerns and connect people with other community or clinical services.

There are three key aspects to moving forward. The first is partnership working, the second is evidence-based solutions and the third is listening to people with lived experience and then acting. Every politician, and everyone in the Parliament, needs to ensure that we push and challenge ourselves and society to make the changes that are required to save lives. If we do not do that, we will fail many more people, many more families and many more communities.

17:06

**Liam McArthur:** I start by acknowledging the contributions of the three colleagues who will be leaving Parliament after this session. Maureen Watt and I share a love of Malawi, and I have very much enjoyed working with her in developing the relationship that the Parliament and Scotland as a whole have with the warm heart of Africa. I recall that she and I were part of the same delegation, headed up by our former colleague Karen Gillon, that was sent to Malawi. We spent some time instructing classes in Minga school, just outside Lilongwe, although I am reassured that educational attainment in those classes has gone up since we departed the scene. I wish Maureen Watt all the very best.

Neil Findlay gave a characteristically uncompromising valedictory speech, but it was

shot through with insight and was deeply emotional. As he did, I acknowledge the contribution that the *Daily Record* has made, particularly in pushing the case for decriminalisation. We should not underestimate the significance of that contribution.

Neil Findlay may be leaving this building, but he has certainly left a lasting impression on me. I still bear the scars from his football boots in my knee, after a typically uncompromising take-man-and-ball effort as the goalkeeper of the Scottish Parliament team, as we defeated the MPs at Parkhead. I wish that, at that stage, he had kept his feet on the bloody ground—apologies for that unparliamentary language, Presiding Officer.

I am looking forward to hearing Jenny Marra's speech—I had rather hoped that I would have heard it before now. She has spoken with authority on pretty much any issue, but particularly on drugs and the drug deaths scandal. Through her passion, insight and tenacity, she has done as much as anybody to push this agenda forward, and I very much thank her for that. In fact, I even forgive her for beating me hollow to the community MSP of the year award, which she rightly walked off with at the awards a few years ago. I wish her well in whatever comes next for her.

This has been a very different debate. I know that we usually sum up such debates by saying that the debate has been very interesting, helpful and constructive, but I think that today's debate genuinely has been. The tone and tenor of the debate has been very different from that of some debates that we have had in the past. Part of that is to do with the candour. There has been candour from the Government, whose motion does not pull any punches and is expressed in a way that we would not have seen a few years ago. The fact that the motion is expressed as such is very welcome.

The minister opened the debate by talking about Scotland's national shame, James Kelly talked about the failure of devolution and Donald Cameron talked about a collective shame. That speaks to the significance of the issues that are under discussion today, and we find ourselves in a much better place than we have been in previous debates.

Donald Cameron was also right in acknowledging Angela Constance's approach. When I worked with her on the education brief, we might not have always agreed, but I always found her approachable and willing to collaborate and explore the ideas that I brought to her. That is absolutely the approach that needs to be taken in relation to our drug deaths crisis. She talked about building on the lived and living experience in the panels that will instruct policy, and that is welcome, although Neil Findlay made the telling

point again that those voices need to challenge as well. I am sure that that will be the case.

We should not mistake accepting that what has been done today is not good enough for saying that nothing that has been done until now is of value. As we look ahead to what we need to do more radically, we need to identify the stuff that works and needs to be preserved. As Donald Cameron suggested, we need to be more broad minded. In that sense, Peter Krykant's brave work has shown what is really possible when we move beyond rigid assumptions of what we can and cannot do. James Kelly and—to her credit—Ruth Maguire made the essential point that we absolutely need to move beyond the debate about the constitution.

I welcomed Angela Constance's reference to ensuring that there are no barriers, or low barriers, to treatment and that what is needed will be provided where it is needed. I commend Jenny Marra for making the point that, although we can all welcome the plan that has been set out, because it takes us far beyond where we have been—"light years away" from where we are now, she suggested—we need to ensure that we are able to deliver that plan, not just through statutory services but across the third sector. I also welcome the self-evident acknowledgement of the need to integrate mental health in addiction services.

I welcome the additional funding—over and above the £20 million for rehab—for addressing the problem that *The Ferret* deserves credit for its perseverance in profiling and highlighting, which is the impossible choice that some face between retaining their tenancy and accessing the treatment that they need. That situation was wholly unacceptable and I welcome the Government's acknowledgment of it and the funding that it provided for it. I also acknowledge Miles Briggs's reference to the work of Norman Stone. Neuroelectric therapy is one of those ideas that I hope will now be given proper consideration as part of the strategy.

As I said in my opening remarks, it is for the incoming Government to identify and agree its agenda, but a statement in favour of decriminalisation from the outgoing Parliament will be difficult to ignore, particularly if it is adopted unanimously. Neil Findlay is right—Scotland's drug deaths scandal is the shame of the Parliament since its inception in 1999, but the past five years has been particularly horrendous. I hope that today's debate and vote can help ensure that the next Parliament does so much better.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald):** Jenny Marra will close the debate for Labour and make her final speech in the Parliament.

17:13

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The debate on drugs is long overdue. The reluctance of the SNP to debate drugs in its own parliamentary time tells its own story over the course of the Parliament. It is not a story of malice or bad intent, but more of a lack of ideas and analysis that might help the desperate situation that we have in Scotland, with the worst drug deaths rate in the world.

It pains me to say it, because I have attempted to speak on behalf of people in Dundee, where the crisis is at its worst, for the past ten years. People with whom I went to school are caught up in that cycle of despair, as are classmates of the former Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing, Joe Fitzpatrick. We are the age of that aging cohort of which the Government speaks.

I spoke from these benches back in 2012, in a debate on the Government's drugs strategy "The road to recovery: a new approach to tackling Scotland's drug problem", which was anything but. Eight years later, drug deaths have more than doubled and recovery beds have almost gone. Our drug deaths task force is painfully slow. The Dundee drugs commission did its work in good faith and its report now seems to be gathering dust on the shelf.

The frustrating thing is that those who did the work are clear that there is no silver bullet. All the analysis points towards the need for an investment in community drug workers on the ground to support families and to do the hard yards of walking alongside people who use drugs and supporting their recovery. That is yet to happen.

The path to drugs is wide and open, while so many other paths are closed to young people in Dundee and across Scotland. There are precious few jobs to go to, with few of any standing or earning potential. The dream of having their own house is a distant one for young people. Holidays are for other people. We call it "economic insecurity" and today we are seeing only the dangerous surface of that iceberg, because Covid has created a catastrophe in the economy that we will see over the next few years.

Do we brace ourselves and start trying policies that will stem that tide economically, creating more hope for young people and giving them paths that are an alternative to drugs? Whoever forms the Government in May, I sincerely hope that they will take the shame of our drug deaths far more seriously than it has been taken over my 10 years in this place.

This is my final speech in Holyrood. People try to give such speeches on a positive note. I will do the same when I invoke the incredible people I have met on this journey: the women, men and

children that I have had the honour to represent as I have stood alongside them in their struggles. I will never forget the male lawyer who accused the women carers that I represented of "avarice" in an equal pay negotiation, nor their dignity in the face of such entitlement and arrogance. I have listened to, talked with and sometimes cried with people in my surgery. Some of their struggles have been individual, some have become campaigns. It has been a privilege to walk alongside every person.

Neither can I forget the frustration of the past 10 years, when vast swathes of our time was taken up with the brutal debate of the independence referendum, while the drugs crisis wrapped its fingers around the throats of people in my community.

I will never forget the intimidation as Anas Sarwar and I stood shoulder to shoulder in Dundee city square, facing up Reform street as an army of kilts, drums and painted blue faces marched and shouted their way towards us. I felt that I had been transported back to a battle in the 15th century and was not in a modern democracy. The silencing accusation that we were talking down Dundee or talking Scotland down was a phrase cleverly designed to shut down debate and undermine democracy. I was screamed and yelled at by activists carrying "Yes" placards as I went door to door, doing the democratic work of campaigning in my city.

I realise that there is a mirror image to that, but that hard line of division, disruption and rancour prevents a better politics. I am allowed to be honest today: I think that the hard edge of nationalism has worn some of us down, for now. I am glad that our party is presenting new energy and vitality for the next Parliament.

I hope that the next Parliament will realise the power of devolution. There is so much that we can do now. I have learned during my ten years here that the debate about powers and where they lie is often an empty one and often a distraction on purpose. Change comes about by harnessing collective will, leadership, teamwork and drive to make things happen.

I started campaigning for a mental health crisis centre for Dundee more than three years ago. Since then, 100 people in Dundee have lost their lives to suicide. The city has stalled and delayed. This week, we discovered that, rather than using Covid as an excuse as Dundee has done, Perth opened the doors of a mental health crisis centre last June, during the pandemic. That shows that progress can be made.

So much of what is recommended by the Dundee drugs commission could be actioned tomorrow. When we begin to show change, power wielders in other places comply and progress can

be swift: Peter Krykant is a powerful example of that. Have the argument about transfer of powers, and we get nowhere fast.

The Scottish Labour amendment reiterates our belief that police resources must continue to prevent supply—James Kelly spoke to that in his opening remarks. Our communities are awash with drugs. I have recently heard of dealers baiting women with free samples of heroin through their letterboxes—women who are in recovery until they succumb to the dealers. In the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee last month, I asked the chief constable about the supply of drugs, and I felt that he was maybe too willing to concede when he said:

“Where the demand exists, the supply will operate.”—*[Official Report, Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee, 11 February 2021; c 36.]*

This is a day-to-day challenge for policing—that I do not deny—but, for parents trying to keep their children away from drugs, the ready availability and cheap prices that saturation supply creates, and police acceptance of that, do not help at all.

At the end of the day, it is so often women who pick up the pieces of the drugs crisis: supporting their sons and daughters to make it to the next stage; taking grandchildren into their own homes to raise when parents die or are simply too caught up in the drugs cycle to look after them. Grandparents are raising children who have had heroin in their bloodstream in the womb and are dealing the resulting effects of that on the children and on their own wellbeing. Women are resorting to prostitution to buy drugs and feed their children. I often feel—and I have said this to many of them—that, if the women of Dundee with lived experience of drugs in their families were asked to run our drugs services, we might be looking at a completely different picture. That is one reason why I have been proud to stand up for women, especially over the past couple of years.

I come from a city with one of the highest rates of domestic violence. Women know that their lives are not gender neutral, and neither should be the laws that protect us. I would like to say the names of Bennylyn Burke and her two-year-old daughter, Jellica. Police have recovered two bodies in Dundee this afternoon.

I am a great-granddaughter of women who worked in the jute mills, who bore the indignity of having flaps in the back of their overalls so that they could go to the toilet. Women know that their lives are different from men's.

I would like to thank my lovely husband for his support. I would like to thank my staff, especially Roy O'Kane, for all their work over the years. I would like to thank my dad for giving me my politics, which were passed down to him from his

grandfather, who founded the Dundee and District Union of Jute and Flax Workers. I hope that I have been able to give fair Labour representation to the descendants of his members and the people of North East Scotland.

I thank the Labour Party for giving me the opportunity to serve. *[Applause.]*

17:22

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** It is an honour to follow Jenny Marra's speech. I want to add my best wishes to Maureen Watt, Neil Findlay and Jenny Marra as they depart this place. They have been a credit to the chamber. I do not think that the general public quite understands the personal sacrifice that is required to be an elected member here. You will all be missed by colleagues across the chamber.

I wonder whether Neil Findlay remembers one of the first conversations that he and I ever had. It was at the start of the Parliament v media golf match. He said to me, “C'mere big man. Let me give you a wee bit of advice. See in the chamber? See if I give you a wee bit of gyp and I shout across at you? Don't worry about it. We can be pals outside the chamber.” I said to him, “I've had 30 years of after-dinner speaking, Mr Findlay. If you give me any gyp you're going to get it smack right back in the face.” Of course, I then went out and gave him a lesson on the golf course. No, you cannot intervene on that, Mr Findlay—it is not a point of order.

I wish the three of you all the best.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. Although we do not necessarily agree with every point in the motion and the amendments, we need to move the debate on, so at decision time we will support all the amendments and the motion. I have a tinge of regret that the Greens have found a way to not support my amendment. I do not think that there is anything in it that, in any way, stigmatises anyone who is addicted to drugs.

I have listened to the contributions of members of all parties, which have mostly been from the same people who have been speaking on the issue for the past five years. They have consistently called for the Scottish Government to take on a crisis that has been growing over decades. We have heard how drug deaths have doubled in the past decade, to the point at which Scotland has the worst rate of drug deaths per head of population in the developed world—it is more than three times that in the rest of the United Kingdom.

In every debate that we have rehearsed repeatedly in the chamber, the Scottish



Government has never managed to answer one really important question: why is Scotland so much worse than everywhere else? Linked to that is the question why Scotland has a higher death rate among the homeless community. We need to know the answers to that. We need to explore those issues to develop an effective strategy.

During the past five years, I have listened to SNP MSPs saying that they need more powers. That is a complete cop-out. The Scottish Government has a huge range of powers that it could deploy, but it has consistently refused to do so. Those members have been hiding behind constitutional nonsense, preferring to use their time and energy to cast blame elsewhere, instead of taking responsibility. I do not think that they can hide from that fact just because the Government has decided to take action.

**Stuart McMillan:** I think that, certainly in this debate and also in the previous debate on drugs, the vast majority of contributions did not play on the constitutional issue. The focus was on what we need to do, irrespective of that aspect. I would have hoped that Mr Whittle would have picked up on that from the vast majority of the contributions from SNP back benchers today.

**Brian Whittle:** Stuart McMillan is, of course, right to say that about this debate, but he cannot sweep it under the table that, in the past five years, the Government has refused to do it. That is just a fact.

The minister said in evidence to the Health and Sport Committee that it will require the deployment of resource from both the health and education portfolios to effectively tackle the crisis, not just the extra £20 million of funding. She is absolutely correct. Both of those portfolios are totally devolved to the Scottish Government.

One of my main concerns is that Scotland remains the unhealthiest country in Europe, as it was at the start of this parliamentary session. Scotland gave the world the modern education system, but Scottish education, once the envy of the world, has been mismanaged by the Government and we have slipped down the international tables, letting down pupils and teachers, without closing the attainment gap and increasing inequality. Yet education will be one of the main drivers in tackling the crisis.

What we should have been doing is what is now coming forward. The Scottish Conservatives have called for the reintroduction of rehabilitation beds for years, after their numbers were decimated by the Government. Why is it only now that the Scottish Government wants to reverse its cuts, after all these years?

Another of my concerns is the use of drugs in our jails. Given that, how about changing the daft

process of releasing prisoners on a Friday afternoon when they cannot access services until a Monday, often placing them in areas where drug use is rife? While we are at it, the Government should introduce a step-down programme from prisons into society. It costs £40,000 to keep a prisoner in jail each year. Getting reoffending down is so important—it is the ultimate spend to save.

What about increasing the needle exchange programmes to tackle HIV and hepatitis C, reversing the upward trend after those programmes were cut? What about ensuring that the third sector, which will be absolutely crucial in tackling the drug death crisis, is properly funded. I was glad to hear the minister talking about a fund specifically for the third sector. There also needs to be family support for those grieving, having lost someone to addiction.

As I have said before in the chamber, a police officer used the term “a hierarchy of death” to describe to me that how those grieving for a lost one are viewed depends on what is on the death certificate. That is stigma.

I am particularly interested in the link between deprivation and addiction and, along with other colleagues from the Health and Sport Committee, I joined the Westminster Scottish Affairs Committee investigation into Scotland’s drug problem. Its report said that deprivation itself does not directly cause addiction. The links between poverty and drug misuse are complex. The main mechanisms that are described as credible links between deprivation and problem drug use are weak family bonds; physiological discomfort and personal distress, including ACEs, which have been mentioned today, and long-term distress; low employment opportunities; and few community resources.

Once someone has a drug problem they also have more limited means of escaping poverty. Their chances of obtaining paid employment are also much reduced. Having a criminal record, a lack of employment history and the stigma of having, or having had, a substance problem all play a part in that.

Therefore, it stands to reason that resources should be allocated prior to addiction. That has to be the most cost-effective investment. To put it simply, if there are fewer community resources in such areas, those resources should be developed to fit the communities. Long-term policy on prevention is required. That should be about access to opportunities to participate in our communities—the chance to be passionate about something in a group who have the same passion. One thing is for sure: if we do not give our children a gang to belong to, they will find their own gang.

I have the greatest respect for Angela Constance and her knowledge of the issue, not to mention her unremitting commitment to tackling this crisis. However, I have to ask: why has it taken the Scottish Government this length of time to act? Why now—at the end of a parliamentary session, just before an election? Why not five years ago, at the start of the session, when the Scottish Parliament could have delivered the real change that the sector has been pleading for? In a few weeks' time a new parliamentary session will begin, with many new members—because some of us will not be here—and the reset button will be hit once again. The next session of Parliament, with its new cohort of members, will have to start the process of dealing with the crisis all over again.

Unfortunately, it is obvious that the constitution will once again dominate the election. All the while, there are those in our society who are the most marginalised, whose voices are seldom heard and who desperately need our help, but who are continually overlooked and let down by this place. Quite frankly, that is the Parliament's shame. More specifically, it is the shame of the SNP Government, whose actions are too little and come far too late. Next year's post-pandemic drug deaths figures will make very grim reading indeed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please move to a conclusion.

**Brian Whittle:** I am concluding, Presiding Officer.

In case this happens to be the last time that I speak in this place I say that it has undoubtedly been the privilege of my life to serve. I have never forgotten why we are here and the responsibility that we carry. However, it has also been the most frustrating place to be because, as I look back over the past five years, I think of what could have been achieved. The Scottish Government's investment in the drug deaths crisis is welcome—of course it is. However, it comes way too late for the Parliament to work with it in this session. The cynic in me also has to wonder why it has come now, just before an election.

Quite frankly, Scotland deserves better. Too many of our most vulnerable people have been failed. I hope that the next Government will be prepared to take responsibility for the inactions of this Government and finally give a voice to those who are most desperately in need.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Angela Constance to close the debate.

17:32

**Angela Constance:** I have very much appreciated the contributions of all members who

have spoken in the debate—in particular, those of members who are planning to leave Parliament and who have just made their final speeches.

Of course, Jenny Marra is an old sparring partner of mine from our days in the youth employment portfolio. She has often spoken of the tension and stresses involved in fulfilling our obligations both to our families and as elected politicians. That has always resonated with me, because it was only months after being elected to this place in 2007 that my own son was born. I have never let Bruce Crawford, who was then Minister for Parliamentary Business, forget about the lack of pairing arrangements. It was perhaps a reflection of the time that, across the political parties, no such arrangements existed, so I had to come in here and vote in the week after my son was born. I appreciate Jenny Marra's campaign and her particular remarks with respect to women in politics and, indeed, those on how the lives and views of women should shape our public services.

Moving from one woman to another, I would also like to pay tribute to my friend and colleague Maureen Watt. Maureen has been a member of the Scottish Parliament since 2006. Over her 15 years here, she has served as Minister for Schools and Skills, Minister for Public Health and Minister for Mental Health. I have always appreciated Maureen's down-to-earth, north-east, matter-of-fact approach to life, and she has always been a go-to source of good, practical but also very honest advice. I am glad that Miles Briggs recognised that Maureen comes from a long line of nationalists. It is not just the Ewings who have good lineage, you know.

I move from my old friend Maureen Watt to my old foe Neil Findlay. What can I say? To be frank, he has sometimes really ripped me knitting. *[Laughter.]* But also, if I am honest, he has sometimes given an absolute belter of a speech, and I think that today was an example of that. I genuinely wish him well. I wish his brave wife Fiona well, and of course his dear mother, who is a constituent of mine.

In his approach to things, Neil will often try to characterise ministers in a particular way, but he knows that I grew up in a village not that far away from the village that he grew up in. I grew up in a tin hoose in Addiebrowhill. One thing that shapes me and that I carry with me day in, day out is my time as a prison social worker, and I know that, while prison is at times absolutely necessary, it rarely works. I, too, have seen the impact on front-line staff, including prison staff, of what happens when people take their own lives, either in the community or in institutions.

The first person I detained under the Mental Health Act, as a newly qualified mental health officer working at the state hospital at Carstairs,

was a young woman with severe mental health issues and a huge drug-taking history who had lost her child. She went on, despite all my interventions, to commit suicide. It is those experiences that shape me and will shape my approach as I go forward in this position.

I am political to my core. I am that blue-faced nat, but it is real life that will always shape me. Of course, we will debate the connections between our political aspirations and views and the impact that they do and do not have in real life.

I am pleased to say that we will accept the Liberal Democrat amendment because it recognises the importance of heroin-assisted treatment and the need to roll that out further, and it takes on board what more we need to do in terms of diversion.

In the spirit of consensus, I will also accept the Labour amendment. We support overdose prevention facilities. However, I would add two things to the amendment. It is the role of the police and all of us to work to reduce not just the supply of drugs but the demand for drugs. It is really important that, in our justice system, we have services including peer navigators—such as Kevin Neary from Aid & Abet, who I have met—who can support people the first time they come into contact with the justice service, and perhaps help people on the road out of the justice service and into treatment and support.

I also want to make a point about funding. I would never demur from the importance of funding—I have, after all, secured an additional £5 million for the current financial year and an additional £250 over the next five years. However, we should reflect on the fact that, since 2008, this Government has invested over £1 billion in drug and alcohol services, and that is before we include housing first, mental health services and specific projects that are funded by the justice portfolio.

The bigger point that I want to make is that inputs do not always equal outputs and that tackling drug-related deaths is not a two-dimensional issue. There are fundamental questions about who we fund, how we fund people, and for what. Going forward, we need to reshape services and rebalance both support and accountability. We absolutely need to listen to the warning signs when people are admitted to hospitals and get them into treatment fast. I want to ensure that there is more parity and more genuine partnership between statutory services and the third sector.

**Neil Findlay:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Angela Constance:** Yes.

**Neil Findlay:** I want to take the opportunity to rip her knitting again for a wee while.

Can the minister tell us in what other area of social policy what is described as an “ageing cohort” would be people who are over 35 years of age?

**Angela Constance:** I cannot think of any other such area. There are, absolutely, issues for people who are 35 or 45 and who have a long history of taking drugs. That has an enormous impact on their physical and mental health, which means that they might not be as healthy or as fit as people who are over 50, like Neil Findlay and me. However, with drug-related deaths, over the past two years, we have seen a rise in the number of young people who are dying, and we need to nip that in the bud. We have also seen a disproportionate increase in the number of women who are dying. Therefore, as I used to say to Jenny Marra in my youth employment days, we can look at the headlines, but we always need to scratch beneath them, and beneath the statistics, to really understand what is happening.

I am determined to have better-embedded mental health and addiction services. I want NHS prescribers to be out there in the community, in outreach services and the third sector. I am determined that we will listen to lived and living experience, that they will be absolutely plugged into the national mission and that the national collaborative will work in partnership with the national mission. I want to deliver residential services that are located in and connected with community services and with families.

Crucially, we need a balanced ticket between harm reduction and recovery, and not one or t’other. With regret, I will not support the Conservative amendment, because, particularly having listened to some of the speeches from Conservative members, I think that that balanced ticket is absent from their approach. If members, like me, really believe in person-centred care, they would not say that we should predetermine what treatment someone should or should not have, or indeed for how long they should get treatment. Every person deserves the right treatment for them at the right time, whether that is abstinence-based recovery in residential rehab or immediate access to an opioid substitute therapy treatment.

**Brian Whittle:** That is exactly the essence of our amendment—it is about ensuring that we do not pre-prescribe treatments. We need to open up the options that are available, which is exactly what our amendment is about.

**Angela Constance:** I could probably have just about accepted the Conservative amendment. However, if the Government can listen to campaigners, lived experience, recovery

organisations and the Parliament to make a long-term commitment to residential rehab of £100 million over the next five years, surely that should not be without an expectation that the Conservatives will be bold and say clearly that they support heroin-assisted treatment and overdose prevention facilities, and that they will work with us to persuade the UK Government to introduce drug-checking facilities and on the regulation of pill presses. *[Interruption.]* I will not take an intervention, as that would really stretch the Presiding Officer's patience.

Brian Whittle asked what is so different about Scotland. There are three or four things that are different, and number 1 is that we do not have enough folk in treatment. We have proportionately more people in our population who use drugs, and we have a different concentration of poverty in parts of the country.

We also have a more acute problem with benzodiazepines. In Scotland, in comparison with 2009, there has been a 450 per cent increase in drug-related deaths in which benzodiazepines are implicated whereas, south of the border, there has been a 50 per cent increase. It is therefore not unreasonable for us to expect our colleagues across the chamber to stand side by side with us and demand regulation on pill presses, bearing in mind that people with those presses can produce 0.5 million tablets in little over an hour and then pollute our streets with drugs that cost pennies.

**Jenny Marra:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Angela Constance:** No, because I am conscious of time. My apologies to Jenny Marra.

Our core aim is to get more people into treatment to save lives. We must ensure that our emergency work is absolutely embedded in our work to improve lives. Our services need to stick with people, and there should be no running out of chances.

Today's debate is not unconnected to the debate that we had a few days ago about children's rights or the debate that we had last week when we passed the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Bill. I want to ensure that the work that we do on drugs policy is joined at the hip with the work that we do on mental health, housing, homelessness, adverse childhood experiences, justice and, of course, poverty and inequality. None of us should forget the impact of poverty and inequality.

I am determined to build a consensus. We will, of course, have robust debate. We do not all need to agree all the time. It is good that we see the mountain from different perspectives and different sides, but we need to march forward together.

## Urgent Question

17:45

### Lothian Buses (Suspension of Services)

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to Lothian Buses stopping its services at 7.30 pm on 17 March in response to reported incidents of buses being attacked and staff endangered.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson):** I deplore the attacks in recent weeks on bus services in Edinburgh, which have resulted in two bus drivers suffering injuries and requiring hospital attention. Attacks on key workers are totally unacceptable. They threaten the essential services on which communities rely. Everyone has the right to be safe, and to feel safe, in their community.

Police Scotland and local authorities lead on interventions to tackle antisocial behaviour, and I understand that extra police officers have been deployed. In addition, Lothian Buses is working closely with Police Scotland, unions and councils to tackle the issue and to keep its staff and passengers safe.

Lothian Buses advises that services are planned to operate as normal tonight, but that they will be withdrawn on a locality basis if similar incidents are witnessed. I call on communities to work with Police Scotland to assist it in tackling such antisocial behaviour.

**Sarah Boyack:** The decision to stop services was not taken after just one incident. As the cabinet secretary said, we have had a pattern of incidents over the past few weeks, which has resulted in buses being targeted. Drivers are increasingly worried about their safety. The worry is that the situation is escalating; the number of copycat threats is increasing, which is utterly unacceptable. What has gone wrong with action to stop the antisocial behaviour that is escalating to an appalling level in our capital city?

**Michael Matheson:** I agree that no one should be subjected to such antisocial behaviour when they go to their workplace, whether they are a bus driver, a community resident or a shop owner. Any form of antisocial behaviour corrodes the very fabric of our communities and leads to people feeling unsafe. The type of behaviour that has been witnessed in parts of Edinburgh is unacceptable.

That is why it is critical that there is early intervention from services that can work with young people to divert them from such activity. In

addition, Police Scotland has a role to play in tackling such issues—in particular, it must consider whether further enforcement action is necessary in order to deal with them. I therefore encourage anyone who has information or who can assist Police Scotland in dealing with the antisocial behaviour in question to provide Police Scotland with that information to support it in taking action to protect anyone from the unacceptable levels of antisocial behaviour.

**Sarah Boyack:** I welcome the suggestion that those people should be talked to in our communities.

We need our buses, but they must be safe. What the cabinet secretary said about Police Scotland and youth services will be important as we go forward, but what support can the Scottish Government provide now to help to eradicate the unacceptable violence that we have seen? Key workers and national health service staff need our buses, but they must be safe.

**Michael Matheson:** I agree with Sarah Boyack. It is important that the appropriate justice bodies as well as child welfare organisations take the necessary action to tackle antisocial behaviour.

A number of mechanisms can be used by different agencies. They include enforcement action through antisocial behaviour orders or fixed-penalty notices and early intervention actions by child support organisations.

A concerted effort and a targeted approach to dealing with this type of antisocial behaviour is critical, not just because of the impact that it has had on buses. I suspect that, if individuals are targeting buses, they will be targeting other areas of the community as well, including people's property or local shops. That is why it is important that communities work together collectively to tackle and stamp out the problems that are associated with antisocial behaviour.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald):** I will take three supplementary questions.

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** As a former employee of Lothian Buses, I utterly condemn the totally unacceptable antisocial and violent behaviour that has endangered drivers and passengers. The company has invested substantial sums of money, over the years, in radios, closed-circuit television and bandit screens to protect drivers in all its vehicles. Will the cabinet secretary join me in thanking my former colleagues at Lothian Buses, Police Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council for finding a partnership working solution that allows evening services to recommence tonight, thereby ensuring that key workers, including NHS employees, can still get to their work safely?

**Michael Matheson:** Yes, of course, I support the comments that have been made by my colleague Mr MacDonald. He rightly points out the need for agencies to work in partnership to tackle antisocial behaviour. I have no doubt that Police Scotland will be engaging with Lothian Buses and others on an on-going basis to tackle this particular issue. It is important that everyone who can play a part in dealing with the issue of antisocial behaviour does so. I have no doubt that Police Scotland will want to play its part in supporting Lothian Buses in ensuring that its staff are protected from such behaviour.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** The incidents have shocked the local community here, in Edinburgh. No one should have to go to their work and face such shameless and senseless attacks.

Given some of the success that Police Scotland previously had on attacks with fireworks around bonfire night, will the Scottish Government and Police Scotland look to establish an antisocial behaviour task force with Lothian Buses and the drivers, not just to address those incidents but to ensure that this unacceptable behaviour never happens again?

**Michael Matheson:** I am sure that we all want to find a long-term solution to the particular problem involving antisocial behaviour that has been experienced in parts of Edinburgh. I will ask my justice colleagues to pick up on Miles Briggs's suggestion of a task force—given that they lead on matters relating to antisocial behaviour—to see whether that is a mechanism that could be used to tackle the issue.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I echo the recognition of bus drivers as key workers and heroes during the pandemic. They have worked under constant threat of infection; they do not need to work under threat of abuse.

The matter started with a moratorium on evening services in the Clermiston area of my constituency, because of a recent spate of antisocial behaviour by young people travelling from all over the city to the Drum Brae Drive bus terminus. What discussions is the cabinet secretary having with ministerial colleagues, particularly the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Minister for Children and Young People, who has responsibility for young people and youth work, about diversionary supportive schemes that could be put in place under the Covid-19 restrictions, given the need to divert those young people from these terrible acts?

**Michael Matheson:** The issues behind antisocial behaviour are often complex and multifaceted. A number of actions need to be taken to deal with them. That cannot sit with Police Scotland alone; it also has to involve people who

work in child welfare so that we divert young people from such behaviour. That is something of which Alex Cole-Hamilton no doubt has knowledge, given his experience with the Aberlour Child Care Trust and its work with young people.

It is important that the agencies that have lead roles are very visible and proactive in dealing with the issue. On Alex Cole-Hamilton's specific point concerning my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, I will ensure that his comments are brought to the cabinet secretary's attention, and I will ask him to respond, in his engagements with Police Scotland, specifically to the points that Mr Cole-Hamilton has raised.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the urgent question. I apologise to other members who wished to ask supplementary questions but, as members will be aware, we are running substantially behind time already in this afternoon's business. We will move on to the next item of business in a moment.

## Standing Order Rule Changes (Private and Hybrid Bills)

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24364, in the name of Bill Kidd, on changes to private and hybrid bill procedures.

17:56

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** This debate is on the first of four motions.

The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's report on private and hybrid bill procedures recommends a number of rule changes to make the rules easier to follow for those engaging with the procedures. The rule changes that have been proposed by the committee relate to the definition of a private bill and assessors, and they also include a number of minor rule changes.

The principal change that has been proposed in relation to the definition of a private bill is to expand and clarify the definition of a private bill. In particular, it will cover situations where the promoter's main aim is to amend or repeal existing private legislation. An example is where the promoter is an organisation constituted by a private act that needs to be updated to suit modern circumstances. In addition, the proposed rule changes clarify the rule in other minor respects.

The proposed rule change in relation to assessors provides for an assessor to be appointed to assist with the scrutiny of any private or hybrid bill to which objections have been lodged. The committee believed that this would reduce the time commitment for the MSPs on relevant committees.

The SPPA Committee's report also proposes a series of rule changes to private and hybrid bill procedures. The purpose of those rule changes is to improve the clarity of the procedures, to catch some minor errors, to ensure consistency in wording in different chapters, and to simplify and update the rules more generally. The changes that have been proposed were the subject of internal consultation within the Parliament as well as consultation with Scottish Government officials.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 6th Report 2021 (Session 5), Standing Order Rule Changes – Private and Hybrid Bill Procedures (SP Paper 973), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 12 May 2021.

[Applause.]

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much, Mr Kidd. There was applause for that—[*Laughter.*] There are three more.

## **Standing Order Rule Changes (Delegated Powers Memorandums and Emergency Bills)**

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24391, also in the name of Bill Kidd, on changes in relation to revised accompanying documents for emergency bills.

17:58

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's report on rule changes in relation to delegated powers memorandums and emergency bills proposes two changes to chapters 9 and 9C of the standing orders.

First, it proposes to make the delegated powers memorandum an accompanying document that is required on the introduction of a public or hybrid bill. As delegated powers can be used to make significant provision, the SPPA Committee considered that it was important that they are fully scrutinised. The provision of a delegated powers memorandum as an accompanying document will enable that scrutiny from the point at which the bill is introduced, as well as ensuring that the delegated powers memorandum has the same status as other accompanying documents.

The second change that the report proposes is to remove the requirement to produce revised or supplementary accompanying documents for a bill that is designated an emergency bill. The committee considers that it is unlikely that there would be any circumstances in which there would be sufficient time in the process for the production and scrutiny of revised or supplementary documents for a bill that is designated an emergency bill. Following consultation with the Parliamentary Bureau, the committee therefore agreed to propose that rule 9.21 be revised to disapply the requirements to lodge revised or supplementary documents after stage 2. The proposed changes were the subject of both internal consultation and consultation with the Scottish Government.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 10th Report 2021 (Session 5), *Standing Order Rule Changes — Delegated Powers Memorandum and Emergency Bills* (SP Paper 987), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 12 May 2021.

[*Applause.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** The popularity of these SPPA Committee motions is quite remarkable.

## Standing Order Rule Changes (Financial Scrutiny)

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24375, also in the name of Bill Kidd, on changes to financial scrutiny provisions.

18:00

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's report proposing rule changes relating to the financial scrutiny of bills responds to the increasing role of revenue from devolved taxation following the changes that were made to the Scottish Parliament's legislative competence by the Scotland Act 2016.

The proposed changes primarily relate to rule 9.3.2 and require that a financial memorandum sets out any changes to revenues

"resulting from taxation measures in a Bill".

The changes also relate to rule 9.12, on when a financial resolution is required. The changes that have been proposed would help to ensure that, on the introduction of a bill, the Parliament would be provided with appropriate information about the financial implications of a bill to ensure effective scrutiny.

The changes would also

"ensure that changes to taxation revenues are factored into the decision"

as to whether there is a need for a financial resolution.

In order to ensure consistency, consequential changes to the rules relating to hybrid and private bills are also proposed. The SPPA Committee consulted business managers and committee conveners on the changes that are proposed, and the response from committee conveners was overwhelmingly supportive, particularly in relation to the proposed changes regarding improved potential to scrutinise financial memorandums.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 3rd Report 2021 (Session 5), *Standing Order Rule Changes on the Financial Scrutiny of Bills* (SP Paper 964), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 12 May 2021.



## Code of Conduct Rule Changes (Register of Interests)

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24359, in the name of Bill Kidd, on the code of conduct—register of interests—gifts threshold.

18:02

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** The report recommends that Parliament agree a change to the code of conduct for MSPs relating to the threshold for the registration of gifts. The gifts threshold is dictated by the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006, and is expressed as a percentage of a member's salary at the start of each parliamentary session. Section 2 of the code of conduct contains detailed information to guide members when registering their interest. Section 2 currently makes several references to a £300 threshold, which will become £320 for session 6.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 5th Report 2021 (Session 5), *Code of Conduct — Register of Interests — Gifts Threshold* (SP Paper 972), and agrees that the proposed changes come into effect on 6 May 2021.

## Decision Time

18:03

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** There are nine questions tonight. The first question is, that motion S5M-24395, in the name of Ivan McKee, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2021, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2021 [draft] be approved.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-24396.1, in the name of Brian Whittle, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24396, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national mission to reduce drug deaths and harms, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. I will suspend for a few moments to allow members to access the voting app.

18:03

*Meeting suspended.*

18:08

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We are now back in session and will go straight to the question.

The question is, that amendment S5M-24396.1, in the name of Brian Whittle, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24396, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national mission to reduce drug deaths and harms, be agreed to. Members may cast their votes now on Brian Whittle's amendment, in a one-minute division.

The vote is closed. Please let me know if you were not able to vote.

### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Reform)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 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)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S5M-24396.1, in the name of Brian Whittle, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24396, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national mission to reduce drug deaths and harms, is: For 43, Against 69, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. With apologies, Scottish Labour does not agree to the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2021. Is it possible to record our dissent or move to a division?

**The Presiding Officer:** I understand that you missed that. I called the vote and I heard acclamation from Mr Lyle, at least, that the order was agreed to, but the point is noted and will be in the *Official Report*.

The next question is, that amendment S5M-24396.3, in the name of James Kelly, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24396, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national mission to reduce drug deaths and harms, be agreed to. Are we agreed? We are agreed.

The next question is—

I beg your pardon—a “no” was registered online. That was my fault; I should have noticed it. We will run a vote on the amendment in the name of James Kelly. The question is, that amendment

S5M-24396.3, in the name of James Kelly, be agreed to. This will be a one-minute division.

The vote is now closed. Please let me know if you were not able to vote.

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 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)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)

Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 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)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Reform)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S5M-24396.3, in the name of James Kelly, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24396, in the name of Angela Constance, is: For 114, Against 1, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-24396.2, in the name of Liam McArthur, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24396, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national mission to reduce drug deaths and harms, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-24396, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national mission to reduce drug deaths and harms, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises that almost 3,400 people in Scotland have lost their lives to drug misuse in the last three years; believes that this scale of loss of life is not only a tragedy on the friends and families left behind, but is also a mark of shame on the nation; notes the Scottish Government's proposal to lead a national mission to reduce drug deaths and harms, and to agree that this is a public health emergency requiring partnership working and concerted action at all levels of public life; welcomes the announcement of significant increased funding to support this national mission to be invested in a range of areas that will have the biggest impact in getting individuals into treatment and keeping them alive; acknowledges that additional resources are necessary after years of funding cuts to services; supports the use of public health interventions such as safe consumption facilities to prevent overdoses and save lives; considers that the resources of the police and criminal justice system should be focused on preventing supply of harmful drugs in Scotland's communities and ensuring that vulnerable drug users are not exposed to unnecessary court action; notes that the scale of drugs deaths in Scotland is the highest in the UK; believes that, as well as preventing deaths, there is a need to deliver improvements in treatment options and the availability of same-day treatment for those who seek help with substance misuse; calls on the next Scottish administration to coordinate a plan for a Scotland-wide network of heroin-assisted treatment facilities, and agrees to work towards diverting people caught in possession of drugs for personal use into treatment and ceasing imprisonment in these cases, helping save lives.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-24364, in the name of Bill Kidd, on changes to private and hybrid bill procedures, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 6th Report 2021 (Session 5), *Standing Order Rule Changes — Private and Hybrid Bill Procedures* (SP Paper 973), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 12 May 2021.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-24391, in the name of Bill Kidd, on changes in relation to revised accompanying documents for emergency bills, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 10th Report 2021 (Session 5), *Standing Order Rule Changes — Delegated Powers Memorandum and Emergency Bills* (SP Paper 987), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 12 May 2021.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-24375, in the name of Bill Kidd,

on changes to the financial scrutiny provisions, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 3rd Report 2021 (Session 5), *Standing Order Rule Changes on the Financial Scrutiny of Bills* (SP Paper 964), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 12 May 2021.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S5M-24359, in the name of Bill Kidd, on the code of conduct—register of interests—gifts threshold, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 5th Report 2021 (Session 5), *Code of Conduct — Register of Interests — Gifts Threshold* (SP Paper 972), and agrees that the proposed changes come into effect on 6 May 2021.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time. When leaving the chamber, members should follow the one-way systems, wear their masks and make sure that they observe social distancing rules.

*Meeting closed at 18:15.*

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

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