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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 30 September 2021

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good morning. I remind members of the Covid-related measures that are in place. Face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

The first item of business is general question time. As ever, succinct questions and answers to match will enable more members to take part.

Electric Vehicle On-street Charging

1. **Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to increase the capacity of on-street charging infrastructure as drivers switch to electric vehicles. (S6O-00225)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): We have already invested over £45 million to develop the publicly available ChargePlace Scotland network, which now consists of more than 1,900 charge points across the country. The network includes a number of public charging hubs that are already available in some towns and cities. More are planned throughout Scotland.

We continue to work with local authority charge point hosts to strengthen and expand the network. This year, we will provide funding to enable £2 million of on-street charging projects across Scotland, specifically for areas without access to off-street parking.

Elena Whitham: There are many rural villages and market towns in my constituency—including mine—in which properties are hard to pavement. As such, they do not have private driveways. Those properties currently do not qualify for grant funding for the installation of home chargers, which leaves many citizens to rely on on-street charging infrastructure should they wish to reduce their carbon footprint. Is the Scottish Government aware of those situations throughout Scotland? What considerations are being made for the many people who are in that situation?

Graeme Dey: As an MSP for a rural constituency, I am very much aware of those issues. I hope that Ms Whitham will take assurance from the fact that Government officials are working with South Ayrshire Council to support the installation of chargers that will provide for

people without access to off-street charging in Straiton, Barrhill, Dailly and Maybole.

The Scottish Government is also currently consulting on the requirements for installing charge points in car parks of residential and non-residential buildings. That will further enhance access to electric vehicle charging across Scotland.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): South Lanarkshire Council said that it would install more than 100 electric vehicle charging points, but it has cut that plan by 42 per cent. Notwithstanding the challenges of the pandemic, a £1 million fleet of electric vehicles has barely left the council car park in a year. Charging is a big concern. What can the Scottish Government do to help South Lanarkshire Council to expand local charging networks and make people feel more confident about using electric vehicles?

Graeme Dey: As Monica Lennon will understand, any actions that South Lanarkshire Council has taken are for it to defend and explain. However, to answer her question about engagement with the Scottish Government, the Scottish Government is actively engaged with local authorities in seeking to encourage that. That is our direction of travel, and we expect local authorities to join us in that.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I thank the minister for his previous answer on the number of EV charging points in Scotland. Will he expand on that a little and tell us how that compares with the rest of the United Kingdom?

Graeme Dey: The most recent statistics show that Scotland has more than 2,500 publicly available chargers, which represents 47 chargers per 100,000 of the population. That compares with 36 chargers per 100,000 of the population for the whole of the UK. It is important that Scotland has the highest proportion of rapid chargers and is well ahead of the rest of the UK on that. That proportion is 12 per 100,000 of the population compared with the UK average of 6.8 per 100,000 of the population.

There is, of course, much more to do, because the uptake of electric vehicles is showing a welcome increase.

Chain Store Closures

2. **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to recent research, which suggests that chain stores in Scotland closed at a rate of 30 per week during the first six months of 2021. (S6O-00226)

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): We understand the difficulties that Scotland's retail

industry faces as a result of the global pandemic. In recognition of that, the Scottish Government has provided businesses with more than £4.3 billion in support since the start of the pandemic.

We continue to support the retail sector and other businesses as we rebuild the economy following the pandemic, including through retail strategy, town centre review and city centre recovery task force work, as well as the Scotland loves local £10 million multiyear support programme.

Liam Kerr: The Centre for Cities report says that Aberdeen has the United Kingdom's fourth-lowest high-street spend, noting that around 90 units currently lie empty. Robert Gordon University and Aberdeen Inspired suggest that reasons for that include business rates and overheads. Others point to how slowly the Scottish National Party got Covid relief out the door.

Aberdeen City Council has a master plan, but the reinstatement of 100 per cent business rates in six months' time is casting a long shadow. What plans does the minister have to introduce a fairer business rates system and to restore a level playing field with England on the higher property rate?

Tom Arthur: As the member will be aware, in Scotland we have the most generous package of rates relief anywhere in the United Kingdom. Indeed, we were the only part of the UK to give full non-domestic rates relief for hospitality, leisure, aviation and retail. That was an investment of more than £700 million.

As the member will appreciate, decisions around NDR will be taken as part of the budget process. I very much look forward to his constructive and informed contribution to that process later this year.

Electric Vehicle Charging Sites

3. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what the timescales and number of units are for the roll-out of electric vehicle charging sites across Scotland. (S6O-00227)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): A wide range of factors influence and, ultimately, determine the types, numbers and timescales for the roll-out of electric charging infrastructure. That includes technology developments with vehicles, batteries and charging equipment, as well as the impact of other actions supporting the Scottish Government's ambition to reduce the total number of privately owned cars and to reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030. It is therefore not possible to specify exact timescales and numbers.

Bill Kidd: Electric charging will become an increasingly essential part of our infrastructure. I know that the ChargePlace Scotland network is supported by the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland. Will the cost of charging be determined by Government or by market conditions? Has the Government discussed what action can be taken to ensure that the cost of electric charging is maintained at an affordable rate?

Graeme Dey: Bill Kidd raises a critical point. If the switch to electric vehicles is to work for all of our population, people need to be able to afford to do that. Tariffs are currently set by charge point owners to cover the cost of the electricity provided, as well as of maintaining and growing the network. Other private networks are operating in Scotland that charge on a commercial basis.

Regardless of the source of investment, the Government is committed to delivering a charging network that works for all of Scotland all the time. We continue to engage with charging providers, energy network companies and regulators to ensure that the charging network is affordable.

Local Authority Bus Services

4. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will implement part 3 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 to allow local authorities to bring forward proposals to directly run bus services in their area. (S6O-00228)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): As I outlined in my letter to all members in June, work to implement part 3 of the 2019 act resumed earlier this year, following a pause necessitated by the pandemic. We are currently consulting to help inform the development of the necessary secondary legislation and guidance. The consultation closes on 6 October, and I would encourage all interested parties to feed into the process if they have not already done so.

Colin Smyth: The minister will know that it is more than two years since I lodged an amendment to the Transport (Scotland) Bill to lift that historical ban on councils directly running bus services or establishing municipal bus companies. Can he give us a timescale for when he expects those powers to come into force? Councils want to get on with the job of delivering bus services to their communities. Will the minister also ensure that direct funding is made available to councils to enable them to use those powers, including for capital and revenue start-up costs?

Graeme Dey: I recognise the constructive way in which Colin Smyth engaged on the Transport (Scotland) Bill and on those provisions. He is asking for a timetable. In essence, we would

expect to have the findings of the consultation available to us towards the end of the year. I offer him the assurance that we will look to move on that as quickly as possible. Like him, I see this matter as a real priority.

When it comes to funding, as Colin Smyth knows, we have committed to establishing the community bus fund for this purpose and others. As we see the outcome of the recommendations from the consultation, we will be able to move forward on that, too. I will be happy to work with Colin Smyth on that.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): The original question that Colin Smyth asked the Government was

“when it will implement part 3 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019”.

I am not sure that we have had an answer to that. The minister said that the consultation will close by the end of the year, but can he actually give an answer to the original question? When does he anticipate part 3 of the 2019 act being implemented?

Graeme Dey: I think that I answered that question and I would have thought that Mr Simpson, as an experienced parliamentarian, would have picked up on that. As he knows, we need to develop the secondary legislation, time will have to be found in the parliamentary timetable for its consideration and the committee will want to scrutinise it. I anticipate that being done as quickly as possible.

A96 (Dualling)

5. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress with the dualling of the A96. (S6O-00229)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): The Scottish Government is committed to improving the A96. The current plan is to fully dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen, but as part of the co-operation agreement with the Scottish Green Party, we have agreed to conduct a transparent evidence-based review of the programme, which will report by the end of 2022.

Tess White: Police Scotland data shows that, in the last three years, 195 people in the north-east have been involved in a crash involving a least one fatality. Despite the review and the safety concerns of local communities, and the minister's comments, Green MSP Maggie Chapman has said that it will not be “viable” to fully dual the A96 route. Does the minister agree with Green MSP Maggie Chapman?

Graeme Dey: Maggie Chapman, like any other MSP, is entitled to her view. As a Government

minister, I am committed to the review process, which will determine how we take the project forward.

I will go back to the start of Tess White's question. If she is implying that safety concerns along the route are somehow being ignored, that is reprehensible and untrue.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): The traffic congestion that is experienced by residents in Nairn can be as bad as that which is experienced in Glasgow or Edinburgh, except that in Nairn there is only one road that citizens can use through the town—the A96. During the tourism season, delays of up to an hour can be experienced in getting from one end of the town to the other. Will the minister approve and commence initiation of the tender process for delivery of the preferred route that has been agreed for dualling the A96 between Inverness and Auldearn, including the Nairn bypass? Will he accept my invitation to meet local people and to hear for himself the strength of views and feelings on the matter?

Graeme Dey: I am happy to commit to making such a visit, although I am not in any way unaware of the strength of views on the matter, given the many conversations that I have had with Mr Ewing, who is a strong advocate for the project. I am sure that the member will very much welcome the fact that what is committed to on the A96 includes bypassing Nairn and dualling from Inverness to Nairn. However, as a former minister, Mr Ewing knows that such projects involve processes that have to be followed. That said, I assure him that we will move as quickly as we can to progress the work.

Young People (Employment)

6. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will support young people to find rewarding and sustainable employment. (S6O-00230)

The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn): The Scottish Government is taking a range of actions to support young people to achieve their potential. Through our delivery of the young persons guarantee we have invested an additional £130 million, which aims to provide at least 24,000 new and enhanced opportunities for young people who need support to find and sustain employment. We are clear that opportunities that are created through the guarantee must provide fair work and be underpinned by a package of training that supports young people to transition into employment.

Our developing the young workforce activities are well embedded and are being enhanced by nearly 300 DYW school co-ordinators, who play a vital role in increasing opportunities for work-based learning for pupils. In recognition of the importance of good-quality careers advice, former general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Grahame Smith, who is a non-executive director at Skills Development Scotland, is leading a review of the careers service.

Gillian Martin: Many of the businesses in my constituency are small and medium-sized enterprises. I would like to encourage more of them to get involved in providing opportunities through the young persons guarantee. Will the minister outline what support we are giving to businesses that are too small to have training or human resources departments to enable them to play their part in the scheme and to unlock the potential of our young people?

Jamie Hepburn: There is good news in that regard. As part of the young persons guarantee, we are working closely with employers to encourage them to sign up to the five asks, which are proportionate to the size of businesses. Of the businesses that have signed up, more than two thirds are SMEs, which is testament to SMEs' willingness and commitment to making a difference.

Of course, we want to see more businesses taking part. Developing the young workforce regional groups and local authority employability leads can play important roles. We too, as members of the Scottish Parliament, can play a leadership role in encouraging local employers to do so. I welcome Ms Martin's commitment in that regard, which is, I am sure, shared by members across the chamber.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): The minister will be aware that, yesterday, figures came out on unemployment among people with disabilities. There are now more people with disabilities unemployed than there were this time last year. The gap between England and Scotland is growing wider in that respect, and a person who is disabled is far less likely to get a job in Scotland than they are to get one down south. Why does the minister think that is happening, and what are he and his Government going to do about it?

Jamie Hepburn: I am aware of that disappointing trend. As Mr Balfour will probably know, it is the first time in some while that we have moved backwards on the disability employment gap. We will respond—as he, and other members, would rightly expect us to do—by introducing, during the current session of Parliament, Scotland's first national strategy on transitions to adulthood. We will also implement the Morgan

review recommendations on additional support for learning.

Our fair start Scotland programme continues to play a role, and we will continue to work to our disability employment action plan, "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: employment action plan", which seeks to reduce by at least half the disability employment gap, over the coming two decades.

Attainment Gap

7. Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the action it is taking to close the poverty-related attainment gap, including in response to the reduction to universal credit. (S6O-00231)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Record investment of £215 million this year, including a £20 million pupil equity funding premium, is providing additional support for children and young people who need it most. That is the first investment as part of our £1 billion commitment to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap and support education recovery in the current session of Parliament.

However, tackling the poverty-related attainment gap cannot be done by education or schools alone. Scottish Government analysis indicates that the United Kingdom Government's decision to cut universal credit could push 60,000 people in Scotland, including 20,000 children, into poverty. That is why the UK Government must reverse that harmful and senseless cut immediately.

Neil Gray: I refer colleagues to my entry in the register of members' interests. As the cabinet secretary said, this action cannot be about just education, although I note the substantial investment in our schools. The best way to narrow the poverty-related attainment gap is to address poverty.

When a £6 billion cut in universal credit, which will remove £1,000 from low-income families, is coming forward from the Tories, a £500 million replication of the Scottish welfare fund, as was announced this morning, will go no way towards making up for the poverty that people will suffer. What impact will those cuts have on the Government's ability to close the poverty-related attainment gap?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I quite agree with Neil Gray. The announcement today of a £500 million fund does not, in any way, begin to compensate for the £6 billion cut to universal credit. That is why we, in the Scottish Government, are doing what we can. I have spoken about the record funding that we are

providing to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap, but Neil Gray is quite right to say that we also need to tackle the root causes of poverty.

One of the root causes is that the UK Government has a fundamentally different approach to its social security system—an approach that seems to punish the poorest people in our society. Given the votes in the universal credit debate this week, I think that the Scottish Tories share the UK Government's view. That is exceptionally disappointing, but we in the Scottish Government will continue to do what we can to support our people.

First Minister's Question Time

11:59

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I intend to take constituency and general supplementary questions after question 2, so members wishing to ask supplementaries should press their request-to-speak buttons during question 2. I will keep a note of members who press their buttons and may take further supplementaries from those members if we have any time in hand after question 6. Members wishing to ask a supplementary to questions 3 to 6 should press their buttons during the relevant question.

Covid-19 Vaccination Passport Scheme

1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The Scottish National Party's vaccination passport scheme comes into effect in just a few hours' time and, although the judgment has now been delivered, as late as this morning businesses were still in court trying to halt the scheme. Guidance is still being published, and the app was to be launched today. So far, we have the app to check vaccination passports, but we do not have the app for vaccination passports. Everything has been left to the last minute, and that is not the way to run any scheme, let alone one that will affect people right across Scotland. The First Minister and I disagree strongly about the policy, and my party wants it scrapped but, surely, even she must accept that the scheme is not ready and needs to be delayed?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): No, I do not agree with that. Perhaps understandably, from his perspective, Douglas Ross wants simply to gloss over this morning's decision by the Court of Session, which rejected the application for interim interdict. Therefore, let me summarise and paraphrase the reasons that were given for that rejection: the scheme had been consulted on; there had been an opportunity to take part in the consultation; the scheme that was introduced was not "disproportionate, irrational or unreasonable"; it was reasonable to bring in the phased approach; there was no discrimination; and, in summary, the scheme attempted to address legitimate concerns in a reasonable and "balanced way".

All along, I have been very candid and clear. None of us wants to be in this position and none of us wants to take any of the steps that we have had to take over 18 months, in order to seek to contain the virus, keep people safe and limit the damage to health and other damage that the virus does. However, we are still in the pandemic; there are around 1,000 people in our hospitals with the virus or because of it and, of course, we face what

might be the most difficult winter that any of us can imagine. The vaccination passport scheme is a targeted and proportionate way to try to reduce the harm that the virus will do over the winter months, while keeping our economy fully open, functioning and trading. The judgment from the court this morning recognises both those reasons and the way in which the Government has gone about that.

The legal obligation for the passport scheme comes into force tomorrow, and we will continue to engage with business, not just in the run-up to the enforcement, which comes into place on 18 October, but afterwards, to make sure that we are listening and understanding and that all of us work collectively to keep the country as safe as possible, as we go through the winter months.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister claims that she has been candid and clear; if only her vaccination passport scheme were candid and clear. She said that I glossed over the legal challenge, but I mentioned it right at the top of my question. Surely, it shows how badly the Government has worked with businesses that they had to take that last-minute legal challenge and they were still in court with her Government this morning.

Sectors are desperately trying to stop the scheme from going ahead, because they are so worried about the impact that it will have on their businesses and Scottish jobs. The scheme starts at 5 am tomorrow but, by tomorrow night, we could be in the ridiculous situation in which hundreds of people will be at venues where they need a vaccination passport to get in but, if the music is turned off, the same people suddenly do not need a vaccination passport. At the football this weekend, thousands of people will need to go through vaccination passport checks, in a short space of time, without any public campaign to inform them of the procedures that they will have to go through. Does the First Minister not realise that, to everyone in the real world, that looks like a complete farce?

The First Minister: Again—no, I do not. Although very few people, if any, like the measures that we are having to take in order to control the virus, the vast majority of people across Scotland understand the reasons for those measures and would prefer a situation where people are asked to show proof of vaccination over a situation where venues such as nightclubs or large-scale events have to close or stop again. That is the balance that we are seeking to strike.

With regard to the legal challenge, any organisation in a democracy has the right to challenge the decisions of Government right up until those decisions come into force and, indeed, afterwards. Interestingly, the Tories south of the

border are seeking to take the right to judicial review away completely, or at least limit it considerably.

However, the judgment of Lord Burns this morning is very clear and emphatic. On the point about some venues and some circumstances being covered but not others, again, I paraphrase and summarise, but the judgment recognises that it is widely known that the combination of alcohol and dancing, late at night and inside, create a high risk environment for the transmission of Covid, which does not occur to the same extent in other venues.

There is no perfection when you are dealing with an infectious virus. All the steps and measures that we have to take are imperfect, and of course they are far from ideal. However, we cannot simply wish Covid away. We have to take the steps to get cases back under control.

I said this the other day, and I think that it is worth repeating. Over recent months, Douglas Ross has opposed almost every step that we have tried to take, from face coverings through to Covid vaccination certification. If I had listened to Douglas Ross, we would probably not be in the position that we are in—thankfully—of having cases on a downward path. Perhaps it is Douglas Ross who needs to reflect a bit more on some of the arguments that he makes in this chamber.

Douglas Ross: If the First Minister had listened to those of us on these benches, she would not be introducing a scheme from 5 am tomorrow that sees hundreds of people get their vaccination passports checked as they walk into a venue, when, if the music gets unplugged, they will suddenly, miraculously, not need a vaccination passport at all. If she had listened to those on the Conservative benches, she would not be introducing a scheme from 5 am tomorrow that cannot be enforced for more than a fortnight after that.

Businesses have never had a tougher time than right now, but they are getting guidance on vaccination passports at the very last minute. The evidence case for those passports—if it can be called that, because there is barely any evidence for this policy—was put before a Scottish Parliament committee for the first time this morning. There are so many flaws littered throughout the scheme, and proper consideration has not taken place.

Let us look at just one key part of the legislation. Who has the Scottish Government consulted with over regulation 16A, and what was the outcome of those discussions?

The First Minister: We have consulted with a range of stakeholders. I do not have the regulations in front of me right now. I am very

happy to come back afterwards and go through every particular regulation and say who precisely we have consulted with.

Let us come back to the heart of the matter here. There is one point that I agree with Douglas Ross on: if I had listened to him and the Conservatives, many of the steps that we have taken to try to get Covid cases back under control would not have been taken. I am afraid that the consequence of that might well have been that Covid cases would still be rising. Just a few weeks ago, Douglas Ross was complaining about the continued legal requirement to wear face coverings. He has opposed, literally, almost everything that we have done. I think that this is just part of a pattern, and it will probably leave most people to think that it is a good thing that Douglas Ross is not standing here, facing the need to take these decisions.

The Presiding Officer: Douglas Ross.

Douglas Ross: Thank you, Presiding Officer. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: My apologies, I assumed that the First Minister had finished.

The First Minister: I was going to address the points about evidence, because evidence is important. Douglas Ross likes, quite legitimately, to quote different people in the chamber. With regard to the scrutiny of the regulations that took place in a meeting of the Covid-19 Recovery Committee just this morning, let me reflect on the comments of Professor Christopher Dye, who is professor of epidemiology at the University of Oxford, in which he commended the evidence paper and said that, with one of two comments or queries, he would

“broadly agree with its recommendations.”

He also said:

“I think that it is a very good report, actually, and I agree with its basic recommendations, which is that vaccination certification is a useful device and approach to support the vaccination programme in Scotland.”

That takes us back to the heart of the matter. We have an infectious virus circulating that has taken far too many lives. It is still doing too much damage: 1,000 people are in our hospitals with Covid right now, as we speak. It is incumbent on Government to take responsible, reasonable and targeted measures to keep the country safe as we go into a potentially very difficult winter. That is a responsibility that I am going to continue to treat and discharge with the utmost seriousness.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister had two bites of the cherry to answer that question, and she could not do it. There are only half a dozen regulations in her legislation, which comes into effect from 5 am tomorrow. If it is somehow

unreasonable to expect her to know about regulation 16A, which was discussed in the COVID-19 Recovery Committee this morning, she can turn to her Deputy First Minister, who appeared before the committee, and ask for answers—but I see that he does not seem to know, either. That just shows the lack of engagement and the lack of consultation that there has been and the SNP’s lack of understanding of its own policy.

The Government seems to be making it up as it goes along. Just look at what John Swinney said at the COVID-19 Recovery Committee this morning. He could not even tell the members what will be the criteria to end the Covid passport scheme. He is whispering in the First Minister’s ear, so let us hope that she can tell us because he could not at the committee this morning.

The SNP Government is the only one in Europe to run a scheme like this, relying purely on the vaccination status of people and banning them from venues unless they can produce official paperwork. It is the only Government in Europe forcing higher costs on to businesses and such restrictive rules on to the public. Nicola Sturgeon wants independence in Europe: well, she has got it. She is completely alone in pursuing this shambles of a scheme. Why are countries across Europe, thousands of Scottish businesses, the Scottish Beer and Pub Association, the Scottish hospitality group, the Night Time Industries Association, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Scottish Licensed Trade Association and the Scottish Human Rights Commission all wrong, but Nicola Sturgeon is right?

The First Minister: It is interesting that in the course of that ramble Douglas Ross appears to have completely changed the basis for his opposition to Covid certification—Anas Sarwar changed the basis of his about a week ago. Up until now, I understood that, for Douglas Ross, the objection was that it was far too difficult for businesses to comply with the scheme, but now it is because we are requiring proof of vaccination only, not proof of a negative test. I have set out clearly why we are not doing that at this point and the fact that we will keep that under review.

The principal reason why we are taking that approach right now is because we are trying to drive up vaccination rates. We set out the rationale, the reasons and the detail, a court has looked at that over the past 24 hours—I have already summarised the judgment of the court, which was delivered this very morning—and the committee has scrutinised it again this morning. We have listened to businesses, which is why we have delayed enforcement to allow businesses a grace period to test their arrangements in practice.

I come back to the central point. I am left wondering what exactly Douglas Ross would support us doing to keep Covid under control, to protect people's health, to protect our economy and to save lives. The position that he is taking right now is to oppose everything that the Government does, simply for the sake of opposition. That is irresponsible at any time, but in the face of a deadly virus that is particularly irresponsible from the Conservatives.

Low-income Households (Support)

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): We are facing a cost of living crisis. Today, furlough, a lifeline for so many, comes to an end; next week, universal credit will be cut for millions of people across the country—I am sure that the First Minister and I agree that that is a shameful mistake by the Tory Government; and, tomorrow, the energy cap will rise by £139, meaning that many people will face a choice between eating and heating this winter. Even before this cost of living crisis, that was an unacceptable choice faced by too many people in our country, particularly our elderly. Will the First Minister tell the chamber, right now, how many people in Scotland are living in fuel poverty and how many of them are pensioners?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Far too many. With apologies to Anas Sarwar, I do not have the precise figures in front of me right now, but I know that it is too many. The Government is, of course, taking action to help people on the lowest incomes with the cost of living crisis, because I absolutely agree that that is what we are facing. For example, by the end of October, we will make a £130 support payment to every household that receives council tax reduction—an investment of up to £65 million that will benefit more than 500,000 households—and we have introduced the Scottish child payment, which is also intended to help those who are living in poverty.

I suspect that Anas Sarwar's next question will be to ask us to make additional payments to people who are living in fuel poverty. I hope that we can agree between us that, if the Government had the wherewithal to do that, we would do it, because we all want to help those on the lowest incomes. However, we come again to the nub of a matter. The Scottish Government—any Government in the Scottish Parliament—is simply unable to continue, week after week, month after month and year after year, mitigating the impact of reserved policies from within a limited and finite devolved budget. It is simply not possible to do that without hitting our devolved responsibilities hard.

I come back to this point: if we want, as I do, the Parliament to be able to do all the things that no doubt Anas Sarwar is going to ask me to do, we cannot just wish the ends; we have to give the Parliament the means. We have to give the Parliament the powers, and we have to ensure that it is this Parliament that holds the resources. Anything short of that from Anas Sarwar is, I am afraid, just an empty sound bite, and what we face now is far too serious for that.

Anas Sarwar: The matter is indeed far too serious, which is why the soundbites are coming from the First Minister.

We have the means, and we should use the means that we have. We have the power to have a winter fuel payment from the Parliament, but the First Minister has chosen to give that power back to the very Tory Government that she rightfully criticises. Let us use that power to make a difference.

On the question that I asked the First Minister, the answer is that 613,000 people live in fuel poverty, of whom 200,000 are believed to be pensioners. One in four households across our country are unable to make ends meet and are forced to make heartbreaking choices right now.

This week, we heard that Scotland had recorded the first death by starvation of an older person in a decade. An older person in our country, which is one of the richest in the world, starved to death in their home. Words cannot describe how tragic and awful that is, but words will not keep people warm this winter. The Scottish Government can, and must, take action now.

Earlier this week, we called for a £70 increase in winter fuel payments to help the poorest pensioners this winter. Today, we learned that the Scottish Government would receive an additional £41 million to support hard-pressed families over the coming months, so now we can go even further. Will the First Minister enhance the winter fuel payment, and not just for the poorest pensioners? Will she also give targeted support to struggling families, such as those with a child with a disability or those that are in receipt of council tax reduction? We have the means, so let us use them.

The First Minister: First, the £41 million to which Anas Sarwar refers is, I assume, what will flow from this morning's UK Government announcement of a UK-wide £500 million fund for low-income families. I am surprised to hear Anas Sarwar talk about that fund positively. It was announced by a Tory Government that is taking £6 billion out of the pockets of the lowest-income families through the universal credit cut and expecting praise—which it seems to have got from

Anas Sarwar—for putting £500 million back. It is an absolute disgrace and an insult.

I give the absolute commitment that every penny of consequential that we get from that fund will go to support low-income families. That will be in addition to the support that I have already talked about—a £130 support payment by the end of October that will go to every household that receives council tax reduction, supporting more than 500,000 households across the country.

We are also doubling the carers allowance supplement in December to try to help carers with the cost of living increase and, as I have already said, we have introduced the Scottish child payment. Only yesterday, I visited Social Security Scotland in Dundee, which is delivering 11 benefits already, seven of which do not exist anywhere else. That is how seriously we are taking the obligation to help those most in need.

I come back to the point that our resources are finite. Anas Sarwar is asking me to find money from within a devolved budget that has already been allocated in order to mitigate—again—the impact of reserved policies. Would it not make more sense for us to have the powers here, in this Parliament, with the accompanying resources, so that we can take different decisions?

I make Anas Sarwar two open offers. First, I ask him to back the Scottish Government in its call to devolve all, and not just some, of social security to this Parliament. Secondly, if he wants us to make another payment, he can, by all means, tell me from where in the already allocated Scottish budget he wants me to take over and above the £41 million that he has mentioned, which, as I have already said, will be fully allocated. If he wants anything over and above that, he should come and tell me where from within the Scottish budget he wants me to take that money. I am happy to listen to him if he is prepared to do that.

The Presiding Officer: I am conscious of time, so I would be grateful for shorter questions and responses.

Anas Sarwar: The problem is that the First Minister wants to shout pre-prepared attack lines rather than listen to what I am saying. I was not welcoming the new money as some kind of relief for universal credit; I was taking seriously what the First Minister often says, which is that, if we have a proposal, we should tell her where the money is coming from. I quite clearly told her that we should use that £41 million to make a difference.

The First Minister gave examples, and I welcome them, but they were announced before we had a cost of living crisis. We can shout about the new powers that we want, but let us use the powers that we have to change people's lives in the here and now. This is urgent: people are

facing rising costs today, energy bills will rise tomorrow and people need help now. We cannot dither and delay when families need that reassurance.

The Scottish Government has the power to do something about it. We know that the additional £41 million is on its way, and families need to know that support is also on its way. Warm words will be cold comfort for people who are at risk of suffering this winter.

Will the First Minister guarantee that the Government will act, that she will back our plan, and that she will make sure that the £41 million gets into people's pockets before it is too late?

The First Minister: People who are watching this will have heard me say that every penny of the £41 million will go directly to help low-income families.

Anas Sarwar said that that is where the funding for his proposal should come from, but he announced his proposal before we knew about the £41 million. Maybe I am getting his proposal wrong, but I assume that the £70 increase that he wants is over and above that. All that I am saying to him is that he should tell us where the money should come from.

Sometimes, consequential do not turn out to be what they appeared to be, but, on the assumption that the £41 million does come from the UK Government, every single penny of it will go to help low-income families. That will be in addition to the other sources of support that I have just outlined, such as the £130 support payment and all the other steps that we are taking: the doubling of the carers allowance and the seven benefits that do not exist anywhere else in the UK that Social Security Scotland is already delivering.

We act to use our powers and our resources, but the cost of living crisis is caused by the decisions that the UK Government is taking within its reserved powers. We cannot go on raiding a finite devolved budget to mitigate the impact of those decisions. We need to get those powers out of the hands of UK Governments and into the hands of this Parliament. As long as Anas Sarwar prefers to leave those powers in Boris Johnson's hands, he will not have the credibility that he wants to have before this chamber.

Gene Editing

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Mike Coffey of Scotland's Rural College said:

"With the state of the planet, we need to do something rather urgently. We no longer have the luxury of having decades to breed ... plants and animals."

The Roslin Institute, the NFU Scotland and the SRUC are all concerned that the SNP Government is adopting an outdated European Union position in rejecting gene editing and putting farmers in Scotland on the back foot instead of grasping science and innovation. Does the First Minister agree with David Michie of the NFUS that gene editing will benefit animal welfare, public health, the environment and farmers?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I have not seen those comments in full, but I am happy to look at them and to consider them carefully. Those are serious issues.

The quality of our food and agriculture is important. I do not support genetically modified crops; opposition to that is important. I know that we are not talking about exactly the same thing, but it is important to consider all these things carefully. I will consider the comments and say more once I have had the opportunity to do that.

Lamb (United States Import Ban)

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): While in Washington last week, Boris Johnson claimed that the US ban on imports of lamb had been lifted. United Kingdom Government memos that have been obtained by the *Daily Record*, however, reveal that the ban has not been lifted and that the PM was “misleading”. I am quoting UK civil servants. Does the First Minister agree that the way in which the Tories are treating the industry is disgraceful, and that Boris Johnson must apologise and set the record straight?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Jim Fairlie appears to be suggesting that not everything that comes out of the mouth of Boris Johnson can be relied upon. Perish the thought. Perhaps the more pertinent question is whether anything that comes out of the mouth of Boris Johnson can be relied upon.

Jim Fairlie is absolutely right. The Prime Minister owes an apology because what he said is not the case and has been described as “misleading”. Of course, the UK Government has betrayed our farmers and our fishermen, and each and every day right now our entire agricultural sector is paying the price of the Tory Brexit. That price is getting higher and higher with every day that passes. Perhaps the PM should apologise not just for the misleading statement about the import ban on lamb but for all the damage that the UK Government has done through Brexit.

Jobs

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Today, the furlough scheme comes to an end. The most recent figures showed that more than

100,000 people in Scotland were still on furlough. Although the headlines might discuss labour shortages, labour market statistics show that the number of jobs in the economy is still significantly below pre-pandemic levels. Although the transition training fund is welcome, it will account for a small fraction of the jobs shortfall.

Does the First Minister think that her Government is doing enough to help people who might find themselves out of work at the end of this month, given the stress and anxiety, and the impact on household finances that they will experience as a result?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We will continue to do everything that we can. The question about the need for us to look on an on-going basis at whether we are doing all that we reasonably can to help low-income families and to help people who are unemployed is a fair one. I certainly give the assurance that we will do that on an on-going basis.

I return to the answer that I gave to Anas Sarwar. I am afraid that we, and people across the country, are suffering the impact of decisions that are beyond the control of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament. There will always be a limit to what we can do to mitigate the impact of those decisions. It would be far better if we did not have to go cap in hand to a United Kingdom Government to ask for furlough to be continued. It would be much, much better if we could take such decisions here in Scotland, in this democratically elected Parliament.

If Labour is serious about such matters—I respect the fact that Daniel Johnson is—it must stop holding to the position of merely willing the ends of things. It must get into a position in which it gives Parliament the means to do the things that we all want it to be able to do.

Vaccination Certification (Weddings)

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): As we sat listening to the exchange about vaccination passports, I was contacted by someone from a hospitality venue in the Highlands, who says that it hosts weddings. It is holding one tomorrow night. The person understands that all guests will need to provide evidence of having had two vaccinations to be allowed in. There will be music, dancing and all the rest of it. Some of the guests are family members who are over from China. Will they be allowed in?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): As we have made clear, weddings are exempt from the vaccination certification scheme.

Temporary Visa Scheme

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): What discussions has the Scottish Government had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the announcement of a temporary visa scheme to tackle skills shortages?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We discuss such matters with the UK Government on an on-going basis. The Scottish Government has on many occasions made clear its opposition to the UK Government's immigration policies—in particular, the ending of free movement. We welcome anything that enables more people to come here to work.

However, to describe the changes to the visa rules that were announced last week as a sticking plaster would be an exaggeration, because I do not think that they even amount to that. They are woefully inadequate.

I am afraid that the price of those policies will be paid and felt by people across the country for some time to come.

Abortion Healthcare (Safe Access)

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Abortion rights are under attack around the world and, here in Scotland, women are being harassed as they try to access abortion clinics safely. The implementation of buffer zones around clinics has stalled, and campaigners such as Back Off Scotland are looking to the Scottish Government for leadership and support.

Does the First Minister agree that anyone who accesses abortion healthcare in Scotland should be able to do so safely and free from harassment? Will the Government reassess its position on legislating for abortion clinic buffer zones?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, I agree whole-heartedly. I am a very strong believer in a woman's right to choose on abortion. I am, if it is possible, an even stronger advocate—as everybody should be, regardless of the fact that people have different views on abortion—of the position that any woman who has an abortion should be able to do so without fear of, and without actual abuse or harassment. There is work to be done to make sure that that is the case.

My party's election manifesto had things to say on the matter, as did the manifestos of other parties, and we will consider steps that we can take to ensure that women can exercise that right in reality.

Ferry Fleet Capacity (Northern Isles)

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Reputational damage is being caused to some

Shetland businesses as Transport Scotland fails to address the need for adequate year-round ferry fleet capacity. One removals company has had future bookings cancelled, which resulted in a house owner sitting on the floor in their empty new home. That is just one recent example.

There can be no economic growth without sufficient infrastructure. The matter has been raised before, but the response was that pinch points are recognised and that all options are being considered. There is growing frustration and anger in the isles that no interim solution has been found. Will the First Minister indicate what Transport Scotland does with the freight information that northern isles stakeholders provide to it? When will the Scottish Government address that serious problem?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Minister for Transport has engaged on the issues, which are important. There are plans to develop two new freight vessels, which will address the issue in the long-term. The minister has also given an assurance that work is under way to explore potential short-term actions to alleviate some of the pressures on the busiest sailings.

I will ask the transport minister to write directly to Beatrice Wishart. If she wishes to provide details of the particular case that she cited, those will be passed on. I will ask Graeme Day to provide more detail about the work that is under way to resolve the issue in the short term as well as in the longer term.

Brexit (Economic Impact)

3. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the on-going economic impact on Scotland of Brexit. (S6F-00322)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government estimates that the new relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom could cut Scotland's gross domestic product by around 6.1 per cent by 2030, compared to continued EU membership. That would be equivalent to £9 billion in 2016 cash terms.

In particular, we have forecast that one of the immediate impacts will come from challenges in recruiting and retaining EU citizens as workers here. That has, indeed, proved to be the case. The fuel crisis and the labour and skills shortages that are now being experienced across the economy and in public services lay bare the economic recklessness of a hard Brexit. The UK Government pressed ahead with leaving the EU, despite repeated requests for delay. Everyone in

the country is now seeing the result of that short-sighted ideology everywhere we look.

Gillian Mackay: The people of Scotland never voted for Brexit. We now face soaring energy prices and forecourts are running dry. A labour shortage affects sectors from care to haulage. We are even threatened with shortages of Irn Bru if the situation is not urgently addressed.

The Conservative response to that is the pathetic offer of a three-month visa for EU truck drivers. It is clear that the Tories have nothing to offer Scotland but cuts, hardship and cruelty. Their latest plans for replacing EU subsidies yet again take powers from this Parliament and threaten our plans for a green recovery.

Is the First Minister concerned about that latest power grab, and will she reaffirm her commitment, as outlined in our co-operation agreement, to offering the people of Scotland a way out of Boris Johnson's Brexit Britain with a referendum on Scotland's future, before the end of this session of Parliament?

The First Minister: It was interesting that, as Gillian Mackay was asking that very pertinent question, the Tories were getting very twitchy. They do not like to hear or to listen to the reality of the damage that their policies are doing to people the length and breadth of Scotland. They will not be able to hide from that damage in the weeks and months to come.

Regarding immigration, in the run-up to the Brexit referendum and since, the Conservatives have given the impression that people from other countries are not welcome to work here. Now they want people to come here for three months to help the UK Government out of its self-imposed crisis, only to send them back again on Christmas eve. That is absolutely disgraceful.

Across a range of issues today, we have heard the power of the argument for this country to be independent, so that we can take such decisions ourselves and are no longer dependent on the decisions of a UK Government, and so that we can respond to the needs of people throughout this country here, in the democratically elected Parliament of our nation.

I continue to believe, and intend, that that will be the case and that people across the country will have the opportunity to choose independence in a referendum within this session of Parliament and, I hope, within the first half of the session.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Does the First Minister agree that local authority budgets have been badly affected by the disastrous Tory Brexit deal? *[Interruption.]* Councils such as Aberdeenshire Council are struggling to repair potholes because

contractors cite additional costs relating to supplies and staff.

The Presiding Officer: I ask colleagues to please bear it in mind that we all wish to hear the questions that are asked. I hope that you heard the question, First Minister.

The First Minister: I did, Presiding Officer. People will draw their own conclusions, but the fact of the matter is that the Tories do not want people to hear these questions because they hope that people will not see the damage that Tory policies are doing to people across the country. However, people are feeling it in their jobs, in their pay packets and in their energy bills. They will see it and they will know exactly who is responsible.

On local government budgets, during a decade of Tory austerity we sought to treat local government as fairly as possible and will continue to do that. However, whether it is through austerity or Brexit, we see the damage that the Conservatives are doing, which is why more and more people think that this country should be independent.

Vulnerable Households (Winter Support)

4. Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what engagement the Scottish Government has had, and plans it has made, with key Scottish industries to support vulnerable households this winter. (S6F-00321)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I have already, in answer to previous questions, set out the range of measures that we are taking to directly support vulnerable households across this winter. More generally, we are engaging with people and businesses across the country. We have been engaging with industry and consumer groups, including fuel poverty organisations, to develop plans for what we can reasonably do to further support those in vulnerable circumstances.

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, Michael Matheson, met the United Kingdom secretary of state on Monday and pressed for further UK Government action on skills, industry and support for the most vulnerable, and we intend to keep making that case.

Evelyn Tweed: As the First Minister knows, there is just one week to go before the UK Government cuts universal credit, plunging over 60,000 families and 20,000 children in Scotland into poverty. Tory MSPs have spent this week defending the indefensible. Will she join me in saying to the Tories, "It's not too late. Do the right thing. Defend your constituents and stand with the Scottish Parliament against these cuts"?

The First Minister: Yes. Obviously, as part of the cut and thrust of democracy and political debate, I disagree with and oppose many of the UK Government's policies, just as the Conservatives will oppose many of the policies of this Government. However, I do not think that there has been anything quite so morally indefensible as the cut to universal credit that is planned to take effect in a week's time. Taking—at this time, in particular—£20 a week away from the most vulnerable, lowest-income households across the country simply cannot be defended in any way, shape or form.

I ask the Conservatives in the chamber—if Douglas Ross wants to get off his phone for a moment while we are talking about this really serious issue—to please, over the next few days, try to persuade their UK Government colleagues not to do this. It is their constituents, just as it is mine and those of every member in the chamber, who are going to find it difficult to feed their children, pay their energy bills and live with dignity if the cut goes ahead. For goodness' sake, let all of us unite to say to the UK Government, "Do not do this."

Planning Applications (Scottish Ministers)

5. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that, in the last year, ministers overturned almost 50 per cent of planning applications. (S6F-00319)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): It is simply incorrect to say that ministers have overturned almost 50 per cent of planning applications. The vast majority of planning appeals are decided by independent reporters from the planning and environmental appeals division of the Scottish Government. It is right and proper that ministers have no involvement in cases that are delegated to reporters.

In the last financial year, 135 decisions on planning appeals were made, and planning permission was granted on 67 occasions. However, in the same period, local planning authorities decided on approximately 25,000 planning applications, and 94.5 per cent were granted planning permission. Planning approvals issued by reporters were approximately 0.3 per cent of the planning permissions granted over the course of this year in Scotland. That is my response to that claim.

Miles Briggs: We know that national planning framework 4 will give ministers additional powers over local planning. Council leaders, including those from the First Minister's own party, have voiced real concerns about the impacts of the Government's proposals regarding the centralisation of services and further loss of local

accountability and decision making. Those include concerns about alcohol and drug partnerships and children's services being swept up in proposals for a centralised system. I ask a very simple question of the First Minister. By the end of this session, will councils have fewer or more powers?

The First Minister: We seem to have gone from planning applications to children's services. We work in partnership with local authorities to make sure that we are delivering for people across the country.

Let us go back to planning applications. There is no centralisation here. As I said, in 2020-21, 25,000 planning applications were decided by local planning authorities. The vast majority of them—94.5 per cent—were granted planning permission. There were 135 decisions on planning appeals made through the arrangements in the Scottish Government, which I have set out, and Scottish ministers made the final decision on four recalled planning appeals.

The whole premise of the question is deeply flawed, which is probably why Miles Briggs chose to go on to something else after my first answer rather than stick with the subject matter of his question.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The national planning framework will be published and consulted on soon. When does the Scottish Government intend to publish the national planning framework participation statement, setting out the consultation process?

The First Minister: I am very happy to get back to the member with the date—if we have set a date—on which that will be published. I will ask the relevant minister to write to the member as soon as possible.

Social Care Services (Glasgow)

6. Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that social care services in Glasgow have been temporarily suspended because of staff shortages. (S6F-00304)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): All of us understand how vital those services are to many people, and I understand the concern that any changes to the operation of such services brings. The Glasgow health and social care partnership has sought to assure the Government that the suspension of services is temporary. The situation will be regularly reviewed and services will be reinstated as quickly as possible.

We have been working, and we will continue to work, closely with all local areas, including Glasgow, to ensure that services are delivered

safely. That has included introducing measures to address recruitment and retention issues, such as working with the Scottish Social Services Council and key partners to promote opportunities and encourage take-up of vacant posts, which includes work on training and developing the workforce. In addition, we are running a campaign to attract more people to the sector, and we are accelerating routes into the sector in recruitment processes.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I thank the First Minister for that answer, but people who require care will probably find little comfort in it. Last week, Glasgow City Council took the operational decision to suspend day-care services on the basis of mounting staffing pressures in what has been described as a “critical shortage” of care workers—a shortage that I, as a care user, am acutely aware of.

Does the First Minister accept that there is a crisis in social care recruitment and that her Government’s continued year-on-year underfunding of local authorities and social care has impacted on vacancies and the pay that is available? How many vacancies are there currently in social care in Scotland, and will the Government commit to publishing that information? What action is the Government taking to tackle the crisis, including the grossly unfair low pay in the sector?

The First Minister: There were a number of perfectly reasonable questions there.

Obviously, local authorities generally are the employers of social care workers, so the data is likely to be held mainly by local authorities, but I will undertake to look at whether we can publish the kind of information that Pam Duncan-Glancy is asking for, so that we have greater understanding and transparency around the level of vacancies.

I absolutely agree that—notwithstanding my previous answer or, probably, this answer—the temporary suspension of services will be of profound concern to everybody who is affected by it, and everybody wants to see those services reinstated as quickly as possible.

We will continue to have debates in the chamber about funding. We are increasing funding to social care, and it is important that we do that. There is a recognised need to drive up the pay and conditions of the social care workforce. That is part of our national care service proposal, but the issue needs to be progressed in the lead-up to the delivery of that proposal. I take all of this very seriously.

I do not want to get back into the exchanges about Brexit that we had earlier, but I will say that we face a shortage of labour in this country that is affecting haulage companies—as we can see right

now—and many aspects of the private sector. We all have to recognise that it is affecting our health and care sector, too, and that is likely to be exacerbated in the coming period. Yesterday, the health secretary and I discussed the issue with officials, and we have a number of plans in progress to try to increase recruitment into social care. We will do everything that we can to do that. It is one of the impacts of decisions that have been taken over recent years that will cause difficulty for us in the coming months. We all have to recognise that and resolve to do everything that we can to overcome it.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister’s question time.

Point of Order

12:45

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Yesterday, in the chamber, during the debate on the drug deaths crisis, Scottish National Party MSP Jim Fairlie suggested that the Scottish Conservatives were

“cynically using the death toll that drugs are taking in our communities to attack the Scottish Government”.—[*Official Report*, 29 September 2021; c 73.]

I suggest that that kind of language goes beyond the robust debate that we want in the chamber. That is offensive to those members from all parties who, over the past few years, have stood up, represented our communities and debated the issue with a view to finding solutions.

If Mr Fairlie is suggesting that Opposition parties should not use their debating time to highlight a crisis that has made Scotland the drug deaths capital of Europe and the First Minister concede that the Scottish Government has taken its eye off the ball, I am not sure what we are supposed to use our time for. It is because of the drug deaths rate that we continually raise the matter—members from all political parties recognise that and work constructively to help tackle that shame.

I recognise that Mr Fairlie is one of the newer members of the Scottish Parliament, and I put on record the fact that I respect him and work with him in committee. Perhaps he will reflect on the use of inflammatory language.

That brings me to someone who should know better. The SNP chief whip stated that Conservatives were playing

“political games while people’s lives are at stake”—[*Official Report*, 29 September 2021; c 87.]

and that, apparently, it was “a damned disgrace”. He may be relishing his time in the spotlight, but, since the start of the pandemic, 18 months ago, the Scottish Government has consistently reassured members that it would bring important decisions to the Parliament for approval and scrutiny. Asking the Scottish Government to adhere to its commitments should not result in the Government’s chief whip suggesting that we are putting lives at stake. It is because people’s lives are at stake that we continue to press for that information.

Presiding Officer, you know that I am an advocate of robust—and heated—debate in the chamber, but I have to say that the language that is creeping into our debates is deteriorating. The First Minister has suggested that we need to consider our behaviour and language. Suggesting

that anyone is using the deaths of others or that we are putting lives at risk for questioning the Scottish Government is unparliamentary and goes too far. I seek your opinion on whether parliamentary protocol has been breached.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I thank Mr Whittle for his point of order. He is entirely correct in saying that, although parliamentary debates can be robust, they must also be conducted in terms that demonstrate courtesy and respect for other members. The Deputy Presiding Officers and I will always intervene when we feel that language has been used that is not acceptable. MSPs have a leadership role in their communities and across Scotland, and the way that we conduct debate in the Parliament should set a positive example to people across the country. I ask all members to reflect on that in relation to their conduct in the chamber.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Brian Whittle referred several times to the Minister for Parliamentary Business as the chief whip, which is incorrect.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Mackay. Your comment is on the record.

We will now move on to the next item of business. I ask members to please leave the chamber quietly.

Community Land Ownership

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-00875, in the name of Rhoda Grant, on community wealth and the emergence of green lairds. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes emerging developments in the market for land, with what it sees as a growing emphasis on the purchase of land for climate-related reasons; notes recent commentary referring to new owners of such land as "green lairds"; understands that Scotland has a pattern of highly-concentrated, private land ownership by international standards; believes that the operation of the Scottish land market is largely unregulated and that the purchase of substantial areas of land serves wealthy, private buyers in particular; understands that ownership of land in Scotland provides access to substantial public funding and tax arrangements, which support the building of private wealth; regrets what it sees as the commodification and financialisation of the climate emergency through the market for land; notes what it sees as the Scottish Government's commitment to community wealth building, to a just transition through the climate emergency, and to the progressive realisation of people's economic, social and cultural human rights; considers that securing more community ownership of land would be a key means to deliver greater community wealth, a more just transition through the climate emergency and progress toward the realisation of social, economic and cultural rights, including in the Highlands and Islands region, and notes the calls on the Scottish Government to consider land-market regulation and public expenditure controls to achieve greater equity and benefit-sharing from public policy, and to make significantly greater ownership of land and built assets by local communities a strategic priority in building community wealth and empowering communities in responding to the climate emergency.

12:51

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am grateful to the members who supported my motion and so allowed it to be debated today.

The Highlands and Islands are at the forefront in feeling the effects of new forces that are at work in our land markets. Those forces are likely to further embed the stark social injustice in our land ownership pattern of very few people owning most of our land. That pattern of land ownership concentrates wealth, power and influence into very few hands—it delivers for the few, not the many.

Scotland is highly unusual in having almost no land market regulation, which makes it the prime destination for capital looking for an easy, safe and rewarding purchase. A recent report by one of the leading land agents, Savills, made clear that it continues to receive calls from "buyers across the world". Savills has referred to our concentrated ownership patterns as

"one of the few remaining places in the world where green resources can be acquired on a meaningful scale".

People can come to Scotland and buy what they like, with no questions asked. Purchasing land in Scotland depends only on the size of a person's wallet, with no questions asked. The scale of many of our land holdings brings with it, in effect, a local monopoly on land, with no questions asked. That is how Anders Povlsen has become probably Scotland's largest private landowner, with no questions asked.

There is nothing new about the unregulated land market in Scotland; what is new is the latest way in which it is being exploited. A new type of buyer is emerging in response to our real concern about the climate emergency. There is evidence that those who market land see the climate emergency as a valuable selling point. We are seeing the commodification and financialisation of the climate emergency, which is stimulating private land grabbing.

In recent months, we have seen corporate buyers moving in. BrewDog is seeking to offset its carbon emissions, promote its green credentials and win new investors by purchasing thousands of acres of land in the Highlands. Standard Life Investments Property Income Trust has just bought thousands of acres in the Cairngorms national park. Gresham House is promoting a £300 million private investment that has Scottish forestry firmly in its sights.

What unites that group of buyers is the climate emergency. It provides the chance to build corporate reputation, enhance market share and grow corporate wealth on the back of the climate concerns that we all have. The approach allows some to continue as carbon emitters while offsetting those emissions through their Scottish land holdings. Some purchases are likely to be a hedge against future carbon tax liabilities, too. It is low-risk investment with very high returns.

With the land comes access to Scottish Government subsidies. The land grabbing and exploitation of an unregulated land market are underpinned by taxpayer subsidies. Standard Life has made clear that the cost of the tree planting on the land that it was happy to buy for £7.5 million will be "met through grant funding". The benefits go to those with capital to invest. Enriching the already rich for climate action cannot possibly deliver a just transition through the climate emergency.

Many purchases take place off market in secret, private sales. That device acts against communities seeking a late registration of interest in land to give them the opportunity to purchase it. However, such is the scale of land price inflation that, in practice, the hard-won right to register an

interest in land may be of little value to them. Even with the doubling of the Scottish land fund, it will be hard for communities to secure land, even if they had the opportunity.

We know that the community ownership of land delivers multiple public benefits. Community owners are not absentee owners; they are local people who live in the area. All revenues are kept locally and reinvested, which builds community wealth. Local affordable housing gets built, population is retained, places are repopulated, jobs are created, trees are planted and peatlands are restored. The new owners—the green lairds—may be playing to our climate concerns, but what regard do they have of those other public interest issues? We have no guarantees because, when land is bought in Scotland, no questions are asked.

We need to recognise that the time is long past for Scotland's land markets to be regulated. Ministers must be empowered to act on land issues in the public interest and to move from that exploitable, unregulated land market to one that regulates land as a national asset to deliver on our collective aspirations.

My party and the parties of Government are committed to a public interest test in questions of land ownership. That would be an important step, but we need to go much further. It appears to me that a presumption against ownership of land over a set scale is now necessary. We impose a residency requirement on our crofters, so why do we not do so on our landowners? The land and buildings transaction tax has a higher rate to discourage second home purchases. Why is there not a higher rate to discourage land grabbing?

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Does Rhoda Grant agree that the Scottish National Party Scottish Government has let people down by not building enough affordable homes and therefore not attracting young people and local people to stay where they want to live and work?

Rhoda Grant: I agree with that. However, there is an onus on landowners to make land available for housing, especially in rural areas. Two wrongs do not make a right.

We need to protect the public interest by acting especially on off-market land purchases. The Scottish Land Commission needs powers to act on land monopoly issues and to better enable public interest purchases. We need to make observing the land rights and responsibilities statement statutory and its expectations much firmer. We need to consider capping the total public subsidy of any large-scale landowner, and we need to see the uplift in the value of land effectively underwritten by public subsidy clawed back for

public benefit. We should act on Community Land Scotland's suggestion for a community wealth fund, and we need to task Co-operative Development Scotland with promoting co-operative and mutual ownership of land in Scotland.

Those suggestions begin to map out some of the potential ways forward. The more radical change that is desperately needed here would already be regarded as normal across the world.

The emergence of the so-called green lairds shines a light on the inadequacy of our land laws and on how we subsidise the creation of private wealth from owning land when we could be building community wealth instead.

If the minister acts on those issues, she can expect fierce opposition from the vested interests. However, if she takes the right action, she will get support from Labour members. My colleagues and I will bring forward ideas. We will also be a force for more radical action. That action is essential to create a more just and fairer Scotland.

12:59

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am grateful to my Highlands and Islands colleague Rhoda Grant for lodging the motion, to which I was glad to offer my support ahead of it being selected for members' business today. In our region in particular, people are very well aware of the imbalance in who owns the land and how that affects the daily lives of those of us who live there, so I am glad to see the issue getting attention early on in this parliamentary session.

I am proud to be standing here today as an MSP elected on the strength of an SNP manifesto that included a specific commitment to new land reform legislation, which is now expected to be brought forward by the end of 2023, with a new community empowerment act.

One policy that I am particularly excited by is the presumption towards community buy-outs of land. That will help us to not only increase diversity in land ownership, but ensure that local people are involved in decisions on how their land is used. I am certain that most people would not choose to have that land used as an indulgent, conscience-easing vanity project for big business. I cannot tell you how many times in the past few years I have let out another sigh at the newest in a line of self-congratulatory press releases from companies that have bought up land in the Highlands and plan on filling it with trees, because they know better than the local community what the right use of the land is and because they have the money to collect our land for use as an asset to their business to offset the damage that they are doing to the climate elsewhere.

The complete lack of self-awareness of many do-gooders, who fail to recognise that they are just another wealthy private buyer of our land who is contributing to the continuation of a skewed and unjust land market, is astounding. Like many people in my region, my ears prick up when I hear the word “rewilding”, not because I do not recognise the need to tackle climate change, but because it is so often raised as an action to be taken in my region by people with little to no understanding of those who currently live on or work the land—or, indeed, those who could be living on and working the land but are not, because of the enduring effects of the clearances two centuries ago. The attitude that the Highlands are a playground for the gentry or eco-tourists persists from those horrific events.

Rewilding can and should happen in conjunction with replotting, but it will not if buyers dream up their big rewilding ideas based on a romantic or even Cumberlondesque vision of a sparse, deserted Highlands rather than on the voices and experiences of the local community who currently use and live in the Highlands. The Highlands are not just sparsely populated; they are still cleared.

I am all for restoration of the natural environment as long as lairds and MSPs alike keep it in mind that a true restoration of the Highlands includes recognising the need to reintroduce people to our land as well. The fact that it is large landowners who are speaking out against the general principles of a new land reform bill only serves to tell me that it is exactly what we need to be doing.

Let us do more to discourage the idea that it does not matter who owns the land as long as there are trees on it. Let us diversify the type of land ownership in this country. More importantly, let us empower communities to have a say in what that looks like.

13:02

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I commend Rhoda Grant for bringing this very important subject before the Parliament.

The motion highlights the vital significance of the climate change challenge that we all face and the need to transition to net zero in a fair and sustainable manner. I sit on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, and the scale of the challenge that we face was highlighted when we took evidence from the United Kingdom Climate Change Committee, which told us that the UK will have to invest £50 billion a year in the transition to net zero—of course, Scotland will have to invest a pro rata share—if we are to deliver on our climate change targets. It was also made clear that that

amount of money and scale of funding simply cannot come from the public sector alone. The transition to net zero will in large part—not in small part—have to be driven by private sector investment across all areas of the economy, including agroforestry and peatland restoration.

That brings me to the motion. The need for private sector investment at scale was also recognised in the Scottish Government’s climate change plan, which called for

“significant increases in forestry and widespread peatland restoration”.

Quite rightly, the plan encouraged collaboration between

“carbon buyers, landowners and ... intermediaries ... to increase the woodland carbon market by at least 50% by 2025.”

I would imagine that there is cross-chamber consensus on the need to meet those targets.

Rhoda Grant mentioned some of the private sector investments that have been made in recent months. It is important to highlight the benefits of such investments. For example, Standard Life Investments has a project to restore woodland and peatland areas over almost 1,500 hectares and to plant 1.5 million trees, with between 50 and 100 people working on the project over the next six years, using land that has no existing agricultural or other value. Such land use and the benefits that come with that investment are to be encouraged.

It is not just the private sector that is directing money and investment towards such areas. The Scottish National Investment Bank has invested £50 million in a managed forest growth fund, which aims to capture 1.2 million tonnes of CO₂ over the next 20 years.

Those are just some examples of how public and private investment can help to deliver necessary reforestation, rewilding and peatland restoration, all of which will be vital to meeting our net zero targets. Without such investments, the public sector would not have the capital available to meet the necessary targets.

I understand the concerns raised by Rhoda Grant about unintended consequences, what the trend might lead to and the potential impacts on local and community land ownership. There may also be implications for public policy. However, additional land market regulation and controls, as set out in the motion, are not the answer. A mix of legislative and regulatory frameworks already provide safeguards for community benefit—benefits that deliver jobs, housing and wider amenity value—helping to deliver what we all want to see in a thriving rural economy: more jobs, more housing and more economic activity.

There is a range of other factors. Local planning consent, community councils and central government regulations all need to play a part in ensuring that everyone derives a benefit from those investments. We also have the woodland carbon code, which sets out that land projects can only be eligible for support if they would otherwise not be economically viable.

I see that I am up against the clock, so I will wrap up. The scale of investment required to meet the net zero targets presents huge opportunities for Scotland across community and public land ownership and will bring much needed investment and jobs to rural Scotland.

13:07

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Land is a public good and a natural resource that should serve our common interests. It is vital for our sustainability and for Scotland's biodiversity. However, we currently have a system of land ownership that concentrates wealth and power in the hands of a few. The system operates at the expense of the social, economic and environmental benefits that land offers. That is why I cannot welcome the growing trend of wealthy individuals and corporate interests seeking to use land to greenwash their record. It is a sign not of growing corporate responsibility or the rich engaging with the realities of the climate emergency, but of an unjust transition and a further transfer of wealth and power at the expense of working communities and our natural environment.

If we are serious about tackling the climate and ecological crises, now is the time for redistribution of land. We must create a new system of land ownership in rural and urban spaces that empowers local communities and delivers for the common good.

Rhoda Grant was right to say that the biggest problem that we face is Scotland's "no questions asked" approach to land markets. The Scottish Government's commitment to introduce a public interest test for land transfers is a welcome step forward. Such a test would send a signal that common good is at stake when land is exchanged. It would also provide greater transparency around sales. The Scottish Land Commission has also suggested introducing land management plans and a review of land rights and responsibilities. Those measures would be welcome, but they must have teeth and protect the public interest.

There should not be a limit on our ambitions. There is much more that the Parliament can do with the powers that it has. More radical proposals, such as caps on private land holdings and a land value tax, must be considered. After all,

why should money and connections enable a wealthy few to monopolise a public good such as land? Why should landowners continue to benefit from the increasing value of land, which was created by public money? The Parliament should empower communities to take ownership of their space and their land.

The issue of land reform has dogged Scottish politics for decades. We have had years of discussing and debating the issue, but now is the time for change.

13:10

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I am delighted to take part in this members' business debate to emphasise the importance of community wealth building. It is as important in urban areas as it is in rural areas, because the exploitation that is experienced is common to both.

Across our country, we see widening inequality and increasing poverty among working-class communities, and an astronomical rise in the levels of wealth being hoarded by the super-rich. Against that backdrop, the premise of community wealth building is more important than ever before. It is a concept that brings a people-centred approach to local economic development, redirecting wealth back into local economies and putting control back in the hands of local people.

We know that it works. We can look at communities such as North Ayrshire, where the council's Labour administration, led by Joe Cullinane, puts the model of community wealth building at the heart of everything that the local authority does. That approach means that more social housing is built, publicly owned energy generating facilities are developed and democratic ownership models are prioritised—all to the benefit of the community.

That is in stark contrast to what we have seen across Scotland in recent years. Local authorities have been faced with significant financial distress as their budgets have been disproportionately cut, and they seek an easy capital receipt with land disposals.

We know that, of the hundreds of millions of pounds of public land that the Scottish Government and Scottish public authorities have disposed of in recent years, at least 12 per cent has been purchased by one volume house builder, CALA Homes. A good example is the former Boroughmuir high school, in Edinburgh. It was sold for £14.5 million in 2015, and it has recently been redeveloped as more than 100 luxury apartments. CALA Homes advises prospective buyers that, at more than £800,000 per property, they will get a handsome return on their investment. Why was that return on investment not

achieved by the community? Instead, it is achieved by anonymous landlords and land holders from all over the world. No one knows who those people are, but they are siphoning our communities' wealth away from the city of Edinburgh, and that example is replicated across Scotland.

There is an alternative. North Ayrshire is one example, and Preston is yet another. Glasgow could benefit from such a model. Where Preston is reopening libraries and building new ones, Glasgow is closing its libraries because it is facing severe financial problems. At one time, Glasgow led the world in municipal socialism. As a city authority, it owned its tramways, its electric and telephone systems and its entire structure of public transport, and it was the biggest social landlord in the world apart from Hong Kong. However, over the past 30 years, all that social infrastructure has been rapidly dismantled and sold to private interests, where it does not serve the people, and where the profits are extracted.

The Scottish Government has indicated that it is exploring the idea of rolling out a nationwide community wealth building strategy. I would welcome that, but I place on record that it must be done not as a mere sticking plaster to mask the continued local authority budget cuts that are handed down from this place. Those cuts are compounded all the more by the insulting greenwashing that we see in Glasgow in the run-up to the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—with myriad corporate interests sponsoring pathetic interventions in the city's built environment while there is broad decline and decay in its urban infrastructure as a result of decades of disproportionate budget cuts.

If we are to adopt the community wealth building model, that must be done alongside the creation of an industrial strategy that puts people and communities at its heart. I encourage the Scottish Government to revisit its proposed compulsory sale order policy, which it quietly dispensed with in the previous session of Parliament. There is an urgent requirement to bring that sort of power back to the forefront of our agenda to ensure that community wealth building is put back in the hands of communities. We must do that in order to take action in communities that have long been blighted by deindustrialisation and the disinvestment caused by budget cuts. I truly hope that the Government embraces the opportunities that community wealth building brings, and does not squander such opportunities as it has done so often in the past.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Màiri McAllan to respond to the debate. Minister, you have around seven minutes.

13:14

The Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): I congratulate Rhoda Grant—with whom I agree on a lot of issues here—for securing the debate, and I thank other members for participating.

Ms Grant's motion—like today's debate—is wide ranging and covers a number of key, interlocking issues that coalesce around land use and ownership, natural capital, climate change and just transition. Those issues, jointly and severally, are close to my heart and at the top of my agenda. I assure the Parliament that I am giving full and active consideration to the issues that have been raised in today's debate. I consider them with colleagues across Government and civic society, and I would like to continue to consider them with members from across the chamber.

Scotland's legal climate targets, which are underpinned by a commitment to a just transition, are still regarded as among the most ambitious—if not the most ambitious—in the world. We are also committed to tackling the twin crisis of biodiversity loss. One reason why Scotland can afford to be so ambitious in tackling those twin emergencies is the ample potential of our natural environment to sequester greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and support biodiversity.

That means that, in the coming years, there will be challenges not only in how to optimise the enormous value of Scotland's land but in always doing so in a way that is fair and that leaves no one behind. We need to put our people and their wellbeing at the heart of our environmental ambitions. My vision, which has been articulated by members today, is of a net zero Scotland where thriving and growing rural, island and urban communities live and work sustainably on land and waters that are owned more fairly and diversely.

Emma Roddick made an interesting point about rewilding and re-peopling. I often question where the people are in rewilding. We have to bring those aspects together.

Let us be clear that there are no simple answers, because those are complex issues, and we must pursue our ambitions in a way that is compliant with the Human Rights Act 1998. As a former lawyer who worked in property law, land reform law and human rights, I am seized of the way in which those matters interact.

Rhoda Grant: Does the minister agree that human rights have to be balanced with the human rights of the wider community, to reset the balance away from those who would exploit our land and back into the hands of those who live and work on the land?

Màiri McAllan: Yes, I agree that human rights need to pertain to both the individual and the collective. They also have to be realisable, because people need not only to have those rights but to have them acted on. I agree with Rhoda Grant in that regard. Private investment will be essential to our net zero ambitions and can play a positive role when it is done in a responsible way that has regard to the rights of communities.

It is encouraging that the motion for the debate notes

“the Scottish Government’s commitment to community wealth building”,

which, of course, is led by my colleague the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth. We should all take a moment to note that the elevation of that issue to the ministerial level is a reflection of the Government’s commitment to it.

Community wealth building has its roots in the post-industrial cities of North America, but interest in it is growing rapidly in Scotland. That comprehensive, place-based economic development model focuses on five key pillars, one of which pertains to land and property, and that is of the greatest relevance to today’s discussion. My colleague Tom Arthur is working with five pilot areas and will take forward plans that have been developed by local authorities. In our recent programme for government, Mr Arthur committed to introducing a community wealth building bill.

Nature-based solutions are critical to meeting our net zero objectives. A just transition to net zero can provide real opportunities for rural and island communities, including green jobs in tree planting, peatland restoration and renewables, as well as in the means by which we tackle fuel poverty. We will need a blend of private and public investment to realise those benefits, because, frankly, the public sector cannot do that alone. We must seize those opportunities and mitigate the risks at the same time.

There is an immediate window of opportunity for taking action to ensure that increasing levels of natural capital value are harnessed in a way that benefits communities. I am pleased to say that the Scottish Land Commission, which I sponsor and which our last land reform act set up to advise the Government, is taking forward a package of work in that area as a matter of priority. That work will help us to find a pathway that balances the need for private sector investment—which has been discussed—with community rights and with the legal requirement for a just transition, to which the Government is committed.

Scotland’s continuing journey of land reform will take another substantial step forward during this

parliamentary session. The upcoming land reform bill will help us to tackle some of the challenges that we have talked about in the debate. I am committed to full and widespread consultation on its proposals, which I hope will be developed in collaboration with members from across the Parliament.

Paul Sweeney: The minister mentioned the forthcoming bill on land reform. Will it include provision for compulsory sale orders and reform of compulsory purchase powers as recommended by the Scottish Law Commission’s report on the matter?

Màiri McAllan: I have just said that I will consult widely on all proposals, so I am not writing anything off at this stage. We have years in which to develop this, and I am keen to be as ambitious as possible within the auspices of the Human Rights Act 1998. I think that the member’s point about compulsory sale orders was raised in relation to community wealth building, which I suspect means that it pertains more to the portfolio of my colleague Tom Arthur.

All of that will be happening against the backdrop of ever-strengthening community ownership across Scotland. Recent statistics show that, even during the pandemic, community ownership has been on the rise, having increased by 2.5 per cent in the most recent statistical period.

As community ownership in Scotland continues to grow, so does the Government’s support. Rhoda Grant mentioned our recent commitment to doubling the Scottish land fund, from £10 million to £20 million per year, by the end of the parliamentary session. That will help us to support more communities to acquire land and assets.

I will conclude, Presiding Officer, as I am conscious of the time.

Tackling climate change fairly, supporting empowered communities to thrive in rural and urban Scotland, and continuing to redress Scotland’s historically unfair patterns of land ownership are some of the most important issues that we, in the Government, and members across the chamber face. It is up to us to deliver for the people of Scotland a fairer, greener, more equal future, and I very much look forward to working with members on that.

13:22

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. I remind members of the Covid-related measures that are in place and that face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

The next item of business is portfolio questions on constitution, external affairs and culture. In order to get in as many questions as possible, I would appreciate succinct questions and answers.

United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020

1. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. (S6O-00217)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 represents an unprecedented assault on the powers and responsibilities of the Scottish Government and Parliament. It was introduced despite an explicit refusal of consent by this Parliament and the Welsh Senedd. My ministerial colleagues and I regularly make clear to the UK Government our continued opposition to the 2020 act and our concern about the many ways in which it is being used by UK ministers to constrain and undermine decisions made by the Scottish ministers and the Scottish Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I should have reminded members that, if they want to ask a supplementary question, they should enter the letter R in the chat function or press the request-to-speak button.

Michelle Thomson: The United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 was passed by Westminster in the full knowledge, as has been stated, that it conferred the right to alter the powers of the Scottish Parliament without our permission. Although UK ministers may give some limited commitment to allow for policy divergence, the 2020 act fundamentally changes the relationship with all devolved institutions. Is that proof that power devolved is power retained, and will the cabinet secretary advise what options the Scottish Government has at its disposal to preserve the integrity of this Parliament?

Angus Robertson: People in Scotland voted overwhelmingly to set up the Scottish Parliament after years of Westminster Governments ignoring their wishes and imposing unwelcome and damaging policies. Devolution has improved people's lives in Scotland and delivered Governments that they have chosen. The Scottish Parliament has introduced free personal care and abolished university tuition fees and no one in Scotland is now charged for prescriptions.

The UK Government is now once again taking control of key devolved powers without consent from Scotland. It is using Brexit as an excuse to rewrite and undermine the devolution settlement. The United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 allows it to take money from the Scottish Parliament and spend it according to the choices of UK Government ministers, who are not elected in this country, not the priorities that are democratically decided in Scotland. The 2020 act will also undermine future laws that are passed in the Scottish Parliament in areas such as food standards, animal welfare and environmental protection, and that is not just happening in Scotland.

GlobalScot Network

2. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the expansion of the GlobalScot network. (S6O-00218)

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): The programme for government 2021-22 committed to growing the GlobalScot network to 1,500 members by 2023. As of 23 September 2021, there were 1,009 GlobalScots. That has grown from 665 members when "A Trading Nation" was published in May 2019.

The network recently celebrated its 20th anniversary and has been acknowledged by the World Bank as an exemplar of how a diaspora can support economic growth. Consisting of entrepreneurs, business leaders and community figureheads, GlobalScots are a vital component of Scotland's international network, providing Scottish companies with critical market insights. The new GlobalScot digital platform launched in July 2020, allowing members and companies to connect with one another more easily. GlobalScots are involved in regional advisory groups focusing on furthering export and investment opportunities for Scotland across a range of countries globally.

Dean Lockhart: In 2019, the Scottish National Party announced plans to expand the GlobalScot network from 600 to 2,000 members by 2021. As we have just heard, those targets are nowhere near to being met, with just over 1,000 members. I

fully appreciate that the Covid pandemic will have made it more difficult to expand the network, but does the minister share my disappointment that that vital network is not reaching its full potential?

Ivan McKee: I will check those targets, as I do not think that they were to grow by 2021. “A Trading Nation” is a 10-year plan to grow Scotland’s export activity. If the member is engaged with GlobalScot, he will understand the huge value that it brings to Scotland’s networks and the value that businesses get from it. He will also understand the requirement to ensure that GlobalScots who come out of the network are of sufficient standard and ranking in their business communities to be able to contribute fully, under their own steam, to Scotland’s export and investment potentials.

I know that the member has worked internationally, so should he be aware of anyone who would make a good GlobalScot, I would welcome his input—he can send names to my office—as we want to follow those leads up to achieve those ambitious longer-term targets.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): The expansion of the GlobalScot network is a testament to Scotland’s appeal and ambition on the world stage. In light of that, how will the Scottish Government fully capitalise on its plans to establish two new offices in Copenhagen and Warsaw, further expanding its existing network of European and international hubs?

Ivan McKee: Our international presence creates domestic opportunities, broadens our horizons and ultimately benefits the people of Scotland. As the member indicates, we will establish two new Scottish Government offices in Copenhagen and Warsaw, which will sit alongside the existing Scottish Development International presence and GlobalScot networks in those countries and, in the case of Poland, our trade envoy, who has been in place there for the past three years. This is an opportunity for us to continue to expand Scotland’s export and investment ambitions, and those investment hubs will be an integral part of Scotland’s global footprint overseas and of our work with our GlobalScots and others.

Afghan Refugees

3. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on Afghan refugee relocation and resettlement with reference to the different elements of the new Scots strategy. (S6O-00219)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government is committed to playing its part in welcoming and

supporting people who are fleeing Afghanistan. We continue to urge the United Kingdom Government to increase the number of refugees that it will accept and to provide more information and confirmation of a start date for the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme.

As of 26 September, around 230 people in 61 families had arrived in Scotland across nine local authority areas under the relocation scheme for locally employed staff. In line with the key principle of the new Scots refugee integration strategy, local authorities are working to support their integration from day 1 of their arrival in Scotland. Partnership and collaboration are central to the new Scots approach. The Scottish Government is working with the Home Office, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, local authorities and third sector and community organisations to provide people with the safety and security that they need to rebuild their lives.

Maggie Chapman: We know that one key way to support asylum seekers and refugees to settle and become part of their new country is to give them access to work. We know, as we have already heard in the chamber today, that we need workers in Scotland, as many sectors are under immense staffing pressure. Employers that want to consider refugees for employment in sectors that are crying out for more staff have contacted many of us. What support can we make available for people who are resettled via the Afghan relocation and assistance policy to find employment, and what can we do to provide support for employers, such as care homes in my region, that want to support refugees into employment?

Does the cabinet secretary agree that, as well as refugees, people who are seeking asylum should be given the right to work? Despite the Prime Minister’s 2019 promise, the UK Government has refused to review its policy on the matter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Short questions and answers, please.

Angus Robertson: I agree entirely with the sensible points that my colleague has made. The new Scots strategy recognises that integration is a long-term and multifaceted process. We work to ensure that people can access the support and services that they need as they settle in Scotland, including those relating to health, education, language, employability and welfare rights.

I will raise the member’s specific questions about employment, training and employers that wish to employ Afghans as a priority.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for his elaboration on the new Scots integration strategy. With 2.6 million Afghan refugees living in other countries and 3.5

million Afghan refugees internally displaced, will the cabinet secretary join the First Minister and me in reiterating that the UK Government's aim to resettle a total of 20,000 Afghan refugees, including 5,000 the first year, is entirely insufficient?

Angus Robertson: Yes, I will. Although the announcement of a UK Afghan resettlement scheme is welcome in principle, the commitment to 20,000 in the long term and just 5,000 in the first year is inadequate. We believe that a commitment to a substantial increase in numbers is required if the UK Government is to meet its responsibilities. It is right that the new Afghan resettlement scheme will be in addition to the UK's existing global resettlement commitment.

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will know that hundreds of thousands of Afghans are fleeing from persecution and more than two decades of war. Scotland must play its part in helping to resettle them. What provisions has the Scottish Government made to ensure that councils have the funding to provide the new infrastructure to resettle refugees and help them to make the most of their new lives here?

Angus Robertson: I commend the Labour Party for its tone and constructive suggestions on this question. The member will know that the funding package is a matter for the Home Office, and we have been pressing the Home Office and the UK Government to ensure that funding is fully in place. We are working on that with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in general and with specific local authorities that are making moves to try to accept the Afghan refugees.

I am happy to work on behalf of the member and his party in pressing the UK Government to deliver on its commitments, and I urge him to amplify the calls that he has made in Parliament today.

Cultural Organisations (Mid Scotland and Fife)

4. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to cultural organisations in Mid Scotland and Fife. (S6O-00220)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth): The Scottish Government provides a range of support to cultural organisations in Mid-Scotland and Fife, particularly in light of the pandemic. For example, organisations in Fife and Perth and Kinross have received more than £3 million through our performing arts venues relief fund, and more than £770,000 through our cultural organisations and venues recovery fund. Full details of those funds are published by Creative Scotland. That funding

has been vital in supporting cultural organisations and businesses throughout the pandemic.

Murdo Fraser: According to a recent report, the number of people who are using the eight open libraries in Perth and Kinross fell by two thirds during the most recent period, which is perhaps not surprising because of the issues with Covid. What more might the Scottish Government do to encourage people to go back to using libraries in order to support that important local resource, and to make it clear that libraries are safe? Will she reassure us that Perth and Kinross Council, and indeed other councils in the area, will not see any reduction in funding because of the fall in the number of people using local libraries?

Jenny Gilruth: The member will be aware that the Government takes the issue of libraries very seriously. We recently introduced a libraries recovery fund to the tune of £1.25 million, which is being managed by the Scottish Library and Information Council. One of the requirements is that the fund reaches those who need it most; another is that we get a geographical spread, which will include the member's region.

On the member's specific question about Perth and Kinross Council, local authorities have a key role to play in cultural provision. I will meet the culture conveners very soon, and I hope—indeed, I am sure—that Perth and Kinross Council will be part of those conversations as we move forward. We absolutely need our local authorities to be part of the cultural recovery.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 was not lodged.

Scotland on Tour Fund

6. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what role the Scotland on tour fund will play in aiding the recovery of the arts sector. (S6O-00222)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth): The pandemic has had significant personal and professional impacts on those working in the live music sector. The sector will continue to face challenges even now that most parts of it can reopen fully.

Musicians, bands, artists and venues will be able to apply to the Scotland on tour fund, which is backed by £750,000 from the Scottish Government, to bring new and additional concerts to venues and festivals in Scotland this year. Scotland on tour will enable artists to reach new audiences and communities, widening opportunities to perform throughout the country.

Emma Roddick: The Scottish Government's commitment to the touring fund within the first 100

days is timely and extremely welcome. In the opinion of the Scottish Government, to what extent will the Scotland on tour fund benefit all Scotland's communities, including those in the Highlands and Islands, and not only those in urban centres?

Jenny Gilruth: One of the key aims of the Scotland on tour fund is to create new performance opportunities throughout the country, including the Highlands and Islands, which the member represents.

Active Events, the organisation that is tasked with delivering the Scotland on tour project, is supported by a steering group that includes representatives of the industry such as the Scottish Music Industry Association, the Touring Network, Creative Scotland, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society and the enterprise agencies, including Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I hope that that reassures the member that the voices of those in her region are being directly reflected in the development of the fund's eligibility criteria.

We are committed to helping communities throughout Scotland have greater access to cultural activities, including live music. Scotland on tour will help to support that ambition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will take a brief supplementary from Sarah Boyack.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Does the minister support the initiative of Alison McGovern MP to ask Europe for support for visas for the touring industry, so that members of that industry can tour not just in Scotland but in the rest of Europe?

Jenny Gilruth: I am not sighted on the specifics of that initiative; perhaps Sarah Boyack could share details of it with me. It sounds like one that we in the Scottish Government would be keen to support.

As Sarah Boyack might be aware, the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and I have made repeated representations to the United Kingdom Government on the issue, which is a real challenge for the sector. Prior to the summer recess, I met the then United Kingdom Government culture minister, Caroline Dinéage, and made that point directly to her.

I would be happy to work with Sarah Boyack on that. It sounds as though we share the same interests in this space.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Meetings)

7. Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has met or has any plans to meet the recently appointed Chancellor of the Duchy of

Lancaster to discuss constitutional issues in relation to Scotland. (S6O-00223)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government is committed to constructive engagement with the United Kingdom Government on the basis of a partnership of equals and is making clear to UK ministers, including the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, that, following the Scottish election, it has an unarguable democratic mandate to offer the people of Scotland a choice about their constitutional future.

I met and shared a platform with the outgoing Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster at the recent British-Irish Association meeting in Oxford, and I hope to meet his successor soon.

Jim Fairlie: Does the cabinet secretary agree that, in the light of this week's article in *The Times*, we should encourage the Tories—despite instruction from their leadership—to continue to talk about the union and help the case for independence even further?

Angus Robertson: I think that that is an entirely positive suggestion. I look forward to hearing such arguments from Tory members.

From reading the article that my friend has highlighted, I think that the reasoning was that Tory members should not sound too "needy"—that was the advice that they were given.

On a more consensual note, I hope that, as democrats, we can all agree that, in the recent Scottish Parliament elections, the parties that stood on a manifesto commitment that the people should have a say on their future in a referendum won, and the parties that opposed a referendum lost. I hope that, as democrats, we can all agree that that was the outcome of the election. That is the mandate, and that is indeed what will happen.

National Centre for Music

8. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting the development of a national centre for music. (S6O-00224)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth): The Royal High School Preservation Trust has put forward proposals to the City of Edinburgh Council for the restoration of the former Royal high school building as a world-class centre for music education and public performance for the benefit of the whole of Scotland.

It would not be appropriate for the Scottish ministers to intervene in advance of any decisions being taken by the City of Edinburgh Council, as the current owner and the planning authority.

However, as Jeremy Balfour might know, I was employed at the Royal high school, although not in the old building, and I am watching developments with interest, particularly given the school's historic role in Scotland's proud history of education.

Jeremy Balfour: Given that the site of the proposed national centre for music is in my region, what funding, if any, is available to the City of Edinburgh Council, and councils across Scotland, if they want the scheme to go ahead? How else can we encourage the building's being brought back into public use?

Jenny Gilruth: I do not want to prejudge the outcome of what the council will say on the matter. Jeremy Balfour will understand that I cannot comment specifically on funding at this moment in time, as the council has made no such approach. However, I am aware of a letter from William Gray Muir, who is the chairman of the Royal High School Preservation Trust, to the First Minister, and I would be happy to meet him once the outcome of the council's consideration is known.

As Jeremy Balfour might be aware, the Scottish Government already supports St Mary's Music School and has provided a budget of up to £1.6 million a year to support up to 55 pupils from all over Scotland. I am aware that the proposals, as drafted, include the potential to relocate St Mary's and that the school has already met education officials on the matter.

I understand that the closing date for applications for future use of the Royal high school's old building was 3 September. As I have said, and as Jeremy Balfour will understand, it will be for the council to decide when to announce the outcome of those applications. I look forward to meeting the chairman of the Royal High School Preservation Trust after that, and I would also be happy to meet Mr Balfour on the matter, if he would like to do so.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As the minister said, the plans for a national centre for music are an exciting example of Scotland's celebration and appreciation of culture. It is encouraging to know that the Scottish Government recognises the importance of cultural centres in local communities.

Will the minister reiterate that the £1.25 million given to the public libraries Covid recovery fund is another brilliant example of that appreciation in action in communities across Scotland?

Jenny Gilruth: I referred to the library recovery fund in my earlier answer to Mr Fraser. The Government recognises the valuable role that libraries play in their communities and how popular they are. In 2019, there were 40 million visits to public libraries in Scotland, which was more than the number of visits to the Premier League and

cinemas combined. The fund that I referred to will restore more services to libraries, including reopening some. It will help libraries to continue being at the heart of their communities and supporting those communities in recovering from the pandemic.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions.

Point of Order

14:51

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Today, my colleague Douglas Ross asked the First Minister about the specifics of a certain section of the vaccination certification scheme that was still being consulted on. Her response was as follows:

“I do not have the regulations in front of me right now. I am very happy to come back afterwards and go through every particular regulation and say who precisely we have consulted with.”

The First Minister made that offer but, as far as I am aware, she is not coming back to the chamber this afternoon to answer those questions.

Presiding Officer, please help me, a humble backbencher. How do I persuade the First Minister to come back and answer the questions that I and other members have about that completely flawed scheme?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): As Mr Balfour will understand, the scheduling of business is a matter for the Parliamentary Bureau. I encourage Mr Balfour's business manager to raise the issue at the next bureau meeting.

Autumn and Winter Vaccination Programme

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Humza Yousaf, on the autumn and winter vaccination programme. I will allow a little time for ministers to change seats. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:52

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): I am pleased to announce that the Scottish Government has today published “Scotland's Autumn and Winter Vaccination Strategy”. I am sure that members will agree with me that the Covid-19 vaccination programme has been a resounding success. The national health service and many others mobilised at breakneck speed to match supply, thereby protecting the most vulnerable people in our society at a scale that has never been experienced in living memory.

It is easy to forget that it is only nine months ago that we began receiving relatively small volumes of vaccine. We have now administered an incredible 8 million vaccine doses across Scotland, which demonstrates the ability of our NHS and wider partners to respond in unprecedented circumstances.

Of people aged 18 and over, 92 per cent have had a first dose of a Covid vaccine and 86 per cent have had a second dose. That is a remarkable achievement, so I record my sincere thanks to everyone who has been involved in that herculean effort. Vaccination continues to play a critical role in helping to protect the people of Scotland and supporting our wider global effort to reduce the harm that is caused by Covid-19.

As part of our commitment to openness and transparency, we have sought to keep Parliament and the public informed of our plans and progress. Our “Scotland's Autumn and Winter Vaccination Strategy” is part of that commitment and shows that we have exceeded the expectation, as set out in our original plans, to vaccinate 80 per cent of the eligible population. More than that, the strategy outlines our vision and commitment to continue, until at least spring next year, to offer a Covid vaccine to anyone who is eligible.

Finally, we have set out how we will deliver Covid vaccinations alongside our biggest ever annual flu programme, to help to protect as many lives as possible this winter.

I am pleased that, this morning, Audit Scotland published its independent report, “Covid-19: Vaccination Programme”, on Scotland’s Covid vaccination programme. It is an overwhelmingly positive report that highlights the remarkable success of the programme, and how we have ensured good collaboration and joint working across the board while developing new digital tools at extraordinary pace. I hope that members will get a chance to look through that insightful report.

The Audit Scotland report highlights that the programme has been

“effective in reducing the number of people getting severely ill and dying from Covid-19”.

It states:

“Vaccines have been delivered in a variety of ways to make it easier for more people to access them, and the level of vaccine wastage has been low.”

There is often much political and media commentary—understandably so, of course—when Audit Scotland produces challenging reports. I hope that attention will also be paid to this report, which states the excellent progress that we have made in the vaccination programme.

As we look ahead to the autumn and winter months, it is vital that we build on our achievements and continue to deliver Covid vaccinations, as well as seasonal flu vaccinations, to all those who are eligible.

A key feature of the Covid-19 vaccination programme has been that the evolving clinical advice has required the programme to pivot, often at quite short notice, to include new groups of people or to change the vaccines that we have used. That has included, for example, extending our offer to 12 to 15-year-olds, following advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and the four United Kingdom chief medical officers.

I thank our vaccinators for the care and sensitivity with which they are helping, in particular, younger people and their parents and carers to engage with the vaccination programme. It is important to reinforce the fact that choice remains central to our approach. A great deal of emphasis has been placed on access to good-quality information, supported by discussions at vaccination centres, to address questions or concerns that young people might have. That has been a key consideration that has informed our delivery. We deliberately started vaccinations for young people in community settings to enable them to be accompanied by a parent or carer and to have those really important discussions.

We are now administering a third primary dose of Covid vaccines to people who are severely

immunosuppressed, and we have begun a programme of booster doses for those who are most at risk of severe disease. The booster dose is given at least six months after the second dose.

This year more than ever, we must ensure that people in the higher-risk age groups are protected against other seasonal respiratory illnesses, such as flu. Our immunity might be lower than usual due to lower levels of flu circulating last year as a result of the crucial public health measures that were in place at that time to protect the population from Covid.

We therefore launched, earlier this month, Scotland’s biggest-ever flu vaccination programme, with expanded eligibility criteria to include everyone over 50; health and social care workers, including independent contractors such as general practitioners and dental and optometry staff; teachers, nursery teachers and support staff; and prison staff and the prison population.

I urge all members to come together to thank all those who have been involved in the vaccination programme and those who will support it as we move forward—from the people who have worked tirelessly in our NHS and across local government to those in the Army who continue to help out, and the many volunteers who have stepped forward at this crucial time. I am also grateful to the many faith, third sector and community groups that have contributed so much to supporting our efforts to deliver an inclusive national programme. We could not have achieved this remarkable success without their help.

Today, I express my thanks to everyone who has stepped forward to be vaccinated, and to the vaccinators. The overwhelming response from the people of Scotland has been inspiring. The vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe disease, and people being fully vaccinated remains the best way for them to be protected against the virus. I urge anyone who is eligible but has not yet received a Covid vaccination to book an appointment or attend a drop-in clinic at the earliest opportunity. I say to anyone who is hesitant because they need more reassurance or, indeed, information, that our vaccination teams will be happy to discuss the benefits with them.

We have continuously adapted our vaccination programme and have incorporated into our planning and delivery the lessons that have been learned by regularly seeking feedback from those who are directly or indirectly involved in the programme. Vaccination, along with testing, remains our best route out of the pandemic, so it is crucial that people come forward.

As a result of the positive impact of the vaccination programme, the rate of increase in Covid-19 cases has been lower among those who

are fully vaccinated than the rates among partially vaccinated and unvaccinated people. That demonstrates the protection that is offered by vaccination.

I think that many members know this statistic, but it is always worth repeating. At the start of the year, around 12 per cent of cases were ending up in hospital, but that figure is now 2 per cent. Across all age groups, the rate of hospital admissions has been higher among unvaccinated people than it has among vaccinated individuals.

Most younger adults will have received their second Covid vaccine dose in late summer or early autumn. There are currently more than 170,000 adults under 40 who have had their first dose but have yet to come forward for their second dose. I say to them that getting your second dose, if you are eligible, will give you longer-lasting protection from the virus, and helps play a part in keeping your friends, family and communities safe. My plea to those who have not attended the appointment for their second dose is this: do not leave the job half done; please attend a drop-in clinic or arrange an appointment for your second dose of the vaccine.

We have undertaken a range of national activity, as well as a range of targeted communications and engagement, to encourage people who have, for any reason, not had their second dose to complete their vaccination. That includes a personal letter from our chief medical officer.

We also continue to work with colleges and universities to maximise vaccine uptake among students who are not fully vaccinated. Clear communications are a key part of encouraging uptake, so we are working across social media channels to inform students of the benefits of being vaccinated. Academic institutions are being encouraged to work with student representatives to encourage uptake.

Following advice from the JCVI and the four UK chief medical officers, all children aged 12 to 15 are now being offered a dose of the Covid vaccine. Health boards have begun to offer vaccination to as many children as possible. Drop-in clinics opened for 12 to 15-year-olds to attend with their parents or carers last week. This week, eligible children and young people will be offered an appointment either at school or at a community clinic. Most young people in that age group will receive a blue envelope with a scheduled appointment time and the national information leaflet. The appointment will be at a community clinic in their health board area.

Some regions are not using the blue envelope or community clinic model. They are NHS Borders, NHS Dumfries and Galloway, some parts of NHS Highland and some islands boards. In those health

boards, a school-delivery model began earlier this week, with the leaflet, letter and consent form going home in schoolbags. I encourage parents, carers and young people to read the materials that are being provided and to reach an informed decision.

I am pleased to report that the roll-out of our seasonal flu programme has begun and is progressing well. We launched our childhood and schools vaccination programme on 6 September, and primary and secondary school pupils started receiving their flu vaccine from that date. On 20 September, NHS boards began to vaccinate residents in care homes, and the health and social care workers online portal for booking appointments went live on 21 September. As members will be aware, we have prioritised those who are at the highest clinical risk and pregnant women.

I am already over time, so I will end by saying that we are working closely with NHS Scotland partners, local authorities and health and social care partnerships to proactively manage current system pressures. There are system pressures in terms of the workforce and we have been clear that conditions are likely to remain challenging. I will, I hope, make a statement to Parliament next week setting out the immediate actions that the Scottish Government can take to assist with mitigating some of the pressures on our health service.

Based on the success and good practices of the Covid programme, we will continue to improve, build and adapt vital resources to deliver the future vaccination programme.

I thank all those who have been involved in making our vaccination programme an incredible success, and I look forward to taking questions from members.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will need to move on to the next item of business. I encourage all members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon as possible.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of the statement.

I say to anyone who is watching at home and who is eligible for the Covid vaccination or flu vaccination that they should please get it, because it will save lives. I have had both of my Covid vaccinations, and I will be getting my flu vaccination.

Tess White has a disabled constituent who will have to travel from Inverbervie to Stonehaven, which will take him an hour from door to door. Will the cabinet secretary set out a maximum travel time for patients, especially those in rural areas? Will he also explain why he is going to give us an update in a week, and not now, on vital information about mitigating pressures, maximising capacity and supporting our system response, which is key to delivery?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Dr Gulhane for his question and the plea that he made, given that he is not only an Opposition politician but a practising GP. That is a really important call to make to people.

I would be happy for Tess White to forward me details of her disabled constituent. Health boards are working extremely hard to ensure that drop-in clinics are available as close to people as possible. If that is not happening, I am more than happy to take the matter up with the relevant health board. There are drop-in centres across the country, but I would not expect somebody to have to travel for an hour. That seems an excessively long journey for somebody to have to make.

My statement to Parliament will hopefully be in less than a week. We have already taken action to mitigate some of the winter pressures that we are facing, and there will be a further update on that.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The demands on the NHS are currently at crisis point, and delivering the flu vaccination programme and the Covid vaccine booster programme at pace will be critical. Will the cabinet secretary commit to doing the flu programme at least before Christmas rather than by March, to better protect the NHS?

I welcome the development of the long-term sustainable vaccination workforce, although that will take time. In the meantime, locum pharmacists do not appear to be being used to the same extent as locum GPs or nurses. Will the cabinet secretary commit to using locum pharmacists as well as commercial pharmacies to deliver the vaccination programme?

The cabinet secretary will be aware that vaccine uptake is lower in disadvantaged areas. Will he ensure that the vaccination centres that were closed are reopened so that vaccinations are delivered as locally as possible?

Humza Yousaf: In relation to the on-going booster or third dose campaign—the continuing Covid evergreen campaign, as we might call it—and the flu vaccination programme, we are talking about 7.5 million vaccine doses over the course of autumn and winter. In the space of a few months, we will try to deliver 7.5 million doses, which is just below the 8 million doses that we have delivered over the past nine months, so an incredible effort

is needed. Nevertheless, we are confident of meeting the timescales that we have set out in the strategy. Of course, if we can go any quicker than that, as Ms Baillie requests, I promise her that we will. As she referenced in the second part of her question, the NHS faces severe pressures, so we have to make sure that we are doing that at pace while also managing those challenging pressures.

I will look again at the issue of locum pharmacists. My sister, who is a locum pharmacist, raised the issue with me in my first week as health secretary. That is also a conversation for me to have with the chief pharmaceutical officer, Alison Strath. I will take that issue away, because anything that we can do to maximise our workforce is a good idea.

On the final point that Ms Baillie raises, I have very regular engagement with health boards. If there is more that they can do to open up additional vaccine centres—I am sure that that is an issue that they proactively look at—I will raise the matter with them. However, it is not just about access. Ms Baillie would agree that, for doses 1 and 2 of the vaccine, there was very good coverage of local drop-in centres across the country.

We have to do more on communication. We are doing what we can by working with the third sector. We are working with faith leaders and ethnic minority organisations such as BEMIS, which has been excellent, to reach those groups in which the level of uptake is lower. Any suggestions that members have on the matter will be met with an open mind.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I ask the cabinet secretary to address the issues that rural people face in relation to the roll-out of the Covid and flu vaccinations. What advice does he give to health boards about people from rural areas having to access the urban centres where vaccination programmes are being rolled out?

Humza Yousaf: Gillian Martin makes a fair point. People can find local clinics on their NHS board's website, and we have a landing page on NHS Inform that takes them to their health board area and allows them to see the drop-in clinic that is nearest to them.

I know that there is a particular issue in rural areas in that what can seem to be a relatively short distance can actually, due to public transport links and so on, involve a much longer journey, particularly at weekends. I am therefore more than happy to speak to rural health boards about the issue. I make an open offer that, if MSPs have cases in which the journey time seems unreasonable, such as the one that Dr Gulhane raised on behalf of Tess White, they can write to

me directly and I will be happy to raise those cases with the relevant health board.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I, too, place on record my thanks to all those in our health service who participated in delivering the vaccination programme. It has clearly saved lives and will continue to do so.

Today's Audit Scotland report on the vaccination programme states that the programme

"has so far been reliant on temporary staff and volunteers."

The report notes:

"Work is currently taking place to establish the size of the workforce needed."

I notice that there is reference to that in the deployment plan. The cabinet secretary is—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question, please, Ms Webber.

Sue Webber: Right. The cabinet secretary has acknowledged those pressures. How many members of staff does he envisage will be required to sustain not only the Covid vaccination programme but the flu one?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Ms Webber for the question, because it is incredibly important. As she will know, page 19 of the strategy gives information on the workforce, with details of how many vaccinators we have had to date and how many volunteer hours have helped in the vaccination effort. I will not give a number of staff just now because, obviously, it depends on the diversity of the workforce. However, I will say that the Government is leaving no stone unturned in trying to meet the very ambitious targets for our vaccination programme for the autumn and winter, which I have already talked about in answer to Ms Baillie.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on how Scots who have been vaccinated outside Scotland—including my constituent who lives in Ecclefechan but who works for the NHS in England, where they were first vaccinated—can obtain proof of vaccination status?

Humza Yousaf: A number of things can be done. First and foremost, when the certification scheme comes into force, at 5 am tomorrow, anybody who has been vaccinated outside Scotland will be able to use certification proof from anywhere in the common travel area—for example, they will be able to use the NHS England app. Data exchange with a number of countries in the common travel area, including England, is already available

From tomorrow, we will launch an online form for people to complete if they have been

vaccinated in England, Wales or Northern Ireland but they live in Scotland. If an individual's vaccination in another part of the United Kingdom is not showing—there might well be errors; members have contacted me about that—they should phone the Covid vaccination status helpline on 0808 196 8565. The aim is to fix such issues within 14 days.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I am at a loss to understand why the JCVI does not consider police officers as a priority group. Given the incredible efforts that Police Scotland and serving police officers will make in policing COP26—the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—with up to 25,000 people attending, which will expose officers to considerable risks, does the Government plan to ask the JCVI to include police officers as a priority for the vaccine booster, which they should be?

Humza Yousaf: I know that Pauline McNeill asked that question with absolute sincerity. As a former justice secretary, I also know the incredible efforts that our police officers—men and women—make right across the country, and she is right to refer to the incredible impact that they will have in relation to our arrangements around COP26.

It is right that the JCVI gives us its clinical expertise, and it is my understanding that very high numbers of police officers have taken up the offer of vaccination. We will continue to listen to the advice of the JCVI on who should be prioritised in relation to vaccination and immunisation.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): What advice would the cabinet secretary give to somebody who is thinking of declining their third or booster jab because they would like it to go to somebody in the developing world?

Humza Yousaf: I would ask them not to delay. I can understand what might seem like good intentions on their behalf but, to give them some assurance, we are working with international partners and the UK, Welsh and Northern Irish Governments in relation to the Covid-19 vaccines global access—COVAX—scheme, and I have had many good conversations with other health ministers in the UK about what contribution Scotland can make to that global effort. If a person does not go for their booster dose, their third dose or, indeed, either of the first two doses, that does not automatically guarantee that the dose will end up somewhere in the developing world. People should be assured that we are working with international and domestic partners and the World Health Organization in relation to the COVAX scheme. If a person is eligible for the first, second, third or booster dose of the vaccine, they should step forward, please.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): On the issue of the Scottish National Party's shambolic plans for Covid certification, very little has been said so far about how fraud will be combated. Can the cabinet secretary say how, in the absence of a photographic component, the system proves that the person who presents the passport is, in fact, the same person to whom it was issued? As far as I can see, it does not and, from tomorrow, the system will be wide open to fraud through impersonation.

Humza Yousaf: I do not agree with Craig Hoy's characterisation of the scheme as "shambolic", of course. The courts have made it clear that, in their judgment, they believe that we have taken the appropriate steps in relation to launching our scheme tomorrow.

There are a number of security features on the Covid certificate. The QR code cannot be altered, of course. I find it slightly distressing that Craig Hoy is now suggesting that people should have to prove and show their identity alongside a paper copy of their vaccination status. We are not calling for that. I respect the fact that Mr Hoy disagrees with me, but he should not be trying to create confusion or, indeed, making inaccurate claims about the certification scheme.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): We know that winter pressures on the NHS exist in all years, notwithstanding Covid being in the mix for this year coming. Will the cabinet secretary please emphasise to people how important it is that the flu jab is taken up in order to protect our NHS over the winter period?

Humza Yousaf: In short, yes. That is absolutely vital. The information and advice that I have received from my clinicians is that, where we can, we will try to co-administer the booster and the flu vaccine but, in some cases, the timelines will not necessarily match up. We will not delay the flu vaccine, which is really important, given that we fear the worst, as we think that people's immunity to flu is lower because not much flu circulated last year. To protect our NHS and individuals, it is vital that people come forward and take up the offer of the flu vaccine as soon as their priority group is eligible.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Several pharmaceutical companies are in advanced clinical trials of second-generation vaccines that particularly target vaccine escape in variants such as the delta variant. Can the cabinet secretary reassure members that the current first-generation vaccines are highly effective at preventing serious illness? Can he also say how we will fold those second-generation vaccines into the booster programme when they become available?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for a very good question.

On his first point, the vaccines are, of course, highly effective. There is plenty of data and research to show the efficacy of the current vaccines.

I have regular conversations with other health ministers, across the four nations, as we wait for Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency approval, once the clinical trials have been completed. I think that we are expecting the results of the COV-Boost trial in the middle of next month. Once we receive the results, it is, of course, for the JCVI and others to give details of how the vaccines should be deployed. We are well plugged into that, and we hope to get the results of the COV-Boost trial in the middle of next month, I think. I will come back to Alex Cole-Hamilton with further details on that.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): As the cabinet secretary will be aware, people who are vulnerable to flu, such as those with mild to moderate asthma and young children, were not in the original priority groups for the Covid vaccine. I am concerned that, as the flu and Covid booster vaccine programmes are run simultaneously, there is a risk that some people may incorrectly assume that they are not eligible for, or do not need, a flu vaccine. How will the Scottish Government ensure that those who are eligible for the flu vaccine are aware of that and attend their appointment?

Humza Yousaf: That is an excellent question from Gillian Mackay. There can be some confusion, and a number of vaccination programmes are under way. We have talked about a third dose, and we talk about a booster dose, a flu vaccine and so on. Gillian Mackay is absolutely right.

We have already done work with communication colleagues to consider how we can simplify the message, target it at those who we think are eligible and ensure that nobody has missed out. We are urgently working on that. As I say, we have done some work already, and Gillian Mackay will have seen some of the communications. I think that the message can be made a bit sharper and crisper, so we are actively exploring that very issue as we speak.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): When is the anticipated completion date for all Covid booster vaccines to have been administered?

Humza Yousaf: In some respects, it is an evergreen offer. As Evelyn Tweed will be aware from my statement and from previous statements regarding the booster programme, the booster dose cannot be given until six months after the second dose. We will continue to offer that. It is not possible, in some respects, to have a definitive

completion date, but we aim to provide boosters to those who are eligible as close as possible to the six months from receiving the second dose. We will keep that programme rolling on, much as we are doing for the primary doses of the vaccine.

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The pandemic has clearly shown the inequalities that our communities still face. One of those is inequality of internet access. The Scottish Government's vaccination strategy is clear in its push for online bookings, but the cabinet secretary knows that many of our constituents are still unable to gain internet access, either at home or at their local libraries. That is a real issue, particularly for older residents.

How does the Scottish Government intend to reach out to those with no internet access? Will the Government commit more resources for hard-copy letters to be sent?

Humza Yousaf: Before answering his question, I pay credit to Mr Choudhury personally, as I know he has been involved in the ethnic minority community in Edinburgh, in particular through the work that he has done with the Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council—ELREC—over a number of years, to ensure that vaccine uptake is high among ethnic minority communities. I thank Mr Choudhury for his personal efforts in that regard.

I give Mr Choudhury an absolute assurance: for those who do not register with the portal, there will be a de-duplication process and letters will be sent out. We absolutely have the resource for that. Based on his question, however, I will go away and see whether there is anything further that we can do for people who may be digitally excluded.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Vaccination and testing are both crucial tools for ensuring that our schools remain safe for staff and pupils. Teachers are eligible for the flu jab this year, but they are not being prioritised for the Covid booster jab. Will the cabinet secretary look again at that decision, and will he commit to not introducing charges for lateral flow tests?

Humza Yousaf: I would have real concerns about moving away from our universal offer of lateral flow tests. That is absolutely not within the Government's purview at the moment at all. I know that that has been raised by the UK Government as part of its winter plan, but I have put it on record to the UK Government that I think that is a wholly inappropriate step to be taking. In fairness to the UK Government, I do not think that it is looking to do that immediately.

On Mercedes Villalba's first question, much as I said to her colleague Pauline McNeill, we take advice from the experts on vaccines and

immunisation: the JCVI. If it changes its advice, we will of course listen to that.

I put on record my thanks to our teachers for the incredible work that they have done throughout the pandemic to ensure that our children's education is not disrupted. I encourage teachers to step forward for their booster vaccinations when they are eligible, which is six months after they received their second dose.

Urgent Question

15:24

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is an urgent question.

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I appreciate the opportunity to bring this matter to the chamber.

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the publication of the sixth case study findings by the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, in which the chair, Lady Smith, criticised the Scottish Government for a “woeful and wholly avoidable” delay in setting up an inquiry into accusations of historical child abuse in Scotland.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The Scottish Government apologises unreservedly that it did not respond more appropriately and sooner to the concerns of survivors of abuse in care who called for a public inquiry. The response to survivors of abuse in care spanned different Administrations between 2002 and 2014. Steps were taken by the Government to respond in that period to the issues that were raised in the original petition, but that happened too slowly and did not go far enough.

An inquiry was announced within weeks of the current First Minister assuming her office in 2014. We welcome the inquiry’s on-going work, which is addressing the harrowing suffering experienced by survivors. We are grateful to survivors who have bravely come forward to participate and give their testimony. The Scottish Government will consider and address any future recommendations that are made by the inquiry to improve legislation, policy and practice. We are listening to all the issues and are determined to ensure that lessons are learned.

Brian Whittle: I appreciate the Deputy First Minister’s response to that question. I know that we have discussed this issue before, but Lady Smith stated that the Scottish Government failed to grasp the fundamental importance that the survivors appropriately and justifiably attach to their need for justice, accountability and redress and, furthermore, that there was a failure of ministers to listen to and engage with survivors.

The Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Act 2021 focuses on those who have suffered abuse in a care home setting, and the Deputy First Minister has stated that the act tackles abuse that had taken place in institutions that had the legal status and obligations of parents. Welcome though the report

and the act are, they fail to recognise that there are victims with the same trauma from abuse that took place in local authority buildings such as schools, where similar parental responsibilities are afforded to teachers. Education legislation says that teachers have responsibility for a child where the child’s parents are absent—that is, they are “in loco parentis” while children are in the school. Why was consideration not given to those victims in the inquiry? Their abuse and the trauma are no less acute.

John Swinney: I understand entirely the sentiments that Brian Whittle expresses, and in no way would I seek to differentiate the suffering of individuals in any such circumstances. Wherever a child was abused, in whatever circumstance, it is wholly and utterly unacceptable, and the perpetrator’s conduct is reprehensible.

The establishment of the abuse inquiry focused on addressing the question of in-care settings where abuse had taken place. That was the substance of the original petition, and it concerned situations in which the state essentially assumed the role of providing parental support to a child on an on-going basis. In the example that Mr Whittle provides to me of schools, that role is not assumed on a permanent basis; it is assumed only for a period of time during the day, and parents retain the role of parents in those circumstances.

That explains the distinction, but I would not in any way want to establish any lack of equivalence in the suffering of individuals with regard to what they have endured in those circumstances.

Brian Whittle: Again, I appreciate very much the Deputy First Minister’s response. I have suggested to him in the past that I think that the way in which the law is drafted breaks the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child law and creates inequality. I have written to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and I await its response.

I have witnessed the deterioration of the mental and physical health of one of my constituents as I have been trying to help her with her journey through the judicial system as she searched for justice, redress and closure. From dealing with current and historical sexual abuse cases for constituents through my work on the Health and Sport Committee and the Public Petitions Committee, it is my conclusion that the system does little to support the victim in their search for justice. There are many agencies with a part to play that do not seem to be able to communicate with one another, so it is little wonder that the conviction rates are so low and the alleged victims of such crimes are continually retraumatised by the process.

Will the Deputy First Minister please take the time to look again at the journey of a victim through the justice system, consider the changes that are desperately needed and put the support in place to ensure that all victims' voices are heard?

John Swinney: I am committed to ensuring that the voices of all victims are heard. That is precisely why the Government took the step, despite a number of different initiatives having been taken in the period from 2002 to 2014, to hear the voices of victims. I accept unreservedly that all those steps were not good enough until we had established the inquiry. In my view, the inquiry fulfils a difficult and painful, but necessary, role in Scottish society: to oblige our country to face up to its past. I hope that the forensic nature of Lady Smith's interrogation of the evidence, and the power of her conclusions, provide survivors with some assurance that their voices are now being heard.

Mr Whittle—fairly, I think—highlighted the difficulties that individuals face where they have already suffered and have then tried to pursue issues through the judicial system. That is exactly why the Government established the redress system—because we want to minimise the suffering of individuals in trying to help them to achieve some form of redress.

Indeed, the evidence that I see from the advance payment system, which we have had in place for around two years, shows that individuals appreciate a pathway that enables them to seek some form of redress for their suffering to help them on the road to recovery. I assure Mr Whittle that the issues that he raises are taken very seriously by Government, and that they lie at the heart of our approach to establishing the inquiry and at the heart of the thinking behind the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Act 2021, which Parliament has already passed into statute.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I place on record my thanks to Lady Smith and her team for a thorough report that puts beyond any doubt the serious failure of Scotland's governing institutions and how badly survivors have been let down.

Is the Scottish Government satisfied that the catastrophic failures of process that are outlined in the report have been rectified in order to ensure that they no longer exist as a barrier to justice in Scotland? When will the first payments from the redress scheme be made? What progress has been made in setting up the survivors forum, which will ensure that survivors are supported throughout the process?

John Swinney: With regard to the process that we are going through, I assure Mr Marra that the

Government is acting to rectify those past failures. I will not say in Parliament today that the journey is complete, because I await further conclusions from Lady Smith's inquiry. Indeed, it would be premature for me to say that, because I do not know the scale of the challenge that Lady Smith will put to us. Nonetheless, I put on record my determination to ensure that the issues are properly addressed by the Government.

With regard to the redress payments, all the milestones for the establishment of Redress Scotland are being met. The chair and chief executive officer are in place, and I am confident that the steps to organise and open the scheme before the turn of the year will be met. What then flows in relation to payments being made depends somewhat on the applications that come forward and the nature of the process that has to be gone through to verify them. However, I assure Mr Marra, based on the experience of the advance payment scheme, that I am confident that payments can be made swiftly after the receipt of applications. I expect that some degree of time will be given for due consideration of applications, but the advance payment scheme has made payments very quickly.

With regard to the survivors forum, various steps have been taken to interview individuals who want to be part of the forum and, as I indicated in my earlier answer, the development work on that is on track.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): In what ways does the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Act 2021 provide tangible support for those who have experienced abuse in care?

John Swinney: As I explained to Michael Marra, the steps to establish the redress scheme are under way, as envisaged in statute. The advance payment scheme will remain open to enable those who are eligible to participate because of their age or the nature of their health assessment. I am confident that those arrangements are available timeously for individuals. Although the scheme can deliver payments to individuals, it is a question of whether that helps in their recovery from the trauma that they have suffered.

This is the sixth case study report; the other case studies focus on the individual settings in which abuse took place and they make, in my opinion, very difficult reading. I hope that, along with the redress payments, the prominence that the inquiry has given to those issues, the reflection of detail and Lady Smith's powerful acknowledgement of the veracity of the accounts of events help to provide a route to recovery for

individuals who have been badly let down by the state in those examples.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the Deputy First Minister's apology and recognise his long-standing personal commitment to this issue, which has been around for far too long.

Lady Smith said:

"For far too long survivors' voices were not listened to, nor heard; they were treated as if their views did not matter and as if they were not worth listening to, just as when they were abused in care."

She said that we must learn the lessons from that tragedy, so I ask the Deputy First Minister to tell Parliament what safeguarding measures are in place to ensure that the voices of survivors are never again silenced by officials or ministers in that way.

John Swinney: Of all the comments that Lady Smith made in the report, the quote that Pauline McNeill has recounted to Parliament is the one that I find most difficult. Institutions of government handle issues in particular ways, but there is, quite simply, no defence or justification for the circumstances that led Lady Smith to write those words.

For example, I chair the national trauma training programme board in the Government, which is designed to address some of the behaviour that led to that dismissiveness towards individuals. That is just one example of how we are trying to change the culture within the Government, to ensure that the voices of individuals are listened to.

At a time when Parliament and its processes can often be attacked, one element of this Parliament's process, the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, is at the heart of providing a platform and a voice for the individuals that Pauline McNeill raised. If it had not been for Chris Daly's petition to the Parliament, the seriousness with which Michael McMahon, as chair of the then Public Petitions Committee, took it and his tenacity in challenging the Government about it—as well as the tenacity of other individuals, such as David Whelan or Helen Holland, to pursue those issues with ministers of successive Administrations over many years—frankly, we would not be in the position where we must, as a Government and an institution, confront some of these hard and uncomfortable realities.

I hope that, in the way that we deal with individuals, we will be the better for these findings, and some of the practical steps that we are taking, such as the trauma training and work that I preside over, is designed to address the exact circumstances that Pauline McNeill put to me.

Brexit Impact on Supply Chain and Labour Market

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-01444, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the impact of Brexit on Scotland's supply chain and labour market.

Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons now. I call Angus Robertson to speak to and move the motion.

15:38

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): In 2016, the people of Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union, but the United Kingdom Government ignored that vote. Recognising that two countries of the UK had voted to remain, while two had voted to leave, the Scottish Government proposed a compromise, through which the UK would stay within the European single market. The UK Government also ignored that compromise proposal. Instead, the Tory Government at Westminster, under the leadership of Boris Johnson, decided on the hardest of Brexits and a distant relationship with the EU.

At the 2019 UK general election, the Tories sought a mandate for their hard Brexit approach. The people of Scotland gave their answer. The Tories were roundly defeated, and they lost more than half their Westminster seats. True to form, the Tories once again ignored the wishes of people in Scotland.

Then the pandemic hit. Such is their hard-Brexit obsession that even a global public health crisis, the likes of which we have never seen before, was not enough to persuade the Tories even to slow the pace of the economic hit that they were determined to impose on Scotland.

Over the past few days, we have seen the clearest evidence yet of the catastrophic consequences of that reckless decision to press ahead with a hard Brexit in the middle of a global pandemic. The Tories have taken aim at key Scottish industries. Shamefully, they have also taken aim at the poorest people in our society, thereby ensuring that people on low incomes pay the highest price for the disastrous decision to impose Brexit while people and businesses are trying to recover from the pandemic.

The abrupt end of freedom of movement has left Scotland, and the whole UK, with no flexibility to address the impacts of labour shortages in vital sectors of our economy, as is highlighted by the

current disruption to fuel supplies that has been caused by a lack of heavy goods vehicle drivers.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary back the Scottish Conservatives' calls to extend the seasonal agricultural workers scheme? Can the cabinet secretary tell us, after his meeting with the Secretary of State for Scotland, how many of the 30,000 places in the scheme have been taken up by the fruit and vegetables sector?

Angus Robertson: I will come back to visas and so on later in my speech, but I thank Rachael Hamilton for her intervention.

Last year, the EU made it clear that it was willing to offer the UK an extension to the Brexit transition period. The Scottish Government published detailed evidence setting out why, given the impact of the Covid crisis, that extension should be agreed to. As part of that evidence, the Scottish Government said:

"Brexit represents an additional risk to the sectors already exposed to those COVID-19-related channels, especially through the international (specifically EU) supply and demand exposures and the impact of removal of Freedom of Movement of Workers on labour supply."

We also went on to warn:

"Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the road freight sector faced a shortage of HGV drivers, and any new barriers to employing EU drivers would exacerbate this."

Yet again, the people of Scotland were ignored by the Tories. Unfortunately, the disruption to fuel supplies is only the most visible example, among many, of the cost of that decision. The end of free movement has created staff shortages across key sectors including food and hospitality, social care and construction, to name but a few.

It was not just the Scottish ministers who issued warnings, only for them to be ignored. In 2018, the Federation of Small Businesses Scotland stated that

"The UK Government's obstinate approach to immigration is a clear threat to many of Scotland's businesses and local communities. These proposals will make it nigh impossible for the vast majority of Scottish firms to access any non-UK labour and the skills they need to grow and sustain their operations."

At the same time, the Scottish Tourism Alliance rang the alarm bells. It warned that the UK Government's immigration plans

"will exacerbate the existing recruitment crisis considerably, placing our tourism industry and what is one of the most important economic drivers for Scotland in severe jeopardy."

More recently, on 20 July, the Scottish ministers wrote to the UK Government to push for pragmatic and easily adopted changes to UK migration policies, to highlight the impact of the rules and delays around licensing for the HGV sector, and to

ask for an urgent meeting. All the warnings were ignored.

The Scottish Government has long argued that the current UK immigration system does not meet the needs of Scotland. We have unique challenges. Unlike the UK as a whole, all our future population growth is projected to come from inward migration. However, it has also become clear over the past few days that the UK Government's hostile approach to migration is not meeting the needs of key sectors of the economy across the whole UK.

On that note, this week it has been sad to see the leadership of the Labour Party ruling out bringing back freedom of movement. It has put what it believes are its electoral fortunes in other parts of the UK ahead of the needs of Scotland and the Scottish economy.

Meanwhile, the UK Government's proposals for a three-month visa route for 5,000 additional hauliers and 5,500 poultry workers is demonstrably inadequate. It is not an attractive offer to workers and it provides no certainty to employers. To quote James Withers, who is the chief executive of Scotland Food and Drink, it is "too little, too late".

However, there are actions that the UK Government can and must take now. It could instead introduce a 24-month temporary worker visa and ensure a formal role for the Scottish Government and Parliament in shaping the Scottish shortage occupation list, and it could review excessive visa fees. After 19 requests—I will say it again—after 19 requests to speak with the UK Minister of State for Immigration on those vital matters, the Home Office has finally relented. Next week, I will reiterate the urgency of making those changes to the immigration rules when I meet the immigration minister to discuss those matters.

The UK Government could easily introduce those improvements if there were the political will to do so. Instead, it has forced EU citizens to apply to the EU settlement scheme in order that they can maintain the rights that they already had. It has labelled people who chose to come to this country to make a positive contribution to our economy "queue jumpers", and has accused them of "undercutting British salaries"—to quote the Secretary of State for Transport earlier this week. The UK Government cannot simultaneously appeal for migrants to come and help while demonising those who do come. Migration policy must support fair work and protect workers' rights, pay and access to employment, while preventing exploitation and abuse.

The Tories are taking aim at the Scottish economy by removing Scotland from the EU and

imposing a hard Brexit in the middle of a pandemic, which is making recovery so much harder, and they are making the most disadvantaged people pay the highest price. They have decided to combine a disastrous Brexit with catastrophic cuts to universal credit. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has warned that the “triple whammy” of price rises, tax increases and benefit cuts could leave low-income families £33.50 a week worse off.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy says that the Scottish Government has the power to maintain universal credit at the higher level, but it is not willing to do so. Will the minister demand that she changes her mind?

Angus Robertson: On this issue, on which there is so much consensus across Scottish politics that what is going on with universal credit is totally unacceptable, it would be really welcome if Tory party members in this Parliament, who we know privately oppose the change that is being made by the UK Government, would find some courage, stand up in the chamber and call out the UK Government. That would be really welcome. I would be happy to give way to Liam Kerr if he is prepared to do so now.

No? I gave the gentleman an opportunity to make clear his unhappiness about the cut to universal credit. It will be noted that he did not take that opportunity.

The UK Government has placed a burden on those who can least afford it. It risks pushing more people into crisis and putting the most vulnerable people in our society at greater risk of food insecurity and homelessness. Within our powers, we are doing all that we can to support people who are on low incomes. The Scottish Government invested around £2.5 billion last year in targeted support, and we will continue that support through the winter. However, the Scottish Government has only limited power to address insufficient and insecure incomes, which are the key drivers of household food insecurity, and Government powers related to the energy market are reserved entirely. [*Interruption.*] I have to make some progress.

In the run up to the 2014 independence referendum, campaigners for voting no boasted about what they called

“the strength and security of the United Kingdom”.

They said to people in Scotland that they had to reject independence in order to remain within the European Union. Since then, we have had years of Tory austerity, Boris Johnson has been elected as Prime Minister and Scotland has been ignored and taken out of the EU. A hard Brexit has been imposed in the middle of a pandemic, and today,

under Westminster control, people are queuing for hours in the search for petrol. There are even shortages of some foods.

The Tory Brexit obsession has hit our world-class food and drink industry, universities, manufacturers and service companies, and the Tories risk pushing 60,000 people in Scotland, including 20,000 children, into poverty, as they are about to take £20 a week away from working people on low incomes.

The Presiding Officer: Could you wind up, please, cabinet secretary?

Angus Robertson: I am winding up now, Presiding Officer.

All that has happened against the wishes of the people of Scotland. Following the 2014 referendum, all parties in Parliament said in the joint Smith Commission report:

“It is agreed that nothing in this report prevents Scotland becoming an independent country in the future should the people of Scotland so choose.”

In May, the people of Scotland elected a new Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: I have to ask you to wind up now, please.

Angus Robertson: It is the people of this country—not Boris Johnson and his band of Brexiteers—who have the right to decide their future.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament believes that the UK Government’s chaotic hard Brexit policy is damaging recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; deplores the decision of the UK Government to ignore detailed evidence from the Scottish Government and others about the harm that would be caused by removing Scotland and the UK from the European single market and customs union in the middle of the public health crisis; calls on the UK Government to immediately introduce a Temporary Worker Route, extended to 24 months, to alleviate some of the damage that it has caused, as part of a replacement immigration system that will both reduce the harm of Brexit and treat people with dignity and respect; recognises that the UK Government’s failure to introduce such a scheme has led directly to serious levels of vacancies in hospitality, distribution, social care, construction, food production, agriculture and tourism, among other sectors; further recognises that this will only mitigate in part the negative consequence for Scotland of ending the benefits of EU membership, including freedom of movement; believes that the UK Government’s actions and lack of action have led directly to serious petrol and diesel shortages on forecourts and to food supply shortages; further believes that these failures are felt across society and most acutely by the poorest, and agrees that, in a rich country like Scotland, the chaos of recent weeks and the deliberate targeting of the poorest in society make clear the heavy cost imposed on people in Scotland by a UK Government that they did not elect.

15:50

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I speak as a veteran of the many debates about Brexit that took place in the last parliamentary session. There was always a familiar pattern to them when it came to how the Scottish National Party approached the issue—a denial of the democratic decision of the UK as a member state to leave the EU; some scaremongering and precious little regard to the facts; and finally and inevitably, a call to arms and a statement that the way out of that whole situation, somehow, was independence. As we have just seen, it seems that the SNP in this new session has, to borrow a phrase, learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

I say that as someone who voted remain. I have long believed however, that we must respect the result of the EU referendum. It is high time that the SNP accepted that the UK public made a decision to leave the European Union; that the UK Government negotiated a fair exit deal; and that we now need to move on.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I understand the member's argument. Does he not accept however, that the type of Brexit that his party has implemented has damaged our economy? As a remainder, he surely must accept that that deal was not a good decision.

Donald Cameron: I do not accept that. Many of those issues are short-term ones, and I believe that the economy will thrive in the long term—*[Interruption.]*

I am sorry; I would like to make a little more progress.

The SNP-Green Government introduces a motion—strong in hyperbole but weak on substance—that describes the UK's deal with the EU as “chaotic hard Brexit policy”, but let us not forget that SNP members of Parliament voted against a deal on which the UK and the EU agreed and effectively backed the hardest Brexit policy possible—*[Interruption.]*

SNP members do not like my saying that, but SNP MPs did back the hardest Brexit policy possible—a no-deal outcome, which would have been crippling for our economy and Scottish jobs.

The motion puts sole blame for the recent shortages squarely on the UK Government, without noting the fact that a shortage of delivery drivers is happening across Europe.

Angus Robertson: Before today's debate, I had a look on the main broadcasters of Poland, Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands. Not a single one reported a problem in their country in relation to shortages in shops or labour market

shortages. Why are shortages happening here and not in those countries?

Donald Cameron: The shortage of HGV drivers is happening in Europe. The problem affects countries across Europe: Germany and France are short of between 45,000 to 65,000 drivers and Poland is short of around 124,000 drivers.

The Government tries to argue that certain sectoral vacancies only exist because of Brexit, without acknowledging that, in many instances—in the health and social care setting, for example—those problems existed long before—*[Interruption.]*

I am sorry; I need to make some progress.

Members on the Conservative benches have always acknowledged that there would be short-term issues after the UK's exit from the EU and have always accepted that Brexit would present challenges as well as opportunities. We never attempted to say otherwise. It is simply wrong however, to ignore the fact that we are in a global pandemic that is having a definitive and searing impact on our economy, along with all the other causes of disruption in the supply chain.

I turn to the issue of fuel. It is irresponsible of anyone anywhere to peddle fears that there is a national shortage of fuel, and the UK Government has been abundantly clear that the problems are about the HGV drivers and not the fuel supply itself.

The problems are stabilising and easing, and there is optimism that, by the weekend, we will have returned to a more normal position. Without downplaying the inconvenience to those of us who drive, the picture in Scotland is in fact better than it is in the rest of the UK. As of yesterday, 27 per cent of petrol stations in mainland UK were out of petrol, but in Scotland that figure was only 15 per cent.

When it comes to the argument that the shortage of HGV drivers has arisen solely because of Brexit, let us be clear: the Road Haulage Association noted that the vast majority of foreign HGV drivers left the UK because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the pandemic has created a driver test backlog, which has prevented new drivers from getting on the road. I have some statistics. In 2016, 89 per cent of HGV drivers who were employed in the UK were UK nationals. In 2021, the figure is actually the same. The number of EU nationals is perhaps slightly lower than it was five years ago, but it is not substantially different. *[Interruption.]*

I am sorry; I would like to make some progress. I only have two minutes left.

There is also a shortage of drivers because there is a lot of retirement in that sector. More than one third of HGV drivers are over the age of 55.

As I have just said, that problem impacts countries right across Europe.

We welcome the fact that the UK Government will issue up to 5,000 temporary visas to recruit additional HGV drivers, but it is plainly a long-term issue. It is not just a question of visas; it is about creating a high-wage and highly skilled economy.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The member said that the problems that have been facing the HGV sector are not just down to Brexit. Of course, he is partly right in that. Part of the problem is to do with a dispute with the Public and Commercial Services Union saying that the working conditions under the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency are not safe. UK ministers have done nothing about that, which has caused a backlog of 54,000 applications, which are stopping more HGV drivers coming through. Does the member accept that?

Donald Cameron: That is exactly why the UK Government has announced that it will make up to 50,000 additional HGV driving tests available each year, streamline the testing process, and help drivers to gain an HGV licence more quickly than before. However, I return to the point that I was making. The issue is a long-term one and it is about creating a high-wage and highly skilled economy with better pay and working conditions.

In the short time left to me, I will turn to health and social care because it has not really been mentioned yet. It is argued that the staff shortages in this area have been caused by Brexit. That is one of the most dishonest arguments I have heard this Government make. The idea that staff shortages in the NHS and the care sector somehow only crystallised on 1 January 2021 when the transition period ended is absurd. Health professionals and the care sector have been warning about staffing for years. Whether it is general practitioners, nurses, consultants, or care workers, there are deep and long-term staffing issues that have nothing to do with Brexit. There is only one cause, and that is this Government's disastrous stewardship of the NHS during the past 14 years.

The most galling thing about this debate is that, while the SNP-Green Government continues to pour doom and gloom over the UK's exit from the EU, it simultaneously fails to mention the cataclysmic impact that breaking up the UK would have on our economy. It fails to mention that its separatist agenda would put at risk around 545,000 Scottish jobs, and the stark warning from its very own adviser, Mark Blyth, who said that Scottish independence would be Brexit times 10. The people of Scotland deserve better than that. They deserve a Government that focuses on the day job, not constitutional grievance, and they deserve a Government that will work

constructively with the UK Government, not against it.

I move amendment S6M-01444.1, to leave out from "believes that the UK Government's chaotic" to end and insert

"recognises that the UK Government respected the result of the EU referendum and delivered a deal with the EU, which allows the UK to trade freely with other states to the benefit of Scottish goods and services; welcomes the UK Government's response to the Europe-wide shortage of HGV drivers by issuing 5,000 temporary visas for drivers to come to the UK; further welcomes the UK Government's positive engagement with the food and drink sector resulting in 5,500 temporary visas being issued to enable the poultry industry to prepare for Christmas, and believes that the Scottish Government should work constructively with the UK Government to ensure the success of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement."

15:59

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Today's debate needs to focus on how we address the crisis that many of our constituents are facing because of the impact of a badly thought-through and chaotic Tory Brexit. The Labour amendment proposes removing the final phrase of the SNP coalition Government's motion. Although we deeply regret leaving the EU, people voted for it, and the SNP knows that many of their supporters also voted to leave the EU. Our amendment therefore starts by recognising that breaking up economic and political unions has deeply damaging consequences, and creating borders has costs.

We have known that Brexit was happening for years, but people have been let down by the Tory Government not thinking through the details of its impact, and not acting to eliminate the challenges for businesses and workers that new rules at borders have created.

People have been let down by a lack of planning, workforce planning and joint working by the Scottish and UK Governments, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic, but many of the shortages of key workers predated the pandemic and Brexit, although those have got worse. We know that, in sectors where pay is low and the conditions are poor or unacceptable, the UK and Scottish Governments have failed to address the issue. Instead, they have turned a blind eye and relied on people from the EU to fill those roles to hide what are systemic issues.

Brexit has highlighted the stark reality of the situation, and it is now time to ensure not only that the wages match the contribution that the people who play those roles make to our society, but that the conditions are fit for the 21st century. We urgently need union engagement in the sectors concerned. We must work across all bodies to ensure that pay and conditions are not just minimally acceptable but attractive.

We support the call for options to enable temporary workers to access our labour markets to help us to get through the next few months as we recover from the pandemic, but that is not enough.

Neil Gray: Does Sarah Boyack accept the principle that was set out yesterday by her colleague Lisa Nandy, that freedom of movement should no longer be up for discussion?

Sarah Boyack: When Labour was in charge in the Scottish Parliament, we negotiated people having the ability to stay in Scotland after they had graduated from university, so we understand the importance of the Scottish Government having the flexibility to work with the UK Government.

Earlier, at portfolio question time, I mentioned the work that my colleague Alison McGovern is doing, which involves going straight to the EU to stand up for our musicians, our artists and those who work behind the scenes, whose work is among our greatest exports, to make sure that they get the support that they need to stay in employment. We do not want to keep losing talented artists and others who work in the music sector, many of whom have had to leave it and take other jobs to keep going. We need real action and leadership from the parties in government in the UK and Scotland, rather than the usual blame passing that has been evident across the chamber today.

Scotland is a rich country, but those riches are not shared across our country. There is a real irony in an SNP Government not drawing to voters' attention its independence plans while decrying the impact of a Brexit that many of its members voted for. The SNP knows that independence would lead to austerity, that it would threaten even more job losses, particularly in our public sector, and that it would be like Brexit times 10. Those are not just my views but those of a former colleague in this chamber, Andrew Wilson, and Professor Mark Blyth.

We need action, not rhetoric, and we need it now. Our constituents need access to fuel and food. We are moving into winter and, for many of our constituents, a lack of Government action here and in the UK will leave them vulnerable. That is why my colleague Anas Sarwar has called for an increase in winter fuel allowance payments, and it is why we have called on the Tories to abandon their universal credit cuts.

Our amendment calls on the Tory Government and the SNP coalition Government to work together, instead of constantly inventing constitutional stand-offs, in which they blame each other for their lack of action. The people of Scotland deserve better. They need action now to invest in jobs and training in the key sectors where

we have labour shortages and to provide workers in those sectors with decent terms and conditions. Workers in the care sector should get a minimum of £15 an hour and be given support to develop career options, and Scottish Government contracts should be used to prevent people from ending up in precarious employment.

The Scottish Government needs to focus on the day job, to plan for the long term and to step up and secure investment in jobs that will allow us to develop the low-carbon economy that we need now, not in 2045. We need a recovery-from-the-pandemic strategy that puts the needs of the most vulnerable first. The debate should be about how we use the powers that we have to bring that about now.

I move amendment S6M-01444.3, to leave out "by a UK Government that they did not elect." and insert:

"; recognises that breaking up economic and political unions has deeply damaging consequences, and creating borders has costs; believes that people have been let down by a lack of planning and joint working by both the Scottish and UK governments, and calls on the Scottish and UK governments to act together to resolve the shortage of workers in key sectors of the economy and ensure that people have access to employment opportunities, training and financial support as Scotland comes through the COVID-19 pandemic and rebuilds its communities."

16:04

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): There is quite a bit of the Government's motion that I agree with, and some bits that I agree strongly with, but, if anything, it is a tad simplistic. There is no single cause of the current chaos. Of course, Brexit is a major contributor, and not acknowledging that demeans the Conservatives. Broader immigration policy is a factor, too, but free movement of people, on its own, would not have solved the workforce shortages that we are now experiencing as a result of the current chaos.

I will take the berry and vegetable fields of Fife as an example. New growing techniques demand more workers for longer periods because the season has been extended and the sector has grown significantly. The sector has tried to recruit locally, but there are not enough people locally. Workers came from Poland, until the Polish economy improved. Workers have come from further and further east year on year, and now come from Moldova and Ukraine, beyond the EU. We need a bigger seasonal workers scheme that can cover them. The recent decision by the Home Office not to extend and deepen that scheme is utterly reckless. The scheme is poorly designed and managed, which, combined with the pandemic, means that many workers did not even venture across Europe to join us this year.

The hit on the fruit and vegetable sector in Fife stretches to millions of pounds in this year alone. The sight of rotting berries and vegetables left in the fields this year is unlikely to be repeated next year. Farms will not invest in those crops unless they have guarantees about their workforce very soon.

That situation affects not only farms but food producers such as Kettle Produce, which supplies supermarkets across the country. The seasonal workers scheme in that sector must be extended to ensure that it is covered too.

In the fishing community of Pittenweem, boats have been tied up for weeks, not because of a lack of markets but because of a lack of workers. A once-thriving community is being prevented from catching high-quality prawns and langoustines for the tables of Europe. The short-sighted immigration rules recently prevented a Ghanaian fisherman from working here within the 12-mile limit, where he could have earned more money than he could ever have earned back home. That would have been good for him and for our economy too.

The post-Brexit cabotage rules make it unprofitable for European HGV drivers to come to the UK. There is already plenty of work for them in Europe. Why would they bother crossing the channel? However, the Scottish Government also bears some responsibility for the current predicament. The limited nature of the transition funds and of the independent training account—it is worth only £200, whereas the cost of learning to drive an HGV stretches into the thousands—means that it comes as little surprise that very few extra HGV drivers have come through that route.

I probably should not have been surprised that the First Minister blamed Brexit for all the problems of Scotland's social care sector. Brexit does make a contribution, but those problems have been brewing for years—since well before Brexit—and are due, in large part, to the Government not funding social care so that it can pay its carers decent wages. *[Interruption.]* I will not take an intervention just now.

All of that is a big lesson that the SNP seems unprepared to heed. We must learn the lessons of Brexit, not repeat them with independence. The last thing that we need in the middle of all this chaos is yet more chaos. Breaking up is hard to do. That is something that we should all have learned by now.

16:08

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise, Ivan McKee, may remember that—*[Interruption.]*—I voted for him. *[Interruption.]* I did

not vote for him; I am sorry, but my computer has gone a bit crazy. May I start again? I do not know why it is bleeping.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Yes, if you can get the bleeping to stop and the speaking to start.

Gillian Martin: I will start again. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise, Ivan McKee, may remember that I wrote to him in June to express my concern about the impact that Brexit was having, and continues to have, on the supply chain, particularly for businesses in the construction industry. There is no doubt that EU exit has had a severe impact on Scottish companies' ability to function.

I know that all too well from speaking to businesses in my Aberdeenshire East constituency. They are struggling to obtain mechanical parts and materials such as cement, steel and timber. As we know, costs are soaring, particularly in recent weeks, due to the shortage of drivers. The cost of timber has risen from £1.60 to more than £5 per metre, and the cost of steel has risen from £1,000 to £1,500 per tonne. Fabricators, kitchen and bathroom companies, garages, joiners, plumbers, builders, farmers and civil and mechanical engineering businesses have all been impacted as their overheads go through the roof. Ordering from suppliers outwith the UK has become arduous and time consuming, and bureaucracy has multiplied for our exporting companies.

The UK Government has been aware of those issues for months. Earlier this year, my colleague Councillor Alastair Forsyth wrote to former Scottish Office minister and Tory MP David Duguid, on behalf of local Turriff-based businesses. Mr Duguid said by way of reply:

“There has almost always been a relatively straight forward resolution to such issues.”

Okay. What is the solution for the owners of the White Heather hotel in Turriff, whose manager I met while she was on her way to the local Tesco for food and drink supplies because her wholesaler could not give her half of what she needed to serve her customers that evening?

What is the solution for Keenan Recycling in New Deer, which wants to expand its waste management facility to help us to meet our net zero goals and provide more local jobs, but which cannot get the steel and concrete that it needs for its building work?

We hear warnings from retailers every day about higher food and fuel prices due to Britain's supply chain crisis—a crisis that former EU exit negotiator Michel Barnier said this week was a

“direct consequence of Brexit”. Who is going to be hit hardest by the increased food and fuel prices? Yet again, it is our poorest citizens—those who have to make a daily choice between heating and eating.

Every week, we debate in this chamber the drivers and consequences of poverty for so many Scottish people. We debate the drugs crisis, and the root cause is poverty. We debate the educational attainment gap, and the root cause is poverty. We debate health inequalities, and the root cause is poverty. We debate malnutrition in the elderly, and the root cause is poverty. We debate adverse childhood experiences, and the root cause is poverty.

Time after time, Tory members get to their feet to demand that this Government mitigates the effects of poverty—poverty that they will exacerbate by reducing universal credit and simultaneously increasing national insurance; poverty that they will create by withdrawing furlough; poverty that they will worsen as they remove the energy price cap; and now poverty that they will create through the effects of their ridiculous solution to the Tory party’s former existential crisis, which resulted in a needless hard Brexit.

Members on the SNP benches know what the solution is: Scotland joining the EU as an independent nation state. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member cannot take an intervention as she is about to conclude.

Gillian Martin: I have always thought that our arguments for that were strong but, my goodness, the mess that the Tory party has made of its Brexit has ensured that those arguments have never been stronger.

16:12

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): I will start by reflecting on the tone and intention of the motion. The SNP-Green coalition, rather than dealing with the real challenges that are facing our country, would clearly rather spend its time on another tedious piece of Brexit bashing. The motion does not focus on how the Scottish Government can support our businesses to seize the opportunities that are available to them on the global stage, nor does it focus on an approach to working together with Governments across our United Kingdom for the benefit of all our citizens. Instead, it is a catch-all rant against the British Government, which has become a tedious and oft-repeated mantra of this SNP-Green coalition. Its political interests will always come before the countries’ interests.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Does the member not think that it is somewhat ironic that he berates the SNP Government without reflecting on any of the consequences of Brexit or engaging with the complexities of the labour market or the underlying issues that might be resulting?

Maurice Golden: I will address all those points, so Daniel Johnson should listen.

Otherwise, the SNP would be seizing this opportunity. It would be standing alongside Scottish businesses and supporting them as they export to the world. Accessing international markets is a boon to Scottish business. Our food and drink sector is worth £14 billion to the Scottish economy and it supports 115,400 jobs. There are massive opportunities for the sector to export to the world.

Ivan McKee: I do not know what universe the member is in, but he must appreciate that Scotland’s food and drink sector is being absolutely hammered by restrictions being put in place at borders because of Brexit, and has been further hammered by the process that we are going through because of the shortage of drivers and the logistics problems that that is causing. The member should reflect on that. Yes, we are working very hard with Scottish business to exploit the opportunities, but, frankly, that is made much harder by the misguided policies of his Tory party colleagues in Westminster.

Maurice Golden: We heard ideology, now here are the facts. I will take seafood as an example. In the past few months, we have seen a 9 per cent growth in our global exports to non-EU countries. *[Interruption.]* These are the facts. Just today the Scottish Chambers of Commerce announced its attendance at the world expo in Dubai. It is an exciting time for Scottish luxury products.

Since the UK left the European Union, the UK Government has signed 70 trade deals with countries around the world, including the EU. The UK has also signed new agreements that go above and beyond trade agreements that it had when it was a part of the EU, such as a new deal with Japan.

Now is the time to support Scottish entrepreneurs, not sit and wallow in politically motivated false despair. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce is up for that. Scottish business is up for it. Why is the Scottish Government not up for it?

The British Government is standing alongside Scottish business. The recent announcement of £24 million in research and innovation support for the Scottish seafood sector is part of a £100 million package of measures. That is on top of the furlough scheme, the kickstart scheme, export

finance and access to 119 Department for International Trade missions and the British Business Bank, to name a few. The British Government has stepped up to the plate, so let me say this to the Scottish Government: work with the British Government to back Scottish business and support our exporters.

16:17

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Yesterday, the Tories posed as defenders of this Parliament—a Parliament that they actively campaigned against re-establishing. Their blustering had as much credibility as the Orange order defending the Vatican. Today, the Tories have exposed their ostrich mentality by simply ignoring the realities of a Brexit that they imposed on an unwilling Scotland. Their irresponsible “It’ll be all right on the night” approach and complete absence of forward thinking, let alone planning, have led to chronic shortages of workers in many key sectors, not least in haulage, as we have so clearly seen in recent days. That has been accompanied by a sharp decline in exports and difficulties experienced in securing imports, all accompanied by an inflation rate that is almost double that of the euro zone.

The damage spreads far and wide. Eurostat analysis shows that UK exports to the European Union declined by a mind-blowing €16 billion—a 17.1 per cent fall—in the first seven months of this year compared with the same period in 2020, when Covid first struck and lockdowns peaked.

Meanwhile, even Lord Wolfson, the chief executive officer of retail giant Next and an ardent Brexiteer, has awoken to the inevitable disadvantages now that Brexit is affecting his own business. He said:

“The HGV crisis was foreseen, and widely predicted for many months. For the sake of the wider UK economy, we hope that the Government will take a more decisive approach to the looming skills crisis in warehouses, restaurants, hotels, care homes and ... seasonal industries. A demand-led approach to ensuring the country has the skills it needs is now vital.”

Unsurprisingly, Next may soon have to increase its prices, to the detriment of customers.

Collectively, businesses are losing millions of pounds a week and Brexit is projected to cost the Scottish economy £9 billion by 2030, which is equivalent to £1,600 for every man, woman and child who lives here.

On the haulage crisis, Edwin Ateama, the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions head of enforcement and research, has said that

“the EU workers we speak to will not go to the UK for a short-term visa to help the UK out of the”

mess

“they created themselves.”

Those comments were echoed by Juan Jose Gil, the secretary general of the Spanish National Federation of Transport Associations, who said that the visa offer to foreign truckers would be a non-starter. He said:

“Since Brexit, Britain is not such an attractive place to work anymore”.

The reason is extra bureaucracy.

“Before Brexit there was no extra paperwork. We just drove through the border.”

He also said:

“The effect of the British Government’s offer to go and work in the UK for three months is going to be nil. What Spanish driver wants to leave his job in Spain to work in Britain”

only to return to Spain after three months?

The assumption that, just because emergency visas are now frantically being offered through this temporary scheme, drivers will want to make use of it betrays a high level of arrogance as much as a lack of foresight on the part of UK ministers. In fact, many EU citizens no longer feel welcome in the UK and will not return for love nor money.

Rachael Hamilton: We need to employ and encourage our domestic workforce. Martin Reid of the Road Haulage Association attended the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee on 1 September and talked about a lack of diversity and a lack of young people going into HGV driving. It is important that we recognise that there are issues in relation to people being interested in HGV driving, too.

Kenneth Gibson: I do not think it helps that the DVLA has a backlog of 4,000 new HGV licences and 50,000 licence renewals to process. As a matter of competence, when the UK Government knew that the problem was coming, why could it not have had more staff in place to deal with that important issue?

Labour politicians share responsibility for the fiasco. Their duplicitous policy of constructive ambiguity—of agreeing with the last person they spoke to—destroyed their credibility, not least in the north of England, which allowed the Tories to secure a thumping majority at Westminster. After Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer’s deadly dull 80-minute speech yesterday, Unite the union’s national officer, Rob MacGregor, said:

“If you’re a Unite member worried about the cost of living crisis, empty petrol pumps, abhorrent ‘fire and rehire’ in our workplaces and the end of furlough just hours away, there wasn’t much for you in this speech.”

As for the Lib Dems, their policy of opposing leaving the EU survived as long after Brexit as

their opposition to tuition fees did after they joined the Tories in coalition at Westminster.

Petrol pumps running dry, emergency visas and calling in the armed forces to deliver fuel—is that the best that Scotland can do? Only the SNP and the Greens now believe that Scotland should be at the heart of Europe. Support the motion.

16:21

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I will begin with a few clarifications. First, on the title of the Government's motion, Scotland does not have a singular unitary monolithic supply chain. It has a multitude—a rich and diverse mosaic—of supply chains plural, more and more of which are, I am bound to say, concentrated in the hands of overseas corporations and private equity funds.

Secondly, I do not think that we should accept either that working people are simply a commodity in a labour market. We should resist the idea that everything—absolutely everything, including working people—can be marketised.

Thirdly, we do not want to return to a world in which a person's passport and where they were born matter. We want to see borders coming down, not going up. However, we have to be careful to distinguish between the revered principle of the freedom of movement of labour and the unethical worldly practice of the freedom of movement of cheap labour.

It is no coincidence that the lowest common denominator that links the industries listed in the SNP motion today with those facing the biggest shortages of skilled workers is that they include the ones with the poorest pay and the ones that rely the most on a hire-and-fire culture. They include the sectors with the worst health and safety records and those that exploit the shoddiest employment practices, such as the extensive use of umbrella companies, employment agencies, outsourcing, subcontracting and zero-hours contracts.

We know that some workers have poor terms and even more shocking conditions—look at what road haulage drivers have to put up with. So, the very idea that 5,000 temporary HGV driver visas that expire on Christmas eve are the answer to this crisis, as the Tory amendment suggests, is economically illiterate. Worse, when we consider that more than 50,000 HGV applications are backlogged at the DVLA partly because of an industrial dispute with the Public and Commercial Service Union that has been provoked and prolonged by Tory Government ministers—by their own admission—the Conservative position is not only economically illiterate, it is morally indefensible as well.

Fourthly, the Scottish Government is today calling on the UK Government to take action, and that is right. We are experiencing a form of Brexit that has been steered so much by rigid ideology that it has driven out economic fact and replaced it with political dogma. However, it is not enough for the SNP Government to lodge a motion in Parliament that is solely about the Tory Government, the action that it must take and the failures that it needs to address. What about the action that this Government and this Parliament can take? And, yes, what about the failures here that we need to address?

The Scottish Government is in charge of economic development, industry, education, training and skills. The Scottish Parliament is not made up of bystanders: we are legislators with powers for change and a £48 billion budget last year. As far back as November 2016, in a debate in this Parliament, I called for

“a leadership role for the Scottish Government and its agencies, such as Skills Development Scotland, in ensuring that there are no skills gaps”.—[*Official Report*, 15 November 2016; c 60.]

I have to say that, five years on, the evidence is that no such plans exist and no such leadership has been given.

It is clear to me that what we need, what this Parliament needs and what the people who elect us need is an economic plan and a jobs-first industrial strategy that is investment led, people centred and manufacturing driven. We need that to make a just transition to a net zero Scotland, we need it to rebuild Scotland's working communities and we need it to counter the economic shock of Brexit.

16:25

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): In the world of Brexiteers, the Tory and Labour parties and even some reporting outlets, it has become common to lay the blame for trade and supply chain problems on the pandemic rather than on Brexit. Problems are presented as a short-term shock instead of there being an acknowledgement of real long-term supply chain issues, despite evidence to the contrary.

Earlier this year, the Office for National Statistics published compelling analysis in which it compared the first quarter of 2021 with the first quarter of 2018. It used quarter 1 of 2018 as the most recent stable period, as it was pre-Brexit and pre-pandemic. Brexit uniquely affects UK relationships with the EU, whereas we acknowledge that the pandemic is global in its impact. Therefore, if the Tory and Labour Brexiteers were right, we would expect UK trade with non-EU and EU countries to have been

similarly disrupted, but what has the ONS found? It states:

“Total trade in goods with EU countries decreased by 23.1% and with non-EU countries decreased by 0.8%”.

To put it more simply, trade with EU countries has been negatively impacted 29 times more than trade with non-EU countries. That is the Brexit effect. As James Withers of Scotland Food & Drink has noted,

“‘Project Fear’ is ‘Project Here’”.

Softer data confirms that. The most recent business insights and conditions survey revealed that 39,000 businesses across the UK believe that Brexit has been by far the most significant factor in the disruption of importing and exporting.

As trading patterns change, the elephant in the room is China. Since the second quarter of 2020, the UK has imported more goods from China than from any other country, and China is now one of the UK’s top five import partners. In fact, imports from China grew in the comparative period that I outlined earlier, from quarter 1 in 2018 to quarter 1 in 2021. That presents structural, strategic and environmental challenges, as it greatly extends supply chains and makes for huge logistical challenges.

In other words, the UK Government has swapped our export trading with our nearest friends and neighbours, despite their proximity, for a flood of imports from China. Frankly, that is based on ideological decisions that Scotland opposed and that the Opposition was well warned about but ignored.

Like all constituencies, Falkirk East has significant issues across a variety of sectors, with the food and drink, retail, engineering and manufacturing sectors all under additional pressure. Staffing concerns are uniformly highlighted. The Economy and Fair Work Committee, of which I am a member, has already identified a lack of access to labour in supply chains as a huge issue. We have heard evidence on that from Martin Reid of the Road Haulage Association and Ewan MacDonald-Russell of the Scottish Retail Consortium. *[Interruption.]* I will not give way—I am just finishing.

Scotland is just starting to experience the impact of Brexit. However, in my time at Westminster, I spoke to many major businesses and they were clear that, when Scotland becomes independent, as she surely will, they will be looking to move major operations to Scotland so that they can access the valuable EU market. We should not forget that.

16:29

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): No one denies that the country is dealing with some very serious issues at the moment, but it is utterly facile and disingenuous to suggest that the UK’s leaving the European Union—which the SNP conveniently forgets was a UK-wide democratic decision—is their primary cause. Even the most cursory glance through the news shows that myriad reasons underlie the current situation—for example, as Donald Cameron highlighted, HGV drivers retiring during a Covid pandemic that has shut crucial agencies, and gas price rises throughout Europe and Asia, which have been caused by global events and challenges in renewables generation.

Rachael Hamilton: Martin Reid from the Road Haulage Association has not been quoted at all. He said in committee that the roughly 75,000 HGV driver tests that are normally done in a year were not happening because of the pandemic and that only 50 per cent of people passed. That left us 40,000 tests short. SNP members need to realise that the restrictions that were put in place by Government caused such issues.

Liam Kerr: I am grateful for that intervention.

There is a record number of construction and engineering vacancies but, according to Randstad, that is due to a surge in demand for workers specifically rather than a post-Brexit fall in supply.

The utter hypocrisy of the Government’s motion is revealed by the fact that, since the UK left the EU, we have concluded more than 70 trade deals worldwide, but the SNP voted in favour of none of them. One of those deals was the deal with the EU to prevent a hard or no-deal Brexit. The SNP voted against that. *[Interruption.]* No, I will not take an intervention. The SNP’s talk on immigration rails against the very points-based system that its white paper advocated in 2014.

This is the second time this week that the SNP, in a desperate attempt to divert attention from record ambulance waiting times and Scotland having the lowest number of hospital beds in a decade and the worst drug deaths rate in Europe, has brought forward a debate in which it has attacked the UK Government. I think that the people who are queuing outside petrol stations, waiting for a hospital bed or waiting for goods to be supplied want to see solutions, such as the downstream oil protocol, more than 10,000 new visas being issued by the UK Government, the UK Government stepping in to ensure that the country has enough CO₂, the UK Government’s health and care visa, making it easier for healthcare professionals to apply, and the extension of the seasonal workers scheme. The people of Scotland

want to see our Governments working together to sort these things out.

Angus Robertson: Will the member give way?

Liam Kerr: I will not, because I have only four minutes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a wee bit of time in hand, Mr Kerr. However, whether you want to take an intervention is up to you.

Liam Kerr: In that case, I will.

Angus Robertson: Liam Kerr has just called on the UK Government and the Scottish Government to work together. I agree with that. However, can he explain why the UK Government's immigration minister declined 19 requests to meet the Scottish Government?

Liam Kerr: It is quite clear that that question would be more pertinently put to the UK Government minister. I cannot quite understand why I would know the answer to that.

I agree with Angus Robertson that our Governments should work together. That is why it is so bizarre that the cabinet secretary proposes as his solution separating Scotland from its largest trading partner and entering the EU. Leaving aside the fact that the people of Scotland clearly signalled that they did not want separation in a democratic vote—another vote that the SNP chooses to ignore—and the years that that would take, even if it were possible, the proposal offers no solution to the issues that are raised in the motion. The cabinet secretary completely fails to mention that even Mark Blyth, who is one of Nicola Sturgeon's own economic advisers, said that Scexit would be "Brexit times ten". In fact, he said:

"If your argument is that we need to do this because of Brexit, then Scotland separated from England is the biggest Brexit in history ... if pulling apart 30 years of economic integration with Europe is going to hurt, 300 is going to hurt a lot."

What Scotland needs more than anything is a Government that acknowledges that issues have many causes and that solving them requires thoughtful and considerate interventions, and which seeks to deliver those solutions in collaboration with all those who can do that. What Scotland does not need is more grievance, division, misinformation, and misconception that is meant simply to divide us. Donald Cameron's amendment seeks the former. That is why I support it.

16:34

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): To respond to Liam Kerr, I struggle with the case for the union if his strongest argument is that the

disastrous negotiation of Brexit is the best case for keeping the union together.

So, there is no fuel crisis. We are going to suspend competition law to allow fuel companies to collude and share market information—but there is no crisis. Petrol stations have had to close because there is no fuel—but there is no crisis. We are going to make a massive U-turn on visa rules to allow EU HGV drivers temporary access to work in the UK—but there is no crisis. We are going to call in our British Army—but there is no crisis. Food prices are expected to rise by 5 per cent before Christmas—but there is no crisis. And by Jove, Gove, it has nothing to do with Brexit, of course.

Grant Shapps finally admitted earlier this week, however, that Brexit is undoubtedly a factor. Of course it was. We know that EU workers from many countries and many industries, including HGV drivers, returned to their native countries because of the hostile environment that was exacerbated by Brexit and the end of freedom of movement. No other European country is suffering the food and fuel shortages that are being suffered across the UK, as the cabinet secretary pointed out.

It did not have to be this way. I sat in the House of Commons for many years and listened to Theresa May box herself in with her self-defeating red lines. We warned her over and over again that she did not need to pursue the form of Brexit that she started and that Boris Johnson rebadged and made worse. The Scottish Government tried to help find a compromise at the time. The UK Government could have kept a more open relationship with the EU. It could have listened and engaged with the Scottish Government to pursue a customs union, single market deal that would have kept freedom of movement in place and would have spared us many of the labour market challenges that we now have. However, Theresa May was too scared to stand up to the extremists in her own party and was totally beholden to them, boxing herself in with her own red lines, failing to listen to the needs of employers and failing to listen to anyone who was warning about the impact of stopping freedom of movement—and so we see the crisis that is now before us.

To acknowledge Willie Rennie's point about challenges going beyond freedom of movement, imagine if Michael Gove had honoured his promise during the Brexit referendum campaign for Scotland to have control over immigration powers. Perhaps if he had followed through on that promise, we could have at least cleared up a bit more of the mess from Westminster, with a fair system that reflects our needs.

Rachael Hamilton: Will Neil Gray support the Scottish Conservatives' calls to extend the

seasonal agricultural workers scheme to support rural Scotland?

Neil Gray: I think that is something that needs to be considered.

Aside from the Brexit failures, the Tories are culpable in other ways, too, regarding the HGV crisis. We know that there is a backlog of 54,000 licence applications. I understand from local employers in Airdrie and Shotts who have been impacted that most of those are licence renewals. That is because UK ministers have failed to deal with the concerns of members of the Public and Commercial Services union, who say that their working conditions are unsafe. That dispute has dragged on for months, and I fail to see what UK ministers have done about it until some 11th-hour desperation set in, when it is too late—and now look where we are.

The Tories are desperate to try and distance themselves from any responsibility for this mess. Let us therefore use a measure that they normally love to use. The Tories love looking to the markets as a barometer of success. I wonder what they reckon the pound suffering its biggest fall against the dollar and a sharp fall against the euro means. I suspect it means that the markets are losing confidence because of Brexit and the UK Government's failure, which is to the detriment of the people of Scotland.

Why will the Tories not just apologise for being wrong, instead of showing the screaming defensiveness that we see today, because they are embarrassed? Does that not show, once again, that Scotland could do so much better with the powers of independence?

16:39

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): The debate brings with it a weary sense of déjà vu. For five years now we have discussed Brexit in the Parliament and, for most of that period, its potential consequences. Committees held inquiries, collected huge volumes of evidence and published report after report. We debated the issues, both in Government time and in Opposition time, on a regular basis.

I say all that to underline the point that the disruption and damage being inflicted on this country by the UK Government was both foreseen and entirely avoidable.

If it had happened under a Labour Government at Westminster, I have no doubt that the Conservatives would be lodging votes of no confidence and calling on the Prime Minister to resign over issues such as fuel shortages and empty shelves in supermarkets.

In recent years, the Road Haulage Association has barely been out of the Scottish Parliament and Westminster, warning of the potential—and now very real—effects of the Tories' post-Brexit immigration policies. By the end of the debate, we will probably have quoted every last word that Martin Reid said to the Scottish Parliament's Economy and Fair Work Committee last week. I will add another section of his evidence, where he said:

"A number of the EU nationals who came here did so as self-employed or agency workers. The changes to tax status and so on meant that they either renegotiated higher rates or just stopped, because there was easier work to be had on the continent without the bureaucracy".—[*Official Report, Economy and Fair Work Committee, 22 September 2021; c 2-3.*]

The motion calls for a temporary workers visa to be introduced immediately and to last for 24 months. Let us be honest, how attractive is a three-month visa and the temporary work that that would entail for a driver from Europe, who would have to contend with the UK's shambolic and bureaucratic customs and borders arrangements? Yesterday, one driver told ITV news:

"I don't want to work on a temporary visa because I think of the future. If the Government offers a 12-month visa I could plan for my life, but three months is not an option. I'd collect about £12,000 ... what next?"

It is not just HGV drivers who are impacted by the hostile system. As we have heard already, and as referred to in the motion, sectors from hospitality to agriculture are suffering from the same labour shortages, which in turn cause similar levels of destruction and outright harm to our wider society. Some of those are inconvenient, but properly manageable if they are only short term. For example, Inverclyde Council in my region has notified parents of a significant reduction in what they will be able to provide in the school canteens. However, as one would expect, the council is going to prioritise children and young people who are in receipt of free school meals and those with specific dietary requirements.

However, other impacts will be far harder to undo. A friend of mine runs their own small business, a shop in a rural community. The disruption has caused them to cancel contracts with suppliers whose goods they have sold for a long time. They simply cannot afford the significant delays and huge amounts of additional administrative work that have resulted from Brexit. It is an existential threat to their business and they do not know whether they will be able to survive it.

I want to address the role of large corporations in the crisis. They are at the other end of the scale from small businesses that are left vulnerable to wider supply chains that are completely outwith their control. Richard Leonard spoke on this subject very well. The UK was short of something

like 50,000 to 60,000 HGV drivers before most Brexit-related barriers were put up earlier this year. A range of factors contributed to that. In many cases, European drivers and haulage firms were already moving away from UK routes in anticipation of exactly the kind of challenges that the UK Government has put in their way. However, we cannot ignore the role of wages and conditions in the road haulage sector over a much longer period. The one thing that I welcome in the current situation is the sudden spike in wages offered to drivers. Far too often in a capitalist economy, resource scarcity drives up the costs of goods and services, but it is far too rare that a labour scarcity drives up wages. In this case, that is exactly what is happening in a sector where it is long overdue. However, offering decent wages will not solve the problem on its own, for exactly the reasons described by the driver I quoted earlier.

The consequences of Brexit cannot be easily swept away. The only way to undo the damage of Brexit is to rejoin the single market and the customs union—and eventually the European Union itself. I look forward to the day when Scotland can take that step as an independent state, rejoining the European family of nations.

16:43

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): As a dual national and an immigrant, I want to speak about the urgent need for Scotland to have the right to a bespoke immigration system to help to deal with the chaos caused by the disastrous Brexit that we did not vote for.

As a former community wellbeing spokesperson for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, I negotiated on behalf of all Scotland's local councils for a more flexible system to address the needs of the Scottish economy, workforce, our shortage occupation list, and our ageing population, and to accrue more policy levers to encourage people to move to Scotland. Those calls were roundly ignored or rebuffed by the UK Government.

I also argued that flexibility cannot stop at the national level; the system must be able to accommodate Scottish local authority areas and their specific needs. That position was clearly set out in the COSLA leaders report in November 2018 on local authority work to tackle depopulation. Scottish council leaders have endorsed continued lobbying of the UK Government for an immigration system that recognises Scotland's needs and they continue to make the case that a reduction of inward migration to Scotland from EU countries will adversely impact Scotland's economy. Sadly, we are living that reality—with empty shelves, wasted produce

and fuel shortages. So far, the only Brexit bonus that I can see is the shortage of fireworks.

I have deep-seated concerns that an immigration system that has the express aim of reducing net migration, in which the bar is consistently raised to the exclusion of particular jobs and sectors, causes untold harm not only to our economy as a whole, but to specific regions and towns. My constituency has seen its share of net outward migration over the past four decades, and I will continue to support the work of west coast local authorities as they seek to address the significant demographic challenges that they face, along with their calls for a Scottish visa system.

Inward migration is crucial to Scotland's economy, and the appetite for the continuation of free movement of people is entirely evident in Scotland; the election results in May emphatically endorsed that aim. We know that it would be the most advantageous system for Scotland, despite what Labour's Lisa Nandy proclaimed last night on "Newsnight".

Despite the Prime Minister's scrambled last-minute plans to introduce short-term visas to attract HGV drivers, the current system is not fit for purpose. Incidentally, some of the UK's issues with the retention of drivers perhaps arise because we do not, collectively, demonstrate their worth by providing them with a network of safe, free places that enable them to park up, grab a hot shower and access hot food, as is the case in mainland Europe.

The salary threshold in our immigration system is too high, and is a barrier to many occupations in our key sectors, including agriculture and hospitality. There should be more focus on the value of, and the need for, a job, rather than on an arbitrary salary threshold. In addition, we should always ensure that we keep fair work principles at the heart of our consideration.

Points should be awarded with reference to the parts of the country that need an increase in population, right down to local authority areas and regions. I know that UK Tory ministers develop a nervous twitch when that is talked about, and they proclaim that such a system would be too complex. Nonetheless, it would be remiss of me, as a Canadian, to neglect to explain how such a system is not only entirely possible but, in fact, works beautifully. Canada is a federation made up of 10 provinces and three territories, which all have very different economies and demographic needs. The country's hugely successful provincial nominee programmes offer pathways to Canadian permanent residence for individuals who are interested in immigrating to a specific Canadian province or territory. There you have it—the art of the possible.

I believe whole-heartedly that the best way to serve Scotland's needs is via independence, to give us all the levers of control. At this exact moment, however, there is zero justification for Westminster to retain all controls over immigration while Brexit bites hard. Scotland's people deserve better, and I ask members to support the motion.

16:47

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

I do not think that we have done the subject in front of us today any justice at all. Two parties in particular have presented it as a binary issue, and both are equally guilty of ignoring salient and important issues that we have to address if we are going to tackle the twin crises that have been created by Brexit and Covid.

In Angus Robertson's opening remarks, there was much with which I sympathised and agreed. I find the intransigence of the UK Government, and the fact that the Scottish Government has had to ask 19 times to speak to it, completely unacceptable. I agree with Mr Robertson's analysis: that the creation of borders where once there was free trade has stopped people moving and prevented them from doing the vital jobs that this country needs. It has prevented goods from arriving and forced prices up, and it is increasing bills and bureaucracy. Those are the consequences of creating borders where previously there were none.

I found it telling that it took Mr Robertson until his 10th minute to squeeze in independence—he was so busy trying to sound reasonable that he had to squeeze it in at the end. That says something about the justifiability of that argument. He knows that all—[*Interruption.*] I ask members to be patient.

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Daniel Johnson: Just a moment.

SNP members believe that the prescription for the disease is more of the disease. They identify a mistake, and then they want to repeat it. That is simply incoherent.

It does my Conservative friends across the chamber a great disservice when they say that they thought Brexit was going to be a bad idea, which is why they argued against it, but that now they think that it will be okay, because these are just temporary inconveniences, which we will get through, and there will be wonderful opportunities. Indeed, there was a great deal of irony in Liam Kerr's plea for the Government to focus and look at the issues in detail, while his party ignores the issues that Brexit is creating.

This afternoon, there has been gross oversimplification on both sides of the chamber, but Richard Leonard was absolutely right, and Ross Greer, again, highlighted the complexities of the issues that are at hand. Absolutely—Brexit has exacerbated the issues with HGV drivers but, in the words of Richard Leonard, we must look at what they have to put up with. The wages for the job have declined against median wages for the past decade; that is why a third of HGV drivers are looking to retire, and it is why their average age is 55 and less than 1 per cent are under the age of 25. It is not just Brexit that caused that issue but poor terms and conditions, and focusing on training and support will solve those issues. In addition, it is not just a problem in this country: Poland is short of 120,000 HGV drivers and Germany is short of 60,000 HGV drivers. The USA is also short of HGV drivers, and the USA's shortages are not caused by Brexit.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):

If Daniel Johnson listened to his colleagues this afternoon—including Mr Leonard, as he mentioned—he would know that the problems are about employment practices such as zero-hours contracts, which are in the control of the Westminster Government. For Sarah Boyack, it is about post-study work visas, which were a brilliant measure that was introduced by Labour but taken away by the Tories at Westminster. Why on earth would he be content to leave those key issues to do with migration in the hands of a Government that does not care about Scotland or Scotland's migration needs?

Daniel Johnson: That is an entirely false choice, because the issues that we are facing and discussing are immediate and need to be dealt with in weeks and months. The reality is that, whatever merits of independence SNP members like to claim, they cannot claim that independence would be resolved quickly; we are talking about years and decades. The Institute for Government was clear that it would take Scotland a decade or more to regain entry to the EU and that it might take years of negotiation even to secede from the UK. Therefore, to claim that the way to solve the issues of today, which face families in a very immediate way, is independence is, frankly, disingenuous and a gross oversimplification. Those members cannot claim that independence is quick or easy, because it is not, and they do their argument and belief a gross disservice by trying to claim that it is.

The reality is that we face serious issues now: furlough is ending; there is a potential shortage of jobs; small businesses have £4.5 billion-worth of debt; high street footfall is down by 20 per cent; and the hospitality industry is struggling. We need to be serious about how we support those industries and look at what we can do now, not

talk about fantasyland politics and something that might happen years and decades down the line. We need to look at how we use the powers of the Parliament, here and now, to protect wages, jobs, families and livelihoods.

16:53

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Everybody in the chamber, whatever our political views—and, my goodness, they are diverse—and however we all voted on Brexit, fully acknowledges that we are currently facing one of the most difficult periods that there have ever been in British and Scottish politics.

It is true that Brexit has been difficult and, for some people, it has been deeply troubling. It has been emotive and it has also been divisive in exactly the same way that the independence referendum was in 2014. However, as we try very hard to take an objective stance in the current debate, we should remember two things, the first of which relates to Daniel Johnson's point that we have a democratic duty as politicians to deliver what people voted for, even if we do not personally like the result of that vote.

Secondly, as Maurice Golden said, voters want us to focus on the outcome that works for them. I believe that they want Governments to co-operate, most especially during the dark days of the Covid pandemic, and to listen carefully to the sectors, most especially in business and industry, on which our economic recovery depends.

We should also acknowledge that in 2014, when the people of Scotland made a decision to stay in the United Kingdom, and in 2016, when the people of the UK made a decision to withdraw from the EU, they made those decisions after the terms of the plebiscite had been agreed. That agreement embodies an acceptance by both sides that the result of the referendum would be respected.

I have said many times in this chamber during Brexit debates that I was very disappointed with the result of the EU referendum. I will be the first to acknowledge this afternoon that Brexit has exacerbated some of the issues that Scotland faces. However, it is neither fair nor accurate to say that Brexit is the sole cause of all the pressures in the economy. Indeed, it is completely disingenuous to suggest that.

Willie Rennie and Richard Leonard made very balanced speeches. I do not agree with some of what they said, but they both argued that this is not a simple situation. Brexit has undoubtedly had implications for visas and therefore for some movement of labour, but there are several other reasons for the current situation. Conservative members have cited comments from key figures in the haulage industry who have made it very clear

that the industry has been suffering from labour shortages for some time, partly because of the age profiles of their drivers and partly because the Covid situation has meant that, understandably, fewer drivers have been able to, or wanted to, work away from home. The pandemic has also obviously had an impact on the ability of those who train and test drivers to provide the necessary certificates and licences.

Those issues are by no means unique to the UK. The driver shortfall across Europe is 400,000-plus, and that includes countries that remain in the EU. Poland and Germany are among those that are suffering many of the same workforce and recruitment difficulties.

Liam Kerr pointed out the hypocrisy of the motion in its excoriating attack on the UK Government. That Government has secured 70 different trade deals, and the SNP did not vote for even one of them, including the deal that was finally agreed with the EU to avoid a no-deal situation. The SNP continues to forget conveniently that that final deal, with all its imperfections, had the support of key players in Scotland, including Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the heads of the UK's four national farmers unions, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the Scotch Whisky Association and major companies such as Diageo. Those organisations are not arguing about abstract and finer points of the constitution; they are looking at what is best for their sectors in terms of stability in the future and the securing of jobs and investment, especially at a time when our economy is so fragile. [*Interruption.*] No, I will not take an intervention, if you do not mind. Like them, the Scottish Conservatives believe that, after all the tortuous negotiations, the Brexit deal was the only viable means of an orderly exit from the EU.

However, the SNP persists in claiming that the current situation is far better for fostering a debate about another independence referendum, even though we have heard several times today about the warnings that its own advisers are giving. Some of those warnings cause little surprise, given the divisions that have been created in the difficult period of the upsetting of 50 years of UK economic integration with the EU.

What would it be like if we separated from the United Kingdom? Not one single piece of respected, independent economic analysis have I seen that provides any evidence whatsoever that breaking up the union would provide Scotland with the same economic benefits and stability that it has now. There would not be the sums that point to fiscal stability, nor the drivers of economic growth—particularly those relating to economies of scale—that the UK brings. There would not be the same opportunities for investment, nor the

safeguards that the union provides via UK spending—and, my goodness, how much we have needed that guarantee in the current pandemic.

I say again: you cannot keep demanding reruns of referenda just because you do not like the outcome. I happen to think that that view is shared by a large proportion of the electorate. They are fed up with the constant tone of grievance that, sadly, has become the defining element of the SNP.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Ivan McKee to wind up for the Scottish Government. Please take us to decision time, minister.

16:59

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): I am delighted to close the debate for the Government.

I will go around the chamber and wind up on some of the contributions, starting with Donald Cameron, who was hiding from the fact that Brexit has made the problems so much worse. He talked about HGV drivers. There are, of course, other challenges, but Brexit has made that situation worse. It has made us unable to access available labour from across the continent of Europe, which has caused us problems. Donald Cameron will not accept that Brexit causes us problems, in line with many of his colleagues who made the same points—Brexit deniers, as they are. Even Grant Shapps recognises that. Brexit is mentioned a lot and there is no doubt that it will have been a factor. Grant Shapps can accept it, but Conservative members here cannot.

There are the Brexit deniers to one side, while on the other side Sarah Boyack laid out Labour's position of supporting Brexit. Labour are apologists for Brexit and do not recognise the Scottish reality. The people of Scotland recognise that.

Sarah Boyack: There was absolutely nothing in my speech saying that we supported Brexit. If the minister looks at the numbers, he will see that more than 1 million people in Scotland voted for Brexit. I was not one of them, but I bet a lot of them were SNP supporters.

Ivan McKee: You have just done it again. You have just apologised for Brexit. You said that Brexit is here to stay and that you are going to get on with it. The reality is that the Labour Party is no longer opposed to Brexit; people in Scotland recognise that. In a poll that is just out, 68 per cent of the people who were polled in Scotland think that Brexit is going badly and 11 per cent think that it is going well. Labour is on the wrong side, on the issue.

Willie Rennie still opposes Brexit, I think, and acknowledged its impact on the economy of Scotland, on investment in Scotland and on exports from Scotland in key sectors including agriculture, food and fisheries.

That gives me the opportunity to highlight “The Brexit Balance Sheet”, which was published today by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations. It concludes that, far from the £148 million benefit that Boris's Tory Government told the sector would result, there has been a cost to the sector of more than £300 million over a five-year period. That is the reality, recognised by fishermen's organisations, of what the Tory Government's Brexit has delivered to people in Scotland and across the UK.

Gillian Martin—whom I thank for voting for me; it is much appreciated—highlighted some hugely important issues. This is not just about what we see on fuel-station forecourts and the empty shelves in the shops; it is also about the materials shortage that the labour shortage has caused, up and down the country and across so many sectors. I see that through the work that I do with the construction sector and others daily and weekly. That is being caused largely by Brexit and the shortage of drivers, and by our inability to access the European labour pool to help to deal with the challenges.

Maurice Golden, who is another Brexit denier, asked what we are doing to support exports. I have told him what we are doing to support exporters in dealing with the problems that his Government has caused—and which it has made so much worse.

Michelle Thomson highlighted the impact that Brexit has had on exporters. The impact on their exports to the EU arises precisely because of the actions of the Tory Government and the hard Brexit that it has taken forward.

Maurice Golden talked about trade deals as if there is something wonderful about what the UK Government has done to replicate the deals with third countries that were already in place, and which we benefited from as a member of the EU. All the UK Government has done is replace those deals. The Japan deal is almost entirely a replication of the deal that Japan has with the EU, with one or two minor tweaks, and the Australia deal basically throws Scottish agriculture under the bus. That is the reality of where we are.

Let me tell you, Mr Golden, you and your Government got us into this mess. You ignored our efforts to warn you about it and to help to fix it through the constructive approach that we took—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, resume your seat for a second, please. I point out

that we do not use “you” because that would be referring to me. Please speak through the chair.

Ivan McKee: I apologise, Presiding Officer.

Mr Golden, you got us into this mess. You and your Government ignored our efforts to warn you what would happen, and ignored our constructive approach to help to fix the problem. Mr Golden, you created this mess. Mr Golden, you and your party own this mess.

Maurice Golden: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Is the minister taking Mr Golden’s intervention?

Ivan McKee: I am.

Maurice Golden: It is deeply disrespectful to point in the way that the minister did. It disrespects you as well, Presiding Officer.

Does Ivan McKee recognise that I am not, and never have been, part of the UK Government?

Ivan McKee: I recognise that you are not part of the UK Government, but that you are an apologist for it.

Kenny Gibson made a brilliant contribution as always, in which he recognised that the reality of Brexit makes it much more difficult for workers, particularly because of the “not welcome” message and the hostile environment that has emanated from the UK Government—of which Mr Golden is not a part. Brexit has made it much more difficult for people to make the decision to come to this country, because they know that they will not be welcome when they get here.

Rachael Hamilton: Can Ivan McKee tell us how many people have taken up the SAW scheme, out of its 30,000 places? [*Interruption.*]

Ivan McKee: I will take one intervention at a time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister will respond to Ms Hamilton first.

Ivan McKee: If the member is talking about the agriculture visa scheme, Lee Abbey from the National Farmers Union has said that the 22,000 number that Alister Jack has talked about is completely inaccurate and out of date. More than 20,000 workers have been recruited so far through that scheme in a process that has been made difficult by paperwork and other hurdles. He says that 30,000 is far from being enough, and that operators are already turning away clients because they do not have enough people to carry out the required work.

I turn to Richard Leonard’s contribution, in which he made some fair points. As the minister responsible for many of the sectors that he has

talked about, I am determined to do what I can to work with those sectors and their unions to raise wages across them. We recognise that everybody should be earning at least the real living wage. I am delighted to support the Unite Hospitality charter for the hospitality and tourism sectors, because it seeks to take that agenda forward. I am keen to work with anyone else who has that agenda.

I also remind members that many of the problems that we have to work around in order to reach resolutions are happening precisely because we do not have devolution of employment law to the Scottish Parliament—a policy that Labour supported as a consequence of the Smith commission.

Liam Kerr talked about working with the UK Government. A common theme from the Conservative members today has been, “Why don’t you work with the UK Government?” My colleague Angus Robertson has already highlighted his efforts to work with the UK Government: he tried 19 times and got nowhere. I could talk for an hour about the times when we have tried to work with the UK Government, but we were rebuffed at every attempt.

The latest example is Alister Jack’s saying that the words “real living wage” must under no circumstances appear in our green ports proposal, which means that the UK Government will not work with us to take forward green ports to support Scottish workers to lead us towards net zero and to deliver for Scottish business.

Liam Kerr: The minister has talked about trade deals. Since his case appears to be that the trade deals replicate what we had, why did the SNP vote against them?

Ivan McKee: The Scottish Government supports free trade and understands that there are challenges around it, with winners and losers in the sectors that are impacted. The Government and businesses recognise the value and the importance of free trade with the European Union, as our single biggest market. The Conservative Government and Conservative members here do not understand that point, which is why they have taken forward a Brexit deal that puts huge barriers in the way of trade.

When it comes to supporting trade, the Scottish Government is in a position to align with businesses that want to trade freely, while the UK Government and the Conservative Party have put themselves in a position in which the trade barriers that they have erected make it so much more difficult for business in Scotland and across the rest of the UK.

Neil Gray made the valid point that Brexit did not need to mean what it ended up meaning; it did not

need to mean stopping freedom of movement. It was not a choice that was made at the ballot box in 2016, but a choice that the UK Government and the Tories made after that, when they decided that they would stop freedom of movement and leave the single market, which has caused today's problems. I reiterate that Brexit need not have meant leaving the single market or ending freedom of movement.

Ross Greer highlighted the message of the hostile environment again and its knock-on effect on businesses—a message that is now coming home to hurt us.

Elena Whitham made a hugely valid point about the importance of immigration policy to tackle Scotland's population challenge, among other things. Our approach in Scotland is 180° opposed to the UK Government's direction of travel and to its attitude to immigrants and immigration, which is why independence and having the ability to set our own immigration policy is so important.

Elena Whitham also made the point that immigration could be devolved tomorrow. Canada works an effective system whereby immigration policy is devolved across the provinces; it works well. If the other parties in the Scottish Parliament are not going to support independence immediately, they should at least support our calls for full devolution of immigration policy.

For the avoidance of doubt, I say to Daniel Johnson that I am in favour of independence, Mr Robertson is in favour of independence, all the members in the seats behind me are in favour of independence, and more than half the people of Scotland are in favour of independence. It now appears that Daniel Johnson's only objection to independence—

Daniel Johnson: That is not the cause of my confusion. I am confused because the minister has failed to set out a single way in which independence would fix any of the problems that we face now, or how it could be delivered within a timeframe that would allow it to deal with the issues that he has identified.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): In closing, minister.

Ivan McKee: Absolutely; I am almost finished, Presiding Officer. When we have our own immigration policy and we are able to decide—
[*Interruption.*]

Does the member want to listen to what I have to say? It will help to have our own immigration policy in order to be able to bring in people to tackle the challenges that we have. It will help when we have full control of our welfare policy, so that we can mitigate what is happening to the

poorest people in our society as a result of Tory Government welfare cuts.

Daniel Johnson rose—

The Presiding Officer: No. The member may not come in because the debate is closing.

Ivan McKee: Independence will allow us to have our own policies to take forward what the people of Scotland want, which is for Scotland to be a full member of the European Union and to turn back Brexit. That will enable us to resolve many of the challenges that we see resulting from what is happening now.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister.

Ivan McKee: It is interesting—

The Presiding Officer: Minister, you must close.

Ivan McKee: I am closing. I have a few seconds left. It is interesting to see that apparently the only objection that Daniel Johnson now has to independence is—

The Presiding Officer: Minister.

Ivan McKee: —that it might take too long. Very finally—

The Presiding Officer: Minister! I will decide when your time is up, and it is up now.

Points of Order

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance. Two days ago, the First Minister promised the Parliament that the Covid vaccination passport app would be available for downloading on Thursday. This is Thursday, and when I checked before coming into the chamber, there was no app. Less than 12 hours before it comes into effect, an essential part of the scheme is not ready.

Presiding Officer, this has been an utter shambles from start to finish. It is simply outrageous. As the Deputy First Minister is sitting in the chamber, and as people and businesses are waiting, can I ask the Government where the app is? If they cannot answer, how do we use your good office to get an answer?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I will respond first to Mr Hoy's point of order, which is not a point of order. The matter raised is not a point of order for me but I am sure that the Government will make arrangements for demonstration of the app.

John Swinney: Presiding Officer, I am grateful to you for allowing me to make a point of order. Mr Hoy asked where the app is. The answer is that it is available on the app store as we speak.

The Presiding Officer: While that might be helpful, it was also not a point of order. Points of order are about procedural matters. I am hopeful that we might actually have a point of order in the chamber this evening.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On 22 September, Lorna Slater, the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity, promised to update the Parliament before the end of September on the coalition's plans for incineration. The most appropriate way of doing that would be via a statement to the Parliament. Instead, at the last possible minute, on the last day of the month, we have a Government-initiated question, a format that does not allow for full scrutiny, that has yet to be answered. Members have questions that need to be answered, such as whether waste will be imported to burn in Scotland, whether a moratorium will end work on incinerators that are in planning, as promised in the Green Party's manifesto, and whether there will be a moratorium at all. The timing and manner of the announcement is designed to avoid scrutiny.

Presiding Officer, I seek your guidance on how we can ensure that ministers bring such significant announcements to the Parliament in good time and in a format that allows full transparency and scrutiny.

The Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Golden for his point of order. I understand that the minister undertook to update the Parliament. As Mr Golden will know, updates can be provided by way of Government-initiated questions. However, should any member wish to further scrutinise the matter of any GIQ answer, they are, of course, able and free to request that a statement or debate be included in the business programme. Mr Golden might wish to pursue that with his business manager in advance of the next meeting of the Parliamentary Bureau.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I will keep this brief. From 5 am tomorrow morning, Covid identity cards will begin their roll-out in Scotland. That will set a dangerous precedent. It will be possible for someone's private medical information to be demanded from them by a stranger, who is not their clinician, in exchange for access to parts of our society. The draft regulations, which were published only late yesterday, make it clear that the door to expansion is wide open.

Serious concerns about scrutiny have consistently been raised in the Parliament. Where are the assessments of data security, equalities and privacy that would normally follow such regulations?

Presiding Officer, in your view, has the Parliament had the chance to meaningfully scrutinise this major policy change?

The Presiding Officer: I thank the member for his point of order. The question whether the Parliament considers that it has had sufficient opportunity to consider a particular subject is a matter for the Parliament itself, but if any member believes that a particular item of business should be scheduled, there are a number of mechanisms through which they can make such a request, including speaking on the business motion.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. For two years, Scottish Labour has said that the poorest and most disadvantaged young people in Scotland have been ignored by the Scottish Qualifications Authority and by the Scottish Government.

Today, the Equality and Human Rights Commission has taken the extraordinary step of taking statutory action against the SQA to force it to reform its policies. The implications of that are potentially huge. It could open up the SQA to legal

challenge from thousands of young people across Scotland whose life chances have been harmed.

Presiding Officer, will you require the minister to make a statement to the Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity to explain how much of the situation is due to ministerial direction and why the SQA withheld the information in question from the Parliament only yesterday, and so that the minister can put on record why the Government can have any faith in the leadership of our national qualifications agency?

The Presiding Officer: I thank Michael Marra for his point of order. As I have previously said, the future business of the Parliament is a matter for the bureau in the first instance. Michael Marra's business manager may wish to request a statement on the topic that he has raised through that channel.

Decision Time

17:18

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is decision time. There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Donald Cameron is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sarah Boyack will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-01444.1, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01444, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the impact of Brexit on Scotland's supply chain and labour market, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. We will have a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:18

Meeting suspended.

17:23

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: Members should cast their votes now.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)

Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-01444.1, in the name of Donald Cameron, is: For 27, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-01444.3, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01444, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the impact of Brexit on Scotland's supply chain and labour market, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-01444.3, in the name of Sarah Boyack, is: For 26, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-01444, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the impact of Brexit on Scotland's supply chain and labour market, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not work, but I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Brown. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. For some reason, I could not connect for that vote. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Fraser. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My application failed as well. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Thomson. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding

Officer. I am sorry, but my app would not load either. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Halcro Johnston. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (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)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (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)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (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)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-01444, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the impact of Brexit on Scotland's supply chain and labour market, is: For 67, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that the UK Government's chaotic hard Brexit policy is damaging recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; deplores the decision of the UK Government to ignore detailed evidence from the Scottish Government and others about the harm that would be caused by removing Scotland and the UK from the European single market and customs union in the middle of the public health crisis; calls on the UK Government to immediately introduce a Temporary Worker Route, extended to 24 months, to alleviate some of the damage that it has caused, as part of a replacement immigration system that will both reduce the harm of Brexit and treat people with dignity and respect; recognises that the UK Government's failure to introduce such a scheme has led directly to serious levels of vacancies in hospitality, distribution, social care, construction, food production, agriculture and tourism, among other sectors; further recognises that this will only mitigate in part the negative consequence for Scotland of ending the benefits of EU membership, including freedom of movement; believes that the UK Government's actions and lack of action have led directly to serious petrol and diesel shortages on forecourts and to food supply shortages; further believes that these failures are felt across society and most acutely by the poorest, and agrees that, in a rich country like Scotland, the chaos of recent weeks and the deliberate targeting of the poorest in society make clear the heavy cost imposed on people in Scotland by a UK Government that they did not elect.

Meeting closed at 17:33.

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

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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba